



*Fostering Inclusion*

# **Emergency Preparedness for People with Disability (PwDs)**

# Introduction to GiftAble

GiftAble is a social enterprise which strives to create an ecosystem of like-minded individuals and collectively build a disabled-friendly society.

## A Holistic Approach:

We aim to empower people with disability (PwDs) across crucial aspects of their life, and have designed several services with this aim in mind.



# Emergency Preparedness for People with Disability (PwDs)

Emergency preparedness is a shared responsibility. This guide provides information on preparing an emergency plan for people with disability/special needs and for caregivers. During disasters and emergency situations people with disability (PwDs) may need additional assistance to obtain the services they need. Universal design, accessible environments, and easy-to-read information, are only some examples of the strategies that can be implemented to make sure that everyone is safe during an emergency.

People with disability (PwDs), their employers, and their family members should make plans to protect themselves in the event of an emergency. It is also important that first responders know how to evacuate people with disability (PwDs) quickly and safely. By taking a few simple steps today, you can become better prepared to face a range of emergencies.

## Hearing Impaired

People with hearing impairment cannot hear alarms and voice announcements that warn of danger and the need to evacuate. It is extremely important for people with hearing impairments to know what, if any, visual notification systems are in place. They also need to be aware of which emergencies will activate the visual notification system and which emergencies will not.

1. Flashing lights as part of the standard building alarm system.
2. Scrolling reader boards:  
In emergency situations, it can be flashed to attract attention and provide information about the type of emergency or situation.
3. Use of televisions in public and working areas with the closed caption.
4. Notifying through internal chat system or any other internal communication platform
5. Asking the concerned manager or lead to make a call and with a short message. The call vibration and message will make them aware of the situation.
6. Few Alerting devices can be worn like a pager. Others will alert you to whatever you program them for, including the phone ringing; wherever else you have transmitters located in your environment.
7. Write a note to tell the person of the situation, the nearest evacuation route, and where to meet outside. (Sample script: "FIRE! Go out on your right. NOW. Meet outside on the ground.")

8. Give visual instructions to advice about the safest route or direction by pointing toward exits or evacuation maps.
9. Simple floor plans of the building indicating the location and routes to usable circulation paths should be available. These plans should be given to visitors when they enter the building so they can find the exits in an emergency. Signs in alternative formats should be posted at the building entrances stating the availability of the floor plans and where to pick them up.
10. Providing a picture book of drill procedures. This will come in handy whenever there is any emergency evacuation and giving them a demo on the same with interpretation.
11. Building security personnel, including those staffing the entrances, employees should be trained in all accessible building evacuation systems and be able to direct anyone to the nearest usable path
12. Personal Emergency Evacuation Planning form to be filled by everyone during induction program. This will help the admin or HR to contact them during emergency.
13. Need of regular Fire Risk Assessments which should include comprehensive emergency evacuation plans for people with disability (PwDs) every quarter.

## **Visually Impaired/Low Vision/ Impaired Vision**

When planning an evacuation procedure for someone who is visually impaired, the most important thing to consider is that how they will safely and successfully exit the building. This means providing appropriate signage and orientation clues so that they are able to find and follow the escape route.

1. Fire Safety signs - People with impaired vision or color perception may experience difficulty in seeing or recognizing fire safety signs. Fire safety signs should be sufficiently large and well designed with a good, clear typeface and sited so that they can be seen easily and are readily distinguishable.
2. Additionally, fire safety signage featuring Braille or audible signs can be installed.
3. Escape routes in Tactile should be made available to all the Visually Impaired employees.
4. Familiar with escape routes – Employees with impaired vision should be familiarized with escape routes, especially those that are not in general use.
5. Providing Plastic Emergency Whistle to the employees with Impaired vision, to reach out to sighted employees in case of help.
6. In an evacuation of a building, a sighted person should lead other employees with impaired vision to safety. It is recommended that a sighted person should lead, inviting the other person to grasp their elbow, as this will enable the person being assisted to walk half a step behind and thereby gain information about

doors and steps etc. Ensure all the sighted employees have undergone training in Mobility.

7. Create and implement a buddy system
8. Once at a safe location, orient the individual to the location and inquire if further assistance is needed before leaving the location.
9. Visually impaired must be given demo on Fire Prevention methods, making them touch and feel the cylinder and explaining them on the usage.

## **Mobility limitations—Wheelchair user**

1. Introduce the 'Buddy System' where a friend, colleague or member of staff will accompany the person to a protected enclosure;
2. Fire exits which are wheelchair accessible should have clear signage so that they are easily identifiable by the wheelchair user.
3. Identify if a wheelchair user can reach the place without any support.
4. Individuals who use wheelchair may choose to evacuate themselves from the ground floor with minimal assistance
5. Ensure clear path of travel. If there is any obstruction in the path, it may be necessary to clear the path to the exit route.
6. Do not lift an individual in a wheelchair. There is too much risk involved for both the rescuer and the wheelchair user (it may result into back injury, loss of control of the wheelchair and person in it, tripping, falling).
7. Most wheelchairs are too heavy to carry downstairs. If the person wishes to be carried down the stairs without the wheelchair, consult with him or her on the best carry options.
8. Always ask the person having a disability what their needs and preferences are regarding:
  - a. Ways of being moved
  - b. Ask them if they have any special condition you should be aware of
  - c. Whether a seat cushion or pad should be brought along
  - d. Aftercare, if the individual will be removed from the wheelchair
9. Availability of Evacuation Chairs for non-ambulatory persons.
10. Ensure the evacuation team is aware of different types of Carry Techniques.

# People with Cognitive Disability

The first thing to consider while planning an evacuation procedure for someone with a cognitive disability is levels of perception and orientation. Cognitive disability is often characterized by decreased function of memory, attention and visual comprehension. This means many people with cognitive disability have trouble comprehending an emergency situation and, as such, the escape procedures which should be undertaken.

1. It is important to remember that many cognitive disabilities are difficult to control and manage, meaning nothing should be assumed and, instead, escape procedures should be made flexible.
2. People with Autism may be reluctant to take an unknown escape route in the event of an evacuation, meaning it is vital to understand the possible alternate route or change of direction.
3. All the escape routes are clearly marked and regularly practiced, with the help of DVD demonstration if necessary so that it becomes somewhat easy for them to understand the severity of the emergency
4. Creating a realistic drill as possible
5. Implement a buddy system.
6. During an emergency, panic is a normal emotion. Panic compounded by having the sensory abilities overwhelmed to a point where they cannot think cognitively may prevent autistic individuals from responding to direction because they do not understand what is being asked of them. In addition, when fearful, they may not be able to process language, so make them walk through evacuation routes a few times during safety drill
7. Having a visual alarm in places.
8. To reduce sensory overload anxiety and fear, training programs should be offered in short time spans and repeated.

## Deaf-Blind

1. Deaf-blind individuals need to be escorted during evacuations
2. They cannot rely fully on visual cues or audible cues. Instead, they rely more on tactile cues.
3. For people who are deaf-blind, draw an "X" on their back with your finger to let them know you can help them. The American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB) makes it a practice during their conventions to train deaf-blind attendees to recognize that if someone draws a big "X" on his or her back with a finger, it is an emergency. When this happens, they have to stop whatever they are doing and immediately go with a personal assistant to safety before asking questions
4. Deaf-blind individuals respond to communication signals through vibrations and tactile or signing with their hands. Those who are not familiar with sign language prefer words be written on their palms with a finger.