



SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS WITH COGNITIVE NEEDS DURING CRISIS PLANNING

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Objectives:

- Increase understanding of the unique needs that may arise
- How to mitigate the impact of disasters on individuals with cognitive needs
- Develop concrete steps in response planning for individuals, caregivers and responders
- Sheltering at home vs going to a shelter
- Supporting the caregiver

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What are some of the things to consider about individuals who have cognitive delays?

- Individuals may have difficulty processing information
- Memory and judgment can be impaired
- Transitioning can create distress
- Communication may be limited, both expressively and receptively
- Individuals may be dependent on others for their care
- Distress may result in maladaptive response
- Social interactions may be challenging

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Understanding the needs of the individual

Common Incorrect Assumptions:

- People with cognitive delays can't understand complex ideas at all
- They need to be protected
- They are completely reliant on others
- The only problems they have are cognitive
- They are always happy

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The reality of the situation

Individuals with cognitive delays:

- May lack ability to cope because they have been sheltered
- Can have strong independence skills
- Can have psychiatric and health related needs
- May have a caregiver to address some of their functional needs
- May have communication challenges
- May have difficulty processing information

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Building Independence Skills

Tasks for supports and service providers:

- Share information effectively
- Assist in trouble shooting
- Identify social supports
- Have easily accessible information
- Develop communication plans
- Establish response plans
- Normalize planning by making it a routine

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Empowering the higher functioning individual

- Practice emergency planning
- Identify social support contacts
 - Friends, neighbors, religious supports, club members
- Identify community supports
 - Social Services, food pantries, Walk in health centers
- Learn safe food preparation
- Be mindful of how to obtain medication and services when the community is impacted
- Ask questions about what you want to know

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Suggestions to increase independence

- Share correct and current information
- Assist with problem solving
- Register with 911
- Post information in easy to find places
- Provide ways for them to reach known providers or supports during crisis
- Practice concrete ways to prepare
- Review successes
- Repeat, repeat, repeat...

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Further independence building

- Don't wait for a time of crisis to discuss
- Make sure they have access to medication, medical providers
- Encourage check-in's by providers
- Create buddy systems for support
- Create bad weather routines
- Prepare caregivers, service providers with supports they may need to do their jobs during a crisis
- Repeat, repeat, repeat...

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For individuals with more complex needs:

- Prioritize the involvement of the caregivers in planning
- Ensuring staff members' safe arrival to work is the most important component for stability
- Train staff for continuity of care in times of power outages and inclement weather
- Identify alternate supports in the immediate vicinity
- Maintain routine as much as possible
- Be mindful of co-existing health needs

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For residential or community housing

- Involve the residents in the planning
- Train everyone in “Emergency Protocols”
- Send out written “Emergency Protocols”
- Identify medical or food preparation equipment that needs electricity
- Designate staff to do check-in’s and follow up’s
- Plan for 72 hours of sheltering in place
- Enable your staff to be flexible about coverage
- Set up buddy system with other sites

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Suggested Pre-event Checklist

- Register with 911
- Establish/contact support circle
- Post important information
- Send out reminders
- Set up a check-in system
- Keep people updated with correct news
- Identify staff who can be more flexible in coverage
- Use social stories to help prepare people
- Take time to process
- Assess the home before an event for safety

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Important reminder

Often family members or caregivers try to protect an individual from the harsher realities of life. There may be concern about “worrying” a person, or fear of “upsetting them” that can result in a person being unprepared, frightened by the unknown and unsure how to respond to a situation.

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How can you support a person with cognitive delays?

- Let someone know what to expect
- Help process the media’s message
- Remind them of past success when dealing with stressors
- Be mindful of your language
- Respect routine and familiarity
- Repeat, practice and drill
- Normalize the experience and remain calm!

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Sheltering at home

- Abrupt transitions or unfamiliar routines and environments can cause distress
- Shelters can be over stimulating, unfamiliar and overwhelming for some individuals
- When the option to remain at home safely is available, it can minimize stress and chaos
- Plan to shelter in place for 72 hours

Safety first! Follow evacuation orders!

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Going to a shelter

- Prioritize mood stability during a change and maintain as much familiarity as possible
- Caregivers should make all efforts to help the person make a positive narrative
 - Use familiar terms
 - Reframe when possible
 - Share information simply without undue emotion
- Enabling people to have familiar objects, routines, and contact with people important to them may help the transition to a new environment



Going to a shelter (continued)

- Caregivers should quickly notify service providers of the evacuation in order to ensure continuity of care
- Medical information and inventories should be brought and shared with health care providers
- Caregivers should be advocates, and champion those in their care
- Seek low-stimuli environments
- Address special dietary needs

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Suggestions for Shelter Operators

- Invite agencies and providers to visit the shelter and have contact information for them
- Identify caregivers and assist in keeping the individuals together
- Provide quiet spaces
- Respect routines
- Screen for health needs

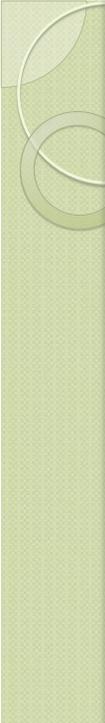
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Additional Suggestions:

- Identify an individual's health needs that may impact their ability to cope, or navigate an environment.
 - Encourage use of pre-existing coping skills.
 - Provide handouts when possible, so people do not have to rely on memory that may be limited.

 - And please, when appropriate, praise someone's efforts and bravery, and share a "thank you" to a caregiver. Getting efforts acknowledged means a great deal.
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Supporting the Caregiver...

Caregivers may have an overwhelming task in maintaining routines and providing support during a time of crisis.

Check in with the caregivers as well as the individual(s). If the caregiver is stressed and overwhelmed, the distress is likely to be communicated to a person who is already having a difficult time transitioning.
