

HURRICANE SEASON SAFETY PLANNING at *the Intersection of Disability and Abuse*

Hurricane season is around the corner and if you are a person with a disability and also a victim of abuse, planning is very important to ensure your safety both during a storm and afterwards. There are additional safety risks and also challenges for victims with disabilities. While there is no scientific proof that emergencies, such as storms increase the risk of abuse, the rates of abuse do increase during emergency situations where stress levels are increased. The increased risk of abuse, coupled with the barriers that exist for persons with disabilities when they have to access services during a storm, make safety planning critical to ensuring safety. Some examples of what a person with a disability might experience in an emergency situation such as a storm are: ineffective, inappropriate response from the community or institutions, lack of resources or accommodations for persons with disabilities from service providers or shelters, limited access to special services and support, and language and communication barriers.

The act of planning for safety helps one think through the possible dangers and have a concrete plan in case a storm actually hits our area. A Safety Plan is exactly what it sounds like. It is a plan that you have for meeting all your needs if you find yourself in an emergency situation, which could be a storm or intimate partner violence. First, if you have to leave your home, you should have ready, spare batteries and backup assistive devices or information on how to get replacements for the device if it is damaged, the instructions for use of technical equipment, medications, medical information and medic alert systems, phone numbers of emergency medical and support personnel if needed, Social Security award letter/payee information or other benefit formation, supplies for service animals and extra cash, credit cards and telephone numbers of family members and others who are in your community of support.

You need to plan ahead and identify accessible shelters and register at them if required. Be sure and inquire as to their availability in a storm. Also plan on how you will travel to that shelter. The safety plan is unique to the individual and must be thought out ahead of time. The items needed to leave home should be in one place and easily accessible in case there is an emergency. Being prepared and ready now is the best option for safety later.