

# BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY!

## Emergency Preparedness For Your Family and Special-Needs Kids



By Elayne Pearson

For more great parenting tips on weathering the storms of raising a special needs child please visit author Elayne Pearson's website at [www.elaynepearson.com](http://www.elaynepearson.com) or listen to her online radio show at [www.thewinonline.com](http://www.thewinonline.com).

*Plan Ahead. An emergency is traumatizing enough without having your special-needs child traumatized, too!*

**M**y three-year-old granddaughter, Lindsey, and I went to our storage room for a couple of cans of soup. She noticed a few bulging backpacks by the door and asked me about them. I explained that Grandpa Rod and I have these backpacks for emergencies.

At that time, the media had frightening

articles that told of families who were stranded in the snow and without electricity. While I was thankful we were safe and still had power, I realized our family needed to be more prepared for additional emergencies, such as earth-quakes, toxic spills, or terrorism.

It's not something I try to dwell on (or I get freaked out!), but there is the reality that we may have to face a true emergency someday. Since Heidi, our beloved child with Down syndrome and some autistic

traits, is now a young adult, I realized that I needed to get Heidi's things updated—and duplicated—so that she has one where she lives now, and a second one here for when she comes home for visits and holidays. Either place, she'll be ready.

After lunch, Lindsey and I started to sort out the contents of Heidi's emergency backpack and prepare a second one.

"Whose are these, Grandma?" little Lindsey asked. She was holding up a pink sweatshirt and jogging pants.

"Well, they were for Heidi, but they're way too small for her now," I replied. I got a notebook and wrote that down. "You can have them." Lindsey beamed. We removed some of the regular things one expects in an emergency backpack: a foil blanket, flashlight, wet wipes, water container, toilet paper, spare underwear, chemical glow sticks, hairbrush, toothbrush, soap, and a duplicate of her favorite t-shirt and shorts.

"Why does Heidi have this little notebook, Grandma?" Lindsey inquired, "Is it so she can draw pictures?"

"Well, maybe, but mainly this is all of the important information about Heidi," I said as I looked it over. I realized that several of the names and numbers of our support network were outdated. "Honey, it's important that others have this information in case we get separated. This little book has Heidi's medical

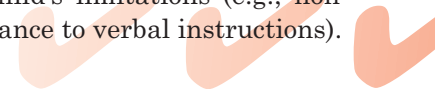
information and how to get hold of Grandpa and me. It even has your mom and dad's phone numbers. Grandpa and I have this same information in our packs, too."

I also noticed that her old medications were not necessary anymore. We had been able to detoxify her system and improve Heidi's intense autistic tendencies, which enabled her doctor to agree to gradually wean her off all of her prescription drugs. I was thankful that big worry was over. Instead, I noted to add fresh vitamins.

As I unpacked the cup that is identical to the cup Heidi insists on using at our home, I knew that having it would be a comfort to her in a stressful situation. The other items in her pack would help comfort her, too. I included miniature Disney characters, a small ball, and some tiny books. I was pleased to realize I could remove Heidi's old safety harness because the health interventions calmed her nervous system to the point that she no longer darts off.

So far we haven't had to use Heidi's backpacks, but I sleep better knowing she has them available. You will too!

- Gather information from your own area about emergency guidelines for individuals with special-needs. You may want to make your local emergency team aware of your child's limitations (e.g., non-compliance to verbal instructions).



*"If you fail to plan, you plan to fail!" Become proactive, and gain peace of mind.*

- Have a list of their diagnosis/ handicap, allergies, fears, or tendencies (such as hand-flapping and screeching when overwhelmed). List medications and what they're for. Find out guidelines/regulations for service animals. Be aware that public emergency shelters will not allow family pets.

- You know what your child will need to be prepared for a stressful situation—such as a special blanket, hat, or toy.

- Create an emergency plan in your community as well as a fire evacuation plan for your home. Have at least two people that can help as a backup plan during school/work. Decide in advance where to meet should your home become unsafe.

- For phone calls to "check in" it is recommended that you use out-of-state relatives. Confirm these numbers occasionally.

- Pack your emergency bag and update it every six months. Consider your child's growth and weather

issues and include an identification bracelet/necklace in case you get separated.

- Ideally, each family member needs a sleeping bag. Defray the cost by purchasing them throughout the year.

- If you pack canned food, you'll need to include a can opener for them. Over time, some snacks spoil, so rotate them.

- A small first-aid kit is wise. Essential oils like peppermint, lavender, and Tea Tree oil are compact and concentrated and offer antibacterial and antiviral properties. Read up, they're amazing!

*To be more prepared, consider having an emergency duffle bag in each of your vehicles, too.*



#### Recommended Items to Include in a Basic Family Emergency Supply Kit:

- Water, one gallon of water per person per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation
- Food, at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food
- Battery-powered or hand crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert and extra batteries for both
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- First aid kit
- Whistle to signal for help
- Dust mask, to help filter contaminated air and plastic sheeting and duct tape to shelter-in-place
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities
- Can opener for food (if kit contains canned food)
- Local maps
- Cell phone with chargers, inverter or solar charger

#### Additional Items to Consider Adding to an Emergency Supply Kit:

- Prescription medications and glasses
- Infant formula and diapers
- Pet food and extra water for your pet
- Important family documents such as copies of insurance policies, identification and bank account records in a waterproof, portable container
- Cash or traveler's checks and change
- Important family documents such as copies of insurance policies, identification and bank account records in a waterproof, portable container. You can use the Emergency Financial First Aid Kit (EFFAK) - PDF, 277Kb) developed by Operation Hope, FEMA and Citizen Corps to help you organize your information.
- Emergency reference material such as a first aid book or information from [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).
- Sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person. Consider additional bedding if you live in a cold weather climate.
- Complete change of clothing including a long sleeved shirt, long pants and sturdy shoes. Consider additional clothing if you live in a cold weather climate.
- Household chlorine bleach and medicine dropper – When diluted nine parts water to one part bleach, bleach can be used as a disinfectant. Or in an emergency, you can use it to treat water by using 16 drops of regular household liquid bleach per gallon of water. Do not use scented, color safe or bleaches with added cleaners.
- Fire Extinguisher
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Feminine supplies and personal hygiene items
- Mess kits, paper cups, plates and plastic utensils, paper towels
- Paper and pencil
- Books, games, puzzles or other activities for children



List courtesy of [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)