

Fire Safety for Care Providers of Persons with Autism

People with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), particularly those who are non-verbal, are more at risk in fires than other people. Because of this it is imperative that care providers create a home escape plan designed around the communication skills of the person or persons involved. If possible, always have a responsible adult available to lead the ASD person to safety and to remain with them so that they do not re-enter the fire building.

Visit the local fire station and introduce them to the firefighters. This should be done frequently so they will feel more at ease with the uniforms, badges, medical equipment, trucks, etc.

Insure that the person with ASD has a medic alert tag or laminated card with their medical/contact information incase the care provider is unable to give this information to the first responder.



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Starting with having working smoke alarms one every level of the residence, it is a good idea to place one directly outside of the autistic persons bedroom door. Then prepare them for the sound of the alarm in an emergency by introducing them to it during the training sessions. If needed a sound therapist may be able to get them used to the sound in gradual phases. Adaptive smoke alarms which allow you to record your voice giving evacuation or shelter in place instruction are available. These may have a calming effect and will serve to reinforce the escape plan at the crucial time.

Teach them to feel the door for heat, and to only open it if it is cool to the touch. If the door is warm, they must cover the bottom to seal out smoke and get to a window or telephone inside the room and call for help. If escape is possible, teach them to stay low, crawling on the floor and exiting the building. Establish a safe place outside for a family meeting place and have them go their each time you practice the drill. Repetition of training is crucial to the success of this training and depending on the individual, may require daily sessions.

For high functioning children with autism, you can visit www.NFPA.org and see their online/printable fire safety book:

"I Know My Fire Safety Plan"

AUTISM AWARENESS



www.FreedomFromFire.com

KNOW

It is an unfortunate fact that individuals with autism are at high risk in a situation involving a fire or medical emergency in the home. Children with autism have died in fires when they retreated to a favorite hiding place; others died when they retreated from an approaching firefighter, apparently frightened by the firefighters appearance (with mask, etc). Some children with autism have escaped a fire, only to die after reentering the dwelling to retrieve a prized object, not mindful of the danger they are placing themselves in by doing so. It is essential that we as parents and care givers preplan for how to ensure our loved one's safety in the event of a fire. Accordingly, we offer these suggestions that can help keep everyone safe in the event of an emergency in your home.



WHAT

- Be proactive by providing your local fire department with as much information as possible about your loved one. This includes filling out the information sheet on the PFD web site, www.freedomfromfire.com Autism Awareness page, as well as advising them of the location of the loved one's room and other places they may flee in an emergency situation. Most fire departments would be happy to come to your home so that they can familiarize themselves with these locations.
- Visit the firehouse often, so that your loved one can see a firefighter with all of their protective and firefighting gear, including the oxygen masks, axes and hoses, so that they can grow accustomed to them. Also, acquaint them with medical equipment, such as stethoscopes, blood pressure cuffs, oxygen masks and stretchers, so that they might be prepared in the event of a medical emergency.
- If your loved one is non-verbal, prepare a laminated card containing basic information about your child (including any allergies to medication) in case of a medical emergency.

TO DO

- Be sure that a smoke detector is placed in or near the person's room, as well as on all levels of the home. Test those smoke detectors frequently to make sure they are in working order.
- Teach your child the basic fire safety tips (stop, drop and roll; touching a door before opening it, etc). This includes picking a gathering spot outside the home.
- It is imperative that one family member be specifically assigned the responsibility to get that person with ASD out of the home and to a place of safety.
- It is critically important that this person also stay with their loved one to ensure that they do not reenter the home to retrieve a favorite object. Remember that the individual with ASD may become overwhelmed with the lights, sirens, frantic activity and excessive stimuli and attempt to flee the situation.

