

Supporting the Mental Health of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) During Emergencies

A Resource for: Shelter volunteers, volunteer coordinators, volunteer trainers

People with intellectual (cognitive) and developmental disabilities (IDD) and mental health concerns (IDD/MH) benefit from positive, focused support during times of crisis. The following are tips for helping people with IDD-MH.

- Keep your communication calm, short and simple
- Offer one-step directions
- Offer reassurances that they will be okay and that you are there to help
- If a person makes statements that are not based in reality, do not challenge the statements, but rather provide reassurance and let them know you are there to help
- When possible, offer quiet areas where the person can retreat
- Express interest in the person's humanity—ask about where they're from, what they do during the day, what their favorite activities are, etc.
- Ask about any medications they take or medical devices they should have with them
- Be as clear as you can about what's happening that day, check in regularly with updates
- If possible, designate a "point person" that can check in with the person with updates and answer any questions the person might have
- **Behavior is a form of communication.** If a person is struggling with behavioral difficulties think about what the person is attempting to tell you.
 - Is something physically bothering them?
 - Are they emotionally overwhelmed?
 - What could have triggered the behaviors?
- Routines are very helpful to develop a rhythm for the day and to decrease stress.
- It is necessary for the person with IDD-MH to remain with their family members or support providers whenever possible to help the person cope.

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