

PREPARED CAREGIVERS



A Toolkit for Caregivers of Veterans for
Disaster Preparedness

VA | U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

ROSALYNN **FOR**
CARTER **CAREGIVERS**
INSTITUTE

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About The Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers (RCI):

The [Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers \(RCI\)](#) is rooted in former First Lady Rosalynn Carter's belief that there are only four kinds of people in the world: "those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers and those who will need caregivers." RCI was established in 1987 as a unit of Georgia Southwestern State University in her honor, with the Georgia Southwestern State University Foundation serving as a fiscal sponsor. In November 2020, RCI transitioned to an independent 501(c)3 to enable the growth of caregiver programs and advocacy work.

Mrs. Carter recognized caregivers and their unique needs were often overlooked. Her efforts fostered the institute's national expansion, increased awareness of the challenges facing family caregivers and has positioned them as a vital part of our nation's public health system. RCI initially offered coaching and support to caregivers in Georgia but has since grown to embrace opportunities to reach more caregivers, in more ways, more often. With more than 53 million people serving as unpaid family caregivers in the United States, the institute's scope and work continues to evolve under the leadership of Dr. Jennifer Olsen, a prominent epidemiologist, in partnership with Mrs. Carter.

RCI promotes the health, strength, and resilience of caregivers across the lifespan. RCI fulfills its promise to champion the family caregiver by building cross-sector partnerships, developing and providing evidence-based programs and advocating for public policy.

About the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA):

"To fulfill President Lincoln's promise to care for those who have served in our nation's military and for their families, caregivers, and survivors," VA carries out four specific missions to make good on that commitment:

- **Veterans Health Care:** The Veterans Health Administration is the largest integrated health care network in the United States. Health care includes regular checkups with primary care and appointments with specialists. Services like home health and geriatric care, medical equipment, prosthetics and prescriptions are available to eligible Veterans.
- **Veterans Benefits:** Veterans can earn a range of benefits that help them transition back to civilian life in the country they fought to defend. Through the Veterans Benefits Administration, VA helps service members transition out of military service, and assists with education, home loans, life insurance and much more.
- **National Cemeteries:** The job of the National Cemetery Administration is to make sure those who served this nation are never forgotten. NCA provides dignified burial services for Veterans and eligible family members to commemorate their legacy, service and sacrifice to our nation.
- **The Fourth Mission:** VA's "Fourth Mission" is to improve the Nation's preparedness for response to war, terrorism, national emergencies, and natural disasters by developing plans and taking actions to ensure continued service to Veterans, as well as to support national, state, and local emergency management, public health, safety and homeland security efforts.

About VA's Caregiver Support Program:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) [Caregiver Support Program \(CSP\)](#) offers clinical services to caregivers of eligible and covered Veterans enrolled in the VA health care system. The program's mission is to promote the health and well-being of family caregivers who care for our Nation's Veterans through education, resources, support, and services. CSP is comprised of two distinct programs: The Program of General Caregiver Support Services (PGCSS) and the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). PGCSS provides peer support mentoring, skills training, coaching, telephone support, online programs, and referrals to available resources to caregivers of Veterans. The Veteran must be enrolled in VA health care and be receiving care from a caregiver in order for the caregiver to participate. Caregivers who participate in PGCSS are called General Caregivers.

In addition to the supports offered through PGCSS, PCAFC may provide Family Caregivers with a monthly stipend, access to health insurance (if uninsured), mental health counseling, certain beneficiary travel benefits, and at least 30 days of respite each year, among other benefits, if they meet certain eligibility criteria. For information on eligibility or to locate your local CSP team, please visit www.caregiver.va.gov.

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Introduction

Being a caregiver simply means that you are helping someone you care about live the healthiest life they can. This could mean you help this person through a range of daily activities. These activities can include helping someone get dressed or helping make doctor's appointments. It could also just mean being someone they can turn to for any kind of support. Being a caregiver and taking care of someone you care about can be one of the most rewarding jobs you will ever have. It can also be one of the most difficult jobs you will ever have. **Don't worry!** There are some simple and important things that you can do now to help ease the stress and uncertainty of being a caregiver, especially in times of disaster. Being prepared and knowing what it means to be a caregiver during a disaster can help you and the person you care for **survive and thrive** in scary situations.

For this toolkit, the VA and RCI came together to talk specifically about how caregivers of Veterans can be better prepared for disasters. Through this sharing of research and information the VA and RCI recognized that caregivers of Veterans must have specialized disaster preparations. These specialized preparations may be due to the visible and/or invisible wounds of war your Veteran may have from their time in service. Through this recognition came the belief that we must not only acknowledge the specialized preparations needed to keep caregivers and their Veterans healthy during a disaster but take active steps to create a toolkit to help guide caregivers through this process. This toolkit is **designed for you**, caregivers of Veterans, so that you can feel confident in your role as a caregiver by being more prepared for disasters, understanding how to handle the mental and physical health of you and your Veteran during disasters, and connecting with **important resources** to help in your recovery from disasters.

In this toolkit, you will find sections that you can use to personalize your disaster planning to your needs. We know that every caregiver and Veteran is different and has **unique needs** when preparing for disasters. When working through this toolkit, please know that not every section may apply to you and your Veteran - that's okay. Disaster planning is meant to **grow and change** with us. If a section does not fit into your planning today, make sure to set aside time to review and update your toolkit for any changes you might experience along your caregiver journey. Also know that planning can be done at a pace that fits your schedule.

These sections are designed with you in mind to help think of **all the things that are needed for disaster planning**, including ways to avoid danger and remain healthy in a disaster while caring for a Veteran, important needs to consider if you are staying at home or in a shelter, and what to do for you and your Veteran during an evacuation. Below you will find key terms and definitions to help work through this toolkit.



Key Terms

- A **disaster** is a large, community-wide geological scale event that brings great damage, loss or destruction, including pandemics such as COVID-19.
- **Disaster Preparedness** consists of a set of measures undertaken in advance by governments, organizations, communities, or individuals to better respond and cope with the immediate aftermath of a disaster.
- **Emergency Management** protects individuals and families by coordinating and integrating all activities necessary to build, sustain, and improve the capability to mitigate against, prevent, protect, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.



Plans and Checklists

Ensuring you and your Veteran's safety in a disaster begins with creating an **emergency plan** and making sure you have an **emergency kit**. You can take simple steps now to keep your Veteran and yourself safe by learning what disasters impact your local area the most, important steps for preparing your Veteran for emergencies/disasters, and what emergency numbers you might need.

As you go through this section, make sure you keep in mind that as a caregiver, you and your Veteran will have **special needs and considerations**. To help prepare for the emergency you should consider: recognizing how a disaster could impact the Veteran, such as loud noises and the general uncertainty and stress that comes with disasters and emergencies. While it is important to care of your Veteran, your safety is important as well. Please take steps to plan for yourself as well so you can **take care of yourself during a disaster**.

The first step in being prepared is to create an emergency plan. Below is an emergency plan template with different sections to help you think through all the needs and preparations you may have. Checklists are also included, to aid in making your emergency kit, including preparing for the needs of your pets and service animals. Once you have completed your emergency plan, make sure to **share this** with those who help you in giving care.

Remember that making an emergency plan can take time as you think through your needs as a caregiver, the needs of your Veteran, as well as the needs of everyone in your house. To ensure you are fully prepared, you can:



1. Build a **plan** using the templates below



2. Build an **emergency kit** based on the checklists provided



3. Use the **items already in your home** to build your kit as a low/no-cost way to begin your disaster preparedness journey

Emergency Plan



WHAT DISASTERS IMPACT MY AREA THE MOST?



Severe storms



Floods



Tornadoes



Hurricanes



Wildfires



Earthquakes



Events that may cause power failure



Other: _____



WHERE AND HOW WILL I GET MY EMERGENCY ALERTS AND WARNINGS?

In this section, think about how you will receive important alerts about disasters in your area. This information can be received through a weather radio, a specific local news outlet, or even a dedicated social media page. Knowing your local emergency service numbers can also be helpful when needing information. Knowing where you will get your information will help in knowing what's going on around you and how you can stay prepared with your Veteran.



HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS' CONTACT INFORMATION:

Name:

Cell Phone:

Social Media:

Email:

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____



INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS/MEDICATION WITHIN THE HOME:

Name:

Needs (include allergens):

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



CHILDREN IN THE HOME:

Name:

Age:

Special needs (include allergens):

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____



PETS IN THE HOME (Make sure to include service animals):

Name:	Type:	Color:	Special needs (include allergens):
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____



IN CASE OF EMERGENCY CALL:

Name:	Cell Phone:	Social Media:	Relationship:
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____



WHERE ARE THE SAFE SPOTS TO SHELTER IN PLACE WITHIN MY HOME?

Thinking about what disasters happen most often where you or your Veteran lives, look up where the safest places are to take cover. Remember the exact spot you choose depends on the disaster/emergency and to stay put until officials say it is safe to leave. For more information on disasters and how to find the safest room in your home, visit <https://www.fema.gov/>.

_____	_____
_____	_____



WHAT ESCAPE ROUTES ARE IN THE HOME?



WHAT IS MY EVACUATION PLAN?

Sometimes during a disaster, you might need to evacuate or leave your home. Planning to leave your home during a disaster/emergency can make a big difference in the health and comfort of your family and Veteran. When planning to evacuate, make sure you are thinking about where you will go, how you will get there (does your car have enough gas?), and what to do if you are separated from your Veteran. For more information on specifics in planning for an evacuation, visit <https://www.ready.gov/evacuation>.



IF SEPARATED DURING AN EMERGENCY, WHERE IS MY HOUSEHOLD'S MEETING PLACE?

Name of Location:	Address:
_____	_____



WHERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE MEETING PLACE IF FIRST MEETING PLACE IS NOT REACHABLE?

Name of Location: _____

Address: _____



HOW MIGHT AN EMERGENCY EVENT IMPACT MY VETERAN?

It is important to recognize that disasters and emergencies can affect your Veteran in many different ways. Take a few moments to explore how disasters might impact your Veteran, such as sensitivity to loud noises or air pressure...



WHAT ARE IMPORTANT STEPS IN PREPARING MY VETERAN?

Now that you have thought about how disasters affect your Veteran, think of the steps you should take to help them during disasters/emergencies. This could mean being mindful of their news intake or ensuring they have a way to connect with their support system.

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 8. _____ |



DO THESE STEPS INVOLVE OUTSIDE AGENCIES OR OTHER INDIVIDUALS ON MY CARE TEAM?

Name: _____ Contact Number: _____ Need: _____

- | | | |
|----------|-------|-------|
| 1. _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 2. _____ | _____ | _____ |



WHAT ARE EARLY WARNING SIGNS THAT MY VETERAN IS HAVING A LOT OF ANXIETY AND STRESS DURING AN EMERGENCY EVENT?

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 8. _____ |



WHAT ARE WAYS I CAN MANAGE THE CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS MY VETERAN MIGHT SHOW?

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 8. _____ |



WHAT ARE MY CONCERNS REGARDING MY AND MY FAMILY'S HEALTH DURING AN EMERGENCY EVENT?

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 8. _____ |



WHAT ARE WAYS I CAN MANAGE MY STRESS DURING AN EMERGENCY EVENT?

Going through disasters is stressful for everyone. It is important that as a caregiver you have ways to manage the stress you feel. Take a few moments and think of ways you can manage your stress during an emergency.



WHAT BARRIERS ARE THERE TO ACTIVATING MY EMERGENCY PLAN? AND HOW CAN I ADDRESS THESE BARRIERS?



WHAT ARE THE STEPS FOR PREPARING OTHER MEMBERS OF MY HOUSEHOLD FOR AN EMERGENCY EVENT?

Important information for developing an Escape Plan:

- ✓ Getting you and your family members safely **outside** is the most important action in a fire emergency. Develop an escape plan and have someone assigned to help your Veteran.
- ✓ If they are in a wheelchair or have **mobility** issues, decide in advance the best procedure/route for getting out of the house.
- ✓ Include **two ways out** of every room. Even if available, the escape plan should not include elevators. Use stairs.
- ✓ Select a **meeting place** where everyone can gather far away from danger and outside of the home.
- ✓ Know your children's **school** or family member's **facility** (place of employment, day centers) emergency plan.
- ✓ **Practice** the escape plan with all family members at least once a year.



Building a Preparedness Kit Checklist:



FOOD AND WATER (KEEP IN A DRY, COOL PLACE)

- Food, at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food per person (including children needing formula, people with special dietary needs) and food for pets); make sure you check expiration dates as needed
- Water, one gallon of water per person per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation (including pets); make sure to change out your water supply every three to six months
- Manual can opener (if canned food does not have pop-off top)
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Charcoal or gas for the grill
- Plastic forks, spoons, knives, cups, bowls, plates
- Bags of ice in the freezer



EQUIPMENT

- Flashlight
- Battery-powered fan
- Battery-powered weather radio
- Batteries (AA, AAA, D)
- Camping or utility knife
- Chargers (wall and car); consider solar chargers
- Whistle or glow sticks (to aid in signaling for help)
- Wrench or pliers (to turn off utilities)
- Cash (make sure to have small bills)
- Car—if you have a car, make sure car has a full tank of gas and has been serviced regularly
- Generator—if you have a generator, make sure gas cans are full



CLEANING SUPPLIES

- Duct tape
- Garbage bags
- Dust mask/N95 masks (to help filter contaminated air)
- Plastic sheeting
- Household chlorine bleach and medicine dropper (nine parts water to one part bleach; bleach can be used as a disinfectant)
- Gloves
- Heavy rope



PERSONAL ITEMS

- Sleeping bag or warm blanket
- Complete change of clothing (easy on/off clothes and shoes; be aware of the climate you live in)
- Medications (or updated copies of prescriptions; remember pet medication if needed)
- First Aid Kit (remember to include ibuprofen, Benadryl, etc.)
- Sunscreen/bug repellent
- Feminine supplies
- Personal hygiene items, including denture care
- Items for infants such as diapers, bottles, and pacifiers
- Pet/service animal leash, collar with tag, and crate/cage



ADDITIONAL ITEMS

- Emergency call list; include doctor's numbers
- Important family documents (copies of insurance cards, identification cards, social security cards, important medical documents, legal documents (such as the DD214), pet/service animal records)
- Detailed list of daily needs for you and your Veteran (medication times, activities that will need equipment)
- Inventory of home possessions—make a record of your personal property for insurance purposes; take photos or video of the interior and exterior of your home
- Utility shut-off and safety information—in the event of a disaster, you may be instructed to shut off the utility service at your home; make sure to contact your local officials to get clear instructions on how to do this



ACTIVITIES

- Paper
- Pencil
- Books, games, puzzles or other non-technology activities
- Playing cards or other card games
- Pet toys



SPECIAL NEEDS

- List of special equipment and location they are kept when not being used—dentures, hearing aids, glasses
- Type and model of medical devices—breathing machines, feeding tube needs, wheelchairs
- List of medications; mark ones that require refrigeration and other handling needs
- Discuss disaster needs with employer, neighbors, and support team; make sure they know your plan and they have contact information
- Comfort items—weighted blanket, stuffed animal



Building a Preparedness Kit for Pets Checklist:

- Food for several days
- Water for several days
- Extra supply of any medications that your pet takes
- Pet First Aid Kit—talk to your veterinarian about what is most important
- Extra collar with ID tag, harness or leash
- Crate or appropriate carrier
- Grooming items
- Needs for sanitation, such as paper towels, plastic bags, or litter and litter box
- A picture of you and your pet together in case of separation
- Favorite toys, blankets, or treats
- List of shelters and hotels/motels allowing pets, list of boarding facilities; make sure to research outside your local area in case local facilities close

For large animals:

- Make sure you have some form of identification
- If needing to evacuate, evacuate larger animals as soon as possible—if evacuation is not possible move large animals to a barn or turn them loose outside
- Make sure all vehicles and trailers are available and are being used by experienced drivers and handlers
- Make sure the destination has food, water, and veterinary care



Building a Preparedness Kit for Service Animals Checklist:

- A copy of identification or papers indicating service animal designation—for more information visit <https://www.ada.gov/> or contact your local VA
- Food for several days
- Water for several days
- Extra supply of any medications that your service animal takes
- Service Animal First Aid Kit—talk to your veterinarian about what is most important
- Extra Collar with ID tag, harness or leash
- Crate or appropriate carrier
- Grooming Items
- Needs for sanitation, such as paper towels, plastic bags, or litter and litter box
- A picture of you and your service animal together in case of separation
- Favorite toys, blankets, or treats
- List of shelters and hotels/motels allowing service animals, list of boarding facilities; make sure to research outside your local area in case local facilities closes



For more information on making an emergency plan and building a preparedness kit, visit <https://www.ready.gov/>



Getting your kit together can seem overwhelming, especially when you are trying to prepare yourself, your Veteran, and the entire house. But you can tackle creating a kit **one step and one item at a time**. Below you will find an example **month-by-month guide** for putting together your disaster kit basics within 6 months. This guide was created to set a pace that works for you and your budget in getting prepared.

 **Month 1**

For your first month of building a disaster kit, focus on the items you will need every day, such as food and water. Use this month to think through items you need and use every day. These items will be some of the most important items in your kit.

Some examples of these items are:

- Food, at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food per person (including children needing formula, pet food)
- Water, one gallon of water per person per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation (including pets)
- Manual can opener
- Plastic forks, spoons, knives, cups, bowls, plates

 **Month 2**

For the second month of getting your kit ready, focus on the different types of equipment you will need. Think of equipment for your disaster kit as items that will help run your electronics, help you signal for help, or tools to help turn off and on appliances.

Some examples of equipment are:

- Batteries
- Chargers for the wall and car
- Whistle or glow sticks
- Wrench/pliers

 **Month 3**

For the third month of getting your kit ready, focus on cleaning supplies. Cleaning items are important for clean-up and preventing infection during disasters keeping you and your Veteran healthy.

Some examples of cleaning supplies are:

- Garbage bags
- Dust mask/N95 masks
- Household chlorine bleach and medicine dropper (nine parts water to one part bleach; bleach can be used as a disinfectant)
- Gloves



Month 4

For the fourth month of getting your kit ready, focus on the personal items you will need. Think of these items that will keep you comfortable during a disaster. Personal items can also be thought of as those items that will keep you and your Veteran as healthy as possible.

Some examples of personal items are:

- Sleeping bag or warm blanket
- Complete change of clothing (easy on/off clothes and shoes)
- Medications (or updated copies of prescriptions; remember pet medication if needed)
- First Aid Kit (remember to include ibuprofen, Benadryl, etc.)



Month 5

For the fifth month, focus on items you will need for other members of your house with special needs and pets/service animals. Think of these items as things that you can have in your kit to help keep all family members safe and healthy.

Some examples of items for special needs members and pets/service animals in your home are:

- List of specialized equipment and location stored—dentures, glasses, hearing aids
- List of specialists and medications
- Comfort items—weighted blanket, stuffed animal
- Crate for pets/service animals
- Collar and ID tags for pets/service animals



Month 6

For the sixth month, focus on activities you can use during a disaster. These activities can keep you and your Veteran from getting too stressed and focus on things other than the uncertainty of disasters.

Some examples of activities are:

- Books, games, puzzles or other non-technology activities
- Playing cards or other card games
- Pencils and paper
- Pet toys



Managing and Mitigating Risks

Understanding how disasters affect your Veteran can be a hard process. Understanding how to **manage and prevent risks** to your Veteran and family during disasters is a conversation filled with lots of questions. One of the most important things you can do, as a caregiver, during this process is to **be patient** while trying to find the best way to prepare with your Veteran. Remember, these are events that you will go through together.

As you work to prepare for disasters, it is important that you are not only aware of your Veteran's limitations, but also aware of their abilities. When planning, please ensure you **include your Veteran** in the planning process. You can allow your Veteran to help as they are able and be as supportive as possible. However, it is also important for you to recognize when your Veteran is becoming overwhelmed.


To know how to help your Veteran in being prepared for a disaster, **get curious**. Remember, you want yourself, your Veteran, and your family to be as safe as possible during emergencies. Asking questions about how to manage and prevent risks during a disaster is as simple as having a conversation about how your Veteran starts feeling when they are going through scary events and what ways your Veteran can get through those moments.

Knowing that every family approaches disaster preparedness differently, here are some **conversation starters** to help you and your Veteran talk about how to manage and even prevent risks when your Veteran is experiencing negative emotions relating to disaster events.

1. Why are we preparing for disasters?
2. What is my role in preparing for disasters? What do you see as your role?
3. How does going through a disaster make you feel? Scared, anxious, confused?
 - a. This is how going through a disaster makes me feel _____.
4. Do you have any early warning signs that let you know you are overwhelmed or overstimulated by what is happening?
 - a. _____ are my warning signs when I am overwhelmed by what is happening.
5. Can we come up with a keyword to help me know where you are with your stress and anxiety?
 - a. This can be as easy as green for good, yellow for okay, but not great, or red for not good, need help now.
6. Are there ways/activities that help you when you feel this way?
 - a. _____ is what I do to help myself with these feelings.
7. Take some time. Think about some questions that may be helpful in starting this conversation. Remember, there might be quick answers to the questions above. But this is a way to start thinking about how to better manage disasters and be prepared for whatever may come your way.



There are also some things that you can put in your kit when preparing for a disaster to help ***ease the stress and anxiety*** that your Veteran may feel. Think about using these items to ease the stress of disasters, while keeping you, your Veteran, and your family safe.

- 
- Pen/journal
 - Favorite books
 - Activity books (word search, crossword puzzle, etc.)
 - Hard puzzles
 - Fidget toys (spinners, cubes, etc.)
 - Any soft item to hold on to and help soothe
 - Sleep/eye mask/sunglasses
 - Noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs
 - Downloaded soothing playlist or handheld radio
 - Walkie-talkies for keeping in communication
 - Comfort items specific to your Veteran (picture, medal, shirt)
 - Molding clay/silly putty
 - Weighted blanket
 - Favorite snacks
 - A change of comfortable clothes and shoes
 - Laminated sheet with information to help you (or others that may have to step into your caregiving role) during a disaster. Think of this sheet as a way to help with your caregiving role during really stressful events. Some things to include on this sheet:

✓ **Why is it important to *stay safe*?**

- Your Veteran may want to play a more active role in the disaster than they are able. Sometimes they might not recognize how difficult or challenging the situation may be. Having some ***key phrases*** to remind them of the importance of staying safe in a disaster and your role as a caregiver in a disaster may help remind your Veteran that safety is the most important part of going through a disaster.



- ✓ **Rating scale or keyword list** for when stress/anxiety is getting worse
 - It may be hard for your Veteran to verbalize all their feelings. As a caregiver, you need to make sure that your Veteran has the tools to communicate when early warning signs are present. This can come in the form of a rating scale or keyword list to aid in letting you know where they are at. Here are some examples:

Red	Bad/Stress and anxiety are high
Yellow	Warning/Stress and anxiety are present but manageable
Green	Good/Stress and anxiety are low

- ✓ List of **grounding/stress management techniques** that work for your Veteran
 - Make sure you are aware of these techniques to help when needed.
 - These techniques should be exercises that have worked in the past. Disasters are not good times to experiment with new stress management techniques.
- ✓ **Words or phrases** that help **calm your Veteran** and **validate their emotions**
- ✓ **Tasks assigned to your Veteran**, such as checking doors and windows, or making sure everyone is in their safe space

As a caregiver, make sure comfort items are located in your kit or where you can **find them easily**. Also make sure that if you and your Veteran are separated, you will **keep in contact** with scheduled check-ins and ensure that your Veteran has any items they might need. Understanding how you can help your Veteran feel prepared and understanding how they may experience disasters will help in keeping everyone in your family safe with as **minimal risks** as possible.



How to Shelter in Place



What does sheltering in place mean?

Sheltering in place means staying in your current location until the threat or disaster is over. You will know when to stop sheltering in place when local officials, such as first responders have given the “all-clear.”



Where can I find safe spots to shelter in place?

Where you and your Veteran shelter in place depends on what event (tornado, hurricane, etc.) and the type of building/home you are in. Below you will find several examples of common disasters that can affect your area, types of buildings/homes, and where the safest place is for you and your Veteran to shelter in place.



Flooding

FEMA defines floods or flooding as an overflow of water, either slowly or rapidly (flash flooding) onto land that is usually dry. Flooding can be caused by a large amount of rainfall in a short time period, by a dam failure, or by a release of water that was caused by ice or snow. If you or your Veteran are unsure about the potential for flooding in your area, visit the National Flood Insurance Program website (www.floodsmart.gov) to find out if your area is susceptible to flooding.

If you and your Veteran are in a manufactured, 1 or 2-story, or multi-story building/home and a flood warning has been issued, go inside as quickly as possible. Remember to bring any outside pets inside.



Make sure you have a way to receive emergency updates and information about water levels in your area.

If you are told to evacuate, do so as soon as possible. If you need help evacuating your Veteran, make sure to let emergency services know as soon as the evacuation notice is given. Remember your emergency plan that includes your list of local emergency services numbers to call.

When evacuating, make sure to stay off bridges and do not drive around barricades.



And don't forget to take your emergency kit!

If it is too late to evacuate or there is no evacuation notice, but the water is rising to an unsafe level, get to the highest part of the building/home. Do not go into a closed attic - your family will risk being trapped inside. As soon as you get to the highest spot, make sure to call 911.



Hurricanes

FEMA defines hurricanes as huge storm systems that take shape over water and then move toward land. Hurricanes will have strong winds, and a large amount of rain, and can cause tornadoes.



If you and your Veteran are or will experience a hurricane and are in a manufactured home/building, you should leave immediately. Manufactured homes (pre-made factory-built homes) and buildings are typically considered unsafe and leave the people inside exposed to high winds and pressure.

Go to your nearest official shelter. If there is no official storm shelter near you, go to the nearest sturdy building. Once inside, go to the lowest floor or level in the building. Make sure all windows and doors are securely closed and locked.



And don't forget to take your emergency kit!

If you and your Veteran are in a multi-story building/home and are experiencing high winds, take yourself, your Veteran, and any others with you to the lowest level of the building where you are located. Make sure the room you are seeking shelter in is an interior room with no windows.



And don't forget to take your emergency kit!



Tornado

FEMA defines tornados as rapidly rotating columns of air that touch down from a thunderstorm to the ground.



If you and your Veteran are or will experience a tornado and are in a manufactured home/building, you should leave immediately. Manufactured homes and buildings are typically considered unsafe during tornados because of high winds and flying debris.

Go to your nearest official shelter. If there is no official storm shelter near you, go to the nearest sturdy building. Once inside, go to the lowest floor or level in the building. Make sure to shelter in an interior, windowless room.



And don't forget to take your emergency kit!

If you and your Veteran are in a multi-story building/home, take yourself, your Veteran, and any others with you to the lowest level or basement of the building where you are located. Make sure the room you are seeking shelter in is an interior room with no windows.



And don't forget to take your emergency kit!





Severe Thunderstorm

FEMA defines thunderstorms as dangerous storms that include rain and severe lightning. Lightning is one of the leading causes of death from weather-related injuries.

If you and your Veteran are or will experience a thunderstorm and are in a manufactured, single, or multistory building/home, stay inside.



Make sure you listen to your area's weather forecast to know if and when it is safe to go outside.

Don't forget to bring any outside pets inside.

Avoid using water or landline phones because electricity can travel through plumbing and phone lines.



And don't forget to take your emergency kit!

Pandemic

FEMA defines a pandemic as an outbreak of a disease, caused mainly by a virus. Pandemics affect large numbers of people and can be spread easily because most people might not be immune or a vaccine might not be available immediately.



If you and your Veteran are or expect to experience a pandemic, no matter what kind of building or home you live in, to protect your family, stay at home as much as possible. This will help in reducing the possibility of being exposed to the virus.

If you or your Veteran needs to go out for an appointment or to get supplies, make sure you have the appropriate protective gear—like masks. Also make sure you, your Veteran, and your family know how to wear their protective gear correctly, such as making sure masks are covering the mouth and nose.



If you think that you or someone in your family unit has been exposed to the disease, make sure to follow up with your local health care providers and follow any quarantine procedures.

And don't forget that while isolating in place you can use activities in your emergency kit! Just make sure to re-supply any used items for future disasters.





Earthquake

FEMA defines earthquakes as sudden and rapid shaking of the earth. The shifting of underground rocks causes this shaking. Earthquakes can cause building collapses and injuries and building damage when heavy objects fall.



If you and your Veteran experience an earthquake and are in a manufactured, single, or multistory building/home, stay inside. Do not run outside, stand in doorways, or use elevators.

For all buildings and homes, make sure you and your Veteran Stop, Drop under a sturdy table if able, and Hold On and Cover your Head. If your Veteran is in a wheelchair or uses a walker, make sure they put on their mobile device's brakes, and can cover their heads.



Make sure you listen to your area's weather forecast to know if and when it is safe to go outside.

And don't forget to take your emergency kit if you need to evacuate!



Winter Storms

FEMA defines winter storms as weather events that can cause higher rates of car accidents, hypothermia, and heart attacks.

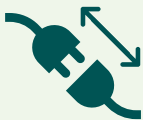


If you and your Veteran are or will experience a winter storm and are in a manufactured, single, or multistory building/home, stay inside and limit your time outside as much as possible.

Make sure you listen to your area's weather forecast to know if and when it is safe to go outside and monitor the temperature.



Don't forget to bring any outside pets inside.



Make sure appliances and any equipment that you or your Veteran uses are turned off or disconnected to avoid any electrical spikes during a winter storm that can cause damage.

And don't forget to take your emergency kit!





How do I know if sheltering in place is the safest option?

Knowing **how you will receive information** about potential disasters is the first step in knowing if sheltering in place is the best and safest option for you and your Veteran.

Local officials, such as first responders and emergency management officials, can help you know the best channels to get your up-to-date emergency information. Contacting them as you make your emergency plan will help in knowing what **services and resources** may be available in your community in preparing for any special needs for you and your Veteran.

Make sure to **write down** where you will receive your disaster updates within your emergency plan.

These channels will also be how you will get **up-to-date** information about when it is okay to stop sheltering in place and can go outside.



How can I prepare my Veteran for sheltering in place?

No matter what type of disaster you and your Veteran are experiencing, it can be scary and filled with lots of uncertainty. Disasters are usually very chaotic and loud. It is important to know that a disaster can cause your Veteran to experience high levels of anxiety and become easily triggered because of their **unique experiences** with the military.

It is important to talk to your Veteran as soon as you know that a disaster event is heading your way. Make sure that as you talk to your Veteran that your voice is **calm** and you are **reassuring**—remember you've been preparing for these events!

Here are some simple ways to talk to your Veteran about a disaster that is going to affect your area and your plan for sheltering in place:



- “The weather reports are saying we have a possible (insert emergency event). We should be okay to shelter in place. I’d like to talk about these plans with you.”
- “We are expected to have (insert emergency event) this week. I know this can be stressful. Can we talk about our plans for sheltering in place and how you are feeling about this?”
- “I would like to talk about (insert emergency event). I know it can be scary and I would like to talk about how you are feeling and what preparations we have made, so we can stay safe.”



It is important to remember that you use these conversations as a way to open up a discussion about the plans you have made, letting your Veteran talk about their concerns, and making sure you are all **on the same page** when it comes to being prepared.

Please know that your Veteran may be resistant to following your guidance on sheltering in place. **This is okay**—remember your Veteran has been through lots of uncertain and scary situations, so a disaster at home may feel like something they should be an active part of. Use this opportunity to talk with your Veteran about tasks or activities they can do while sheltering in



place so that they can be included in the activities. Do not use this resistance to focus on what your Veteran may struggle with or be unable to do.

Below are some prompts to help in talking to your Veteran during the disaster so that everyone in your house can stay safe:

- “I just want to check in and see how you are feeling.”
- “I know this is stressful. Can we use a code word when you notice that your stress is becoming overwhelming?”
- “I know things feel uncertain and scary. We are all together. I have our kit with lots of activities and items to help with the stress. Let me know and I will get those things for you.”



Important **things to remember** when sheltering in place:

As you go through your disaster plan for sheltering in place, there are several things to keep in mind to further **ready yourself, your Veteran, your family, and your home**.

It might be helpful to **let those closest to you outside of the disaster area know that you are sheltering in place** and the room where you will be located. This will be helpful information in case they need to send professional/emergency help your way.

Even though you are sheltering in place, remember to have your **emergency kit** within whatever room you have identified as your home base. In your kit, make sure your **three day supply of food and water are up to date and not expired**. Also make sure you know where you will be keeping medication that needs to be refrigerated, whether in a cooler to take with you to your home base or left in the refrigerator.

If you have to leave the designated area in your home for any reason, be mindful of how your Veteran or others within your home will be able to **stay in contact** with you. Consider investing in a communication device other than your cell phone. Batteries may die quickly in cell phones without a power source, so having something like walkie-talkies may be helpful to keep in contact.



Some other **essential items** to remember to take with you while you are preparing to shelter in place are:

- ✓ **Weather radio** to keep up to date with the latest information.
- ✓ Information about what appliances or environmental services (AC, heat, water, gas) should be **turned off or can be left on**.
 - You can find the contact information for these services on your **official county/community website** or by contacting your local first responders through their non-emergent phone numbers.
- ✓ **Cleaning supplies** to make disaster recovery easier—make sure the area you are sheltering in place is kept clean to cut down on possible health risks.
- ✓ Keep in mind how you might use your **car battery and charging items**. Your car might not last the entire event, so be mindful of how you will be charging your electronics so you can stay in contact with your support team.

Remember when sheltering in place, the best thing for you and your Veteran is to **remain as calm as possible**. You have your emergency kit, tools to manage your and your Veteran's stress, and have a way to keep up to date on the latest information about the disaster event. ***You are prepared and got this!***



Sheltering at a Congregate Shelter



What does sheltering at a congregate shelter mean?

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) defines sheltering as when conditions require you to seek protection, whether it is at your home, where you work, or at a mass care shelter. For this section, we will focus on sheltering at a congregate shelter or what is sometimes called a disaster/emergency shelter, mass care shelter, or also referred to as a storm room.

A **congregate shelter is any private or public facility** that has planned for the possibility of needing to provide safety and security for multiple to a large number of people that have had to evacuate their homes due to a disaster. These locations also provide non-shelter services day-to-day, such as convention centers or stadiums—in other words, these types of shelters are only open for this type of need for a limited time.



What is sheltering at a congregate shelter like?

It is important to remember as you prepare to shelter at a congregate shelter that these types of shelters will often be crowded. **This means that you and your Veteran will be sharing living spaces, restrooms, and showers with others sheltering at this location.**

While these shelters have been equipped to help keep you and your Veteran safe, they will not have many of the comforts you have at home. Also, remember that these shelters are considered temporary when they may be open depending on the disaster event you experience.

Make sure to **bring your emergency kit** with all the items that you and your Veteran have identified as helpful in managing stress and anxiety.

Suppose you and your Veteran have **special needs** or want to look to where the closest congregate shelter is to you. In that case, you may need to call your **local Emergency Management Office or first responders**—you should be able to find this contact information on your city or county government website. You can also consider downloading the FEMA App for your mobile device to use as a disaster resource to help with planning and keeping up to date on disaster information, including helping you find a shelter near you.



What if my family or Veteran has special needs and we need to go to a shelter?

It is common to have **feelings of uncertainty** when going through a disaster event and needing to also travel to a congregate shelter for safety. This can be amplified especially when you might also need to account for any special needs your Veteran or family may have. Below you will find some simple things you can do to help in easing this stress and anxiety—remember **planning in advance can make all the difference**:

- Call your local **Emergency Management Office** and schedule a time to locate your nearest congregate shelter. You should talk to them about the special needs you may have and set up a time to take you and your Veteran to tour the congregate shelter. It can ease the anxiety your Veteran may have about sheltering at a congregate shelter.



- o Find out if there is a **special needs registry** for your Veteran and family needs. This will let the individuals in charge of the shelter be aware and help them understand how to best interact with you and your Veteran and what shelter might best fit your needs.
- o Recognize any items or **preparations** you may need to make depending on the location, size, and layout of the shelter, such as if there is a limit of items you can bring into the shelter.
- o If your Veteran is not mobile or cannot tour the shelter, see if it is possible to take a virtual tour of the shelter.
- When looking at your nearest shelter, also explore what the best options are if **you and your Veteran are separated**.
 - o What **advance planning and care needs** will your Veteran need at the shelter when you are not with them?
 - This can be a **written out care plan** for officials at the shelter or your Veteran can keep this on their phone using a note or storage app. Also, ensure your Veteran can contact you, so you and the shelter officials can work together to provide the best care in a disaster.
 - o Research **other available resources** in the community to help with these situations, such as the Red Cross.
 - o Make sure your plan includes **contacting family** outside of the disaster area to let them know where you and your Veteran will be and ways to communicate while you and your Veteran are at the shelter.
- If able, **drive the route** to the shelter and **save the shelter's address** in your GPS.
 - o This will help you and your Veteran know where you will be going and **identify alternative routes** as needed and help you and your Veteran feel comfortable in driving to the shelter if the GPS is not working.
- **Contact your local VA** if you must travel out of the area to shelter safely.
 - o Have your Veteran request a **travel vet consultation** with their VA social worker or doctor. If medical needs arise or illness or injury occur, your Veteran will have a plan for continuity of care during a disaster event.
- **Talk to your Veteran and family** about shelters and disaster planning. This will help ensure that everyone within your home is on the same page and knows what the plan is.
 - o Here are some **conversation prompts** to help with starting the discussion:
 - “We are in an area that has (insert disaster event). We need to talk about planning for this and where our shelter is located.”
 - “The news reports say that we might be getting some bad weather. Let’s talk about our plan and where we will go to shelter during this situation.”
 - “It is important that we talk about our disaster and sheltering plans. Let’s talk about what I am thinking and what you might need.”



What do I need to go to a shelter?

Getting ready to go to a congregate shelter can be overwhelming. It can be easy to forget needed items. It can also be easy to overlook the early warning signs of your Veteran and you. Below are some items that can be easy to forget or overlook—remember a congregate shelter will not have all the comforts you have available at home.



- **The most important thing to bring with you is your emergency kit!** Before leaving, make sure you have all the items you, your Veteran, and your family may need, including any copies of important documents or things to help in the recovery phase of the disaster.
 - **Comfort items**—comfortable clothes, activities, headphones, or any familiar favorite items. Remember in a congregate shelter, you and your Veteran will be there with many others from the community, so it can be loud and triggering to your Veteran.
 - Items with your Veteran’s **favorite scent**, such as scented candles or comfortable clothes sprayed with their favorite cologne to help ease triggers your Veteran might feel. Make sure that scented items are cleared by the shelter and are allowed in the shelter—others in the shelter might be allergic and unable to handle strong smells.
 - **Extra charging cords** for any electronics you have in your kit.
 - Any **sanitary items** in your kit as these may not be available at the congregate shelter.
- Make sure you have a copy of all **prescriptions** and include the dosage or any special treatment information.
 - If possible, ensure you have a **30-day supply** of all the medications you need, in case you and your Veteran are displaced for longer than 3 days.
 - Make sure to have any **durable medical equipment** (DME) with you upon arrival. Shelters will not provide these items, and you will not have time to go back for these items if conditions are unsafe.
 - Make sure to include any cords and a back-up power source for your Veteran’s essential DME.
- Prepare if your Veteran has **special dietary needs**. Depending on the type of shelter you are at, you may need to bring some of those non-perishable food items. Make sure to have the dietary needs recorded in your plan to help if you find yourself at the shelter longer than expected.
- **Identification** or other forms may be required to enter the shelter—remember to contact your local Emergency Management Office for details.
- Consider how the shelter staff can aid in decreasing or helping **avoid any triggers** your Veteran may encounter. Below are some simple ways to help the shelter staff know how to assist your Veteran in reducing their anxiety and staying staff during a disaster:
 - Use your **emergency plan!** Remember you have already listed your Veteran’s condition(s), triggers, early warning signs, and coping strategies. Put that plan to work! Let the staff know that your Veteran has special needs and see if or who on the shelter staff is trained or has experience with those special needs.
 - Make a plan for approaching your Veteran when you notice their **early warning signs**, such as certain phrases to signal to your Veteran that you are noticing a spike in their anxiety. Also consider phrases to avoid that may further trigger your Veteran.
 - Also, make sure you are using **YOUR stress management skills**. Stress and anxiety can be contagious! Making sure you remain calm can help your Veteran use their own stress management skills.
- Make sure you have already discussed **service animal requirements** for the shelter you are going to. Some shelters may require documentation of the service animal’s status and what they are trained for. Ensure you have the appropriate needs for your service animal—crate, ID tag, or food and water—with you upon arrival.



Evacuation



What does evacuation mean?

In some emergencies or disasters that impact your area, you may need to evacuate or leave. This means you and your Veteran will need to leave where you are because it is unsafe. When you are evacuating, you are going to another location that is out of the danger zone, where you can remain safe until you can return to your local area.

When officials (first responders or Emergency Management Office) call for you and your Veteran to evacuate, you may have anywhere from a few days to minutes to leave for a safer location. These evacuation notices are typically done through local radio or news channels. Remember planning for events like these is key to ensuring your and your Veteran's safety.



When you and your Veteran are evacuating together:

The most important thing to remember in safely evacuating is **planning**. Planning will help ease your stress as a caregiver and the stress of your Veteran. Below you will find some helpful reminders as you prepare and plan for evacuating you and your Veteran:

- ✓ Have a **list of where to find items** that will need to have with you and your Veteran in addition to your emergency kit
- ✓ Remember to have a **list of medications**, your and your Veteran's **ID**, information regarding your **Veteran's conditions**, and **health care contacts** for your Veteran
 - If your Veteran has any information regarding DNR, Living Will, or Power of Attorney— make sure those papers or copies are with you
 - Put any important papers in a secured waterproof folder or consider digitally storing any papers you will not need right away
- ✓ Make sure you have a full tank of **gas** in your car, a map of the area (your local area and the area you are evacuating to), and a backup **battery charger**
 - Make sure you have your disability placard for your car, if applicable
- ✓ Have a **list of special needs shelters and hotels** that can accommodate your Veteran's needs and pets/service animals
- ✓ Remember to take your Veteran's **comfort items**
- ✓ Have the address of the **nearest VA medical center** if evacuating outside of the local area
- ✓ Make sure your Veteran has a copy of their Veteran's **VA card**



- ✓ If your Veteran has **large medical equipment** that is not easily transported (specialized bed, wheelchair, oxygen concentrator), make sure you have contacted medical transport companies, first responders, or Emergency Management Office to aid in finding options for transporting during evacuation or to ensure your Veteran's safe spot in the home or other sheltering location is equipped with needed equipment
- ✓ If your Veteran has **medication that needs to be refrigerated**, make sure to have **ice packs or a thermal bag** to keep medications cold
 - If able, make sure you have 7 days' worth of medications
- ✓ Remember to bring **personal hygiene needs** or extra **oxygen tanks, hearing aids and glasses**
- ✓ Have **extra batteries and chargers**
- ✓ Make sure you have registered with your city or county **special needs registry** to help first responders be aware of your Veteran's needs and check on them when the disaster has passed
- ✓ Make sure you have contacted your local VA and have done a **Veteran Travel consultation**
- ✓ Make sure you and your Veteran have updated **VA mobile apps**
- ✓ Make sure you and your Veteran have **personal emergency contact information** and a plan to communicate with outside family members



If you and your Veteran are separated during evacuation:

Evacuation can be stressful and confusing. It is important that if you and your Veteran are evacuating together, you **make every effort to stay together**—remember you are the expert on their care and needs. If you are separated while evacuating, a little pre-planning can help you find your Veteran safely.

Here are some planning tips for if you are separated from your Veteran while evacuating:



Have a designated **meeting spot** or phone check-in time



Make sure you and your Veteran have personal emergency **contact information** to call and a plan to communicate with outside family members if separated



Alert first responders and the Emergency Management Office of the separation from your Veteran



Have an up-to-date **picture of your Veteran** on your mobile device or in your kit to assist first responders and Emergency Management Office if you have been separated from your Veteran

- Make sure to know your Veteran's height, weight, or any distinguishing marks or tattoos to help first responders reconnect you with your Veteran



Make sure your Veteran is enrolled in a **Safe Return program**, if applicable, or has a **medical alert bracelet**



If your Veteran is evacuating from a hospital or other facility:

If your Veteran is in a facility or receiving care outside of the home and you receive information that your Veteran is evacuating back home or to another area, it can be really scary. This is a normal feeling in times of emergencies and disasters. As a caregiver, you want to ensure no matter where your Veteran is, they are **receiving the best care**. Here are some tips to ensure that their evacuation is as stress-free as possible for you and your Veteran:

- ✓ Know the facility's **evacuation plan**
 - Keeping informed about the facility's procedures will help you know what to expect and to talk to your Veteran about what they can expect
 - Ask for names or departments that will be responsible for any part of the process and make sure the facility knows you are the caregiver and will be checking in on the status of your Veteran
- ✓ Make sure the facility has an **alternate contact person** for the evacuation in case they cannot get in touch with you
- ✓ If your Veteran is evacuating back to your home, make sure you ask the facility what the Veteran's **routines** are
 - Keeping routines as normal as possible will aid in keeping your Veteran's negative emotions as minimal as possible
 - Ask for an up-to-date medication list if needed
- ✓ Talk to your Veteran's facility social worker or medical team members about their **treatment** or what you should be on the lookout for if their condition worsens



For more information, visit <https://www.ready.gov/evacuation>



Recovery After Disaster



What does this mean?

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) *defines recovery as a community returning to pre-disaster operations or as near to that as possible*. Looking at recovery from a community perspective can take weeks or years depending on the size and extent of the disaster.

For you and your Veteran, recovery from a disaster can include lots of things, some as simple as being able to return home after a disaster to having to relocate yourselves entirely. There is no set timeline for recovery, which is a slow process. Here are some important things to help you in developing a recovery plan:



Remember to have a copy of **important papers**

- o Below are the **important documents** most households will want to keep safe, secure, and accessible:
 - Identification
 - Birth certificates
 - Social Security cards
 - Passports
 - Marriage certificate/divorce records
 - Family ID forms (Driver's license, ID card)
 - Military ID, DD214
 - Property deeds and homeownership documents
 - Home insurance
 - Thumb drive with images and/or video of the contents within your home
 - Appraisals of high-value items that you own
 - Vehicle titles
 - Registration
 - Vehicle insurance
 - Life insurance policies
 - Health insurance information
 - Living Will
 - Last Will and Testament
 - DNR
 - Power of Attorney
 - Emergency phone numbers
 - List of medications
 - Doctor's office and locations
 - Medical equipment documents
 - Service animal records including vaccinations
 - Financial accounts information
 - Personal account information
 - Previous year's tax return



- o Remember that these important papers can also be **stored digitally**. Be mindful of the **security of the device or storage outlet** you choose.



If you have to leave any bigger items behind **take pictures of these items** if possible. This will help in filling insurance claims or replacing these items.



Know **what VA health care clinics are near you** in case your Veteran needs medical care and/or a refill on medications.



Also, know which **local shelter you will need to go to** if needed.



Keeping Safe During the Recovery Period

Your first concern should be looking at and monitoring the health and well-being of your Veteran and family. Make sure they are not harmed or injured. If you suspect an injury or health concern, call 911.



Some **common safety issues** after a disaster can be avoided by being aware:

- If your home has new damage from the disaster, reach out to local officials to have a qualified inspector assess the damage.
- DO NOT enter your home if you smell gas, if there are still floodwaters around your home, or if local officials have NOT declared it safe to return or enter your home.
- Make sure that if you and your Veteran are walking around outside the home, you have a stick to poke through debris to avoid stepping on wildlife, especially poisonous snakes.

Local officials are there to help. If you are unsure whether you should stay in your home or return to your home, reach out to them.



Mental Health Overview

Disasters can bring an overwhelming amount of stress for you and your Veteran. Disasters can cause feelings of instability and uncertainty. It is important to know that a disaster can cause your Veteran to experience high levels of anxiety and become easily triggered because of their **unique experiences** with the military.

Making sure your Veteran is okay means you are **aware of their needs**, are **open to communicating** with your Veteran about their feelings of unease, and are **reaching out to their health care provider** if these feelings become overwhelming.



Here are some **common warning signs** from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):

- Over or under-sleeping, lack of sleep, or not eating
- Isolation
- Excessive worry or feelings of guilt
- Feelings of helplessness
- Difficulty in readjusting

It is important to remember that recovery from a disaster also means ensuring you **take care of your mental health and well-being as a caregiver**.



Below are some tips to help **maintain your mental health and well-being** after a disaster:

- Limit your watching or listening to the news, as it can make it more difficult to fully relax or participate in stress reduction activities.
- Establish a routine after a disaster as soon as you are able.
 - Remember as a caregiver, routines are essential to taking care of yourself and your Veteran. Establishing and maintaining a routine after a disaster will aid in helping you not become overwhelmed and aid your Veteran in their recovery process.

Understand that some things are **out of your control** in disaster recovery and **changes will happen**. Be ready to roll with the punches and communicate your and your Veteran's needs. This will help your community know what they can do to help you recover.

 Places to turn for assistance:

- **Ready.gov:**
 - <https://www.ready.gov/recovering-disaster>
- **Disaster Recovery Center (DRC):**
 - <https://egateway.fema.gov/ESF6/DRCLocator>
 - 1-800-621-3362
- **VA Emergency Management Resources:**
 - [Veterans, Families & Emergency Management - VHA Office of Emergency Management \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/emergency-management/)
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):**
 - <https://www.samhsa.gov>
- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:**
 - Call, Text, or Chat 988
- **Veterans Crisis Line:**
 - Dial 988 then Press 1, or Text 838255