

Disabilities and Access and Functional Needs (DAFN)

Disaster and Emergency Communication Guide



DAFN COMMUNICATION GUIDE

DAFN Communication During a Disaster or Emergency

- When communicating with individuals with a disability or access and functional need (DAFN) during a disaster or emergency, it is important to always ask the person how you can best assist.
- Asking the individual before assisting maintains their safety, independence, and health, as they are the expert when it comes to their individual needs.
- The following pages outline tips for communicating effectively with individuals with disabilities and/or access and functional needs.

Blind or Low Vision



Announce your presence, speak out, state the nature of the emergency, and then enter the area.

- Avoid shouting and speak directly to the individual.
- Offer assistance but allow the individual to explain what help is needed and avoid grabbing or attempting to guide them without first asking permission.
- When assisting, offer the individual your arm. As you walk, advise them of any obstacles (i.e. stairs, doorways, narrow passages, ramps, etc.).
- If leading more than one individual, ask them to help guide the person behind them.
- Once you have reached a safe location, provide a brief orientation of where the individual is located and ask if any further assistance is needed.



Cognitive Disabilities



Signs to look for that may indicate elevated stress levels in an individual with a cognitive disability include:

- Fleeting eye contact.
- Repetitive or self-stimulating behaviors (rocking, hand-flapping; repeating words, sounds, phrases, wiggling fingers in front of the eyes, twirling/spinning, and/or jumping).
- Self-injurious behaviors (slapping, head banging, biting, hair pulling).
- Fear/panic.
- Non-responsiveness.
- Aggression, Running away.
- Covering ears or screeching.



Cognitive Disabilities



To enhance communication during times of elevated stress:

- Make eye contact.
- Be patient.
- Speak slowly, use plain and concrete language.
- Give one-step direction – wait two seconds and repeat.
- Be mindful of your body language (non-verbal cues).
- Do not touch.
- Model the expected response (hands up, fingers apart, etc.).



Deaf or Hard of Hearing



- If possible, flick the lights when entering an area or room to get the individual's attention.
- Establish eye contact with the individual, not with the interpreter or "buddy", if one is present.
- Use facial expressions and hand gestures as visual cues.
- Keep your face visible at all times and keep instructions in the present tense using basic vocabulary.
- Once individual is in a safe location, offer pencil and paper for written communication if no interpreter or "buddy" is present.



Mental/Behavioral Health



- If possible, flick the lights when entering an area or room to get the individual's attention.
- Speak slowly and in a calm tone.
- Keep communication straightforward, clear and brief.
- If the person exhibits confusion, avoid giving multiple commands. Instead, ask or state one command at a time.
- Try to avoid interrupting a person who may be disoriented; just let them know that you have to move quickly.
- Have a forward leaning body position to show interest and concern.



Physical Disabilities



- Ask the individual how you can help before beginning any assistance.
- Ask the individual if he/she is able to stand or walk with or without the use of a mobility device.
- If the conversation will take more than a few minutes, sit or kneel to speak to the person at eye level.



Service Animals



- Evacuate the owner and animal together. Avoid separating them whenever possible.
- If an animal is wearing a harness or vest, it is on duty. If you are asked to take the animal while assisting the individual, hold the leash and not the harness.
- Service animals are not registered and there is no proof that the animal is a service animal. If the person tells you it is a service animal, treat it as such. However, if the animal is out of control or presents a threat to the individual or others, remove it from the scene.
- The animal may not be specially trained as a service animal. People with psychiatric and emotional disabilities may have a companion animal. Be understanding and treat the animal as a service animal.



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Pregnant Women



- If the pregnant woman is otherwise healthy, she can be included in evacuation plans.
- Be as calming as possible as expectant mothers may become anxious during emergencies.
- Provide reassurance of assistance and meeting identified needs.
- Provide fluids once she has arrived to a safe location.



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First Responder Guidance - Active Shooter - Evacuate



During a post-shooting evacuation, first responders should be sure to:

- Take DAFN considerations into account when entering the building.
- This means understanding that depending on any one individual's DAFN they may not understand or be able to follow commands to show their hands, to get on the ground or to move as directed.
- Individuals may exhibit behaviors that are counterintuitive due to their DAFN, such as putting on headphones or laughing as a means of coping with the stress of the environment.
- Remember that individuals who may approach first responders for assistance could be unable to hear, have limited understanding of the circumstances, or require escorting.



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First Responder Guidance - Active Shooter - Evacuate



During a post-shooting evacuation, first responders should be sure to:

- Ask individuals if they have a DAFN that they should be aware of and how they can assist them or accommodate their needs during Evacuation.
- Give concrete, plain directions.
- Use visual or gestural cues to assist individuals with DAFN during evacuation.



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First Responder Guidance - Active Shooter - Hide



When it is time for individuals to vacate their places of concealment, first responders need to provide loud, clear, plain, concrete instruction announcing it is safe for persons to make their presence known. In doing so, they should consider that:

- Some individuals with a DAFN may not be able to hear or understand verbal instructions.
- Depending on their DAFN, some individuals may require physical assistance to exit their place of hiding or being unconcealed.
- Always ask individuals with a DAFN if they need assistance and seek instruction before physically moving them.
- Avoid separating individuals with a DAFN from their personal care assistant, service animal, durable medical equipment, or assistive device(s).



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Credits



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