

STAY IN TOUCH

in Crisis Situations



The logo consists of a cluster of white dots of varying sizes arranged in a roughly circular pattern.
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locator

Connecting You to Community Services



STAY IN TOUCH IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

In the event of an emergency or disaster, how will you know that your older loved one is okay? Whether it is a parent, relative, friend or neighbor, it seems like you can never predict when an emergency situation will occur.

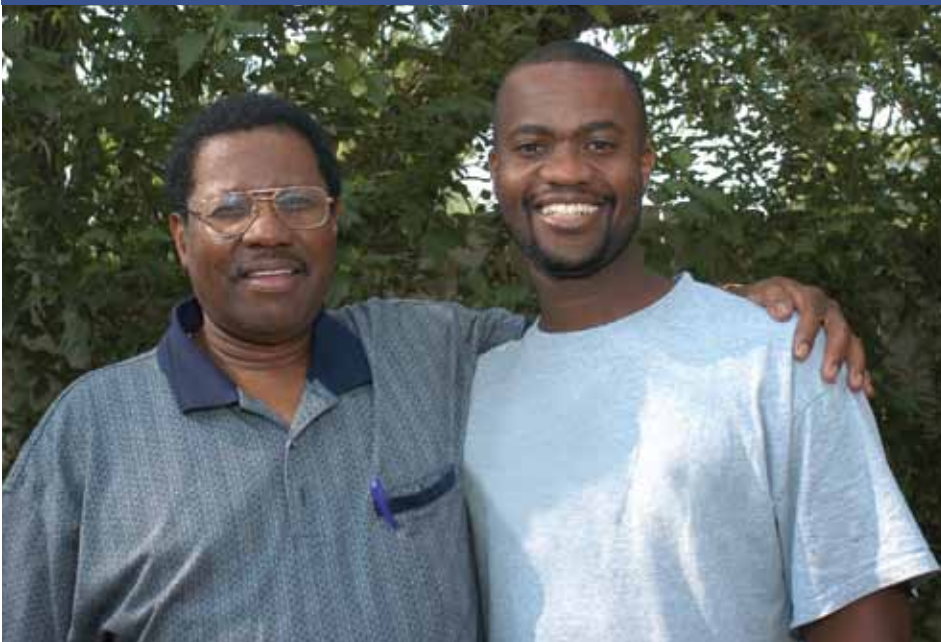
Hurricanes, blizzards and flooding have devastated many parts of the country, a reminder that no region is exempt from the possibility of a disaster. Beyond natural disasters, what about personal or other crises that requires an emergency response? How would you know your loved one is okay? When families get together it is important to talk about how to handle these types of critical events. By establishing a plan, families can **STAY IN TOUCH** with older loved ones and be prepared when a crisis situation occurs.

WHEN CREATING A STAY IN TOUCH PLAN KEEP IN MIND...

- Though many older adults live healthy, independent lives, during a crisis they may need some additional help.
- Age-related characteristics, such as delayed response time, reduced ability to see or hear and difficulty reading small print can affect an older person's perception and reaction.
- Some older adults may need instruction or assistance using new communication tools like cell phones, texting, social media or other means of keeping in touch.
- Physical or mental impairments can limit a person's ability to respond quickly or seek help in an emergency.
- Chronic health conditions, such as arthritis or diabetes, can make access to transportation or the availability of proper nutrition and medications particularly critical.
- Limited financial resources may impact a person's ability to maintain a safe environment or be able to adequately prepare for natural disasters or other emergency situations.
- Language and cultural differences may affect some older adults' ability to understand and communicate effectively in a crisis situation.

OVERVIEW OF THE “STAY IN TOUCH” PLAN

- I** dentify potential emergency situations and disasters
- N** ote what community resources are available that can help
- T** alk about individual circumstances that are of concern
- O** utline your plan in writing and share it with everyone involved
- U** pdate your plan as situations change
- C** ommunicate regularly and test your plan
- H** ave peace of mind knowing that you have a good plan in place



DEVELOPING YOUR IN STAY IN TOUCH PLAN

Whether you live far away or directly care for your loved one, a **STAY IN TOUCH** plan will aid in your communication efforts before, during and after a disaster or crisis situation. The following are some key points for you and your older loved one to consider when developing your **STAY IN TOUCH** plan:

Identify potential emergency situations and disasters that could occur in your older loved one's home and community

- Examine the physical condition of the residence to identify any safety hazards that may cause personal injury. Things to look for include: fire threats in faulty appliances and wiring; working condition smoke alarms and expiration dates of fire extinguishers; poor lighting and loose handrails in stairways; and the possible need for grab-bars in bathrooms and non-skid rugs to help prevent falls. Check outside as well for trees that could hit the house in a storm, walkway hazards, low hanging wires, etc.
- Investigate the safety and security of the neighborhood. Is crime a problem? How far away are the police and fire departments? Is there a neighborhood watch group?
- Contact the local emergency management agency such as the Red Cross and find out about potential disasters in the area, like earthquakes, wildfires, floods, hurricanes, blizzards, ice storms or other severe weather. Learn about the community's early warning and evacuation signals and determine the safest evacuation routes and location of nearby shelters.
- Determine back-up systems to use in the event of an electrical power outage – especially for any medical equipment that is being used. Also where to go when there is no heat in winter or air conditioning in the summer.

Note what community resources are available that can assist your efforts in establishing your **STAY IN TOUCH** plan

- Contact your Area Agency on Aging to connect to a range of services that can help older adults during emergency or crisis situations. The Eldercare Locator (800.677.1116 or www.eldercare.gov) can help you **STAY IN TOUCH** with the agency that serves your area. Services such as transportation and home-delivered meals can provide crucial assistance during disasters or in an emergency situation.
- Identify any informal community networks such as homeowners associations, neighborhood watch groups, faith organizations and/or senior centers that can assist. Find out about neighbors, friends and other acquaintances in the area.

Ask your loved one to identify individuals they would like to assist them. Establish a priority system among these contacts for various types of emergencies.

- Record information about your loved one's health, medications, medical professionals and emergency contacts.
- Contact your local emergency information management office to see if it maintains a listing of people with disabilities who would need to be contacted and assisted quickly in a disaster.
- Identify what resources are available to transport and shelter pets if needed.



Talk about individual circumstances that are concerns for you and your older loved one

- Ask your loved one what they need or are concerned about to avoid preconceived solutions. Have them provide input into the plan; don't impose it on them. Remember older persons have a lifetime of experience in managing adversity. Even in an emergency situation, they may also be a resource in helping others.
- Be considerate of any sensitivities or resistance your loved one might have to wanting help or involving others in their personal business. Discuss why a **STAY IN TOUCH** plan is important for both of you.
- Talk about the requirements for special needs. Hearing or visual loss could require special communication devices. Consider how medical equipment, like oxygen or an electric wheelchair would be moved in an emergency or disaster situation.
- Determine the capability and comfort level of communicating via cell phone, email, text message, etc. What is practical for your situation?
- Determine how your loved one can signal for help if needed. Consider the usefulness of an electronic Personal Emergency Response System (PERS), which can be worn and activated to summon help. Consider also location-tracking devices such as the On-Star system in automobiles or other wireless technology integrated into watches and cell phones.

Outline your **STAY IN TOUCH** plan in writing and share it with everyone involved

- Keep the plan simple and easy to use. All that might be needed is a page or two, typed in an easy to read format that can be posted for easy access.
- Reach an agreement on who will be a part of your **STAY IN TOUCH** team. In addition to family members, a neighbor, friend, clergy, doctor or local organization might be appropriate to include. List the names and contact information. Indicate each of their roles and the situation for which they should be contacted.
- Identify at least two key contact persons:
 1. A family contact for the older person in case of an emergency;
 2. The first person the family would contact to check on and make sure the older loved one is okay.
 3. In case of a major disaster situation, also identify a third person who lives in a different state who both parties can check in with.
- Obtain permission from each contact person to include him or her in the plan. As appropriate, these contacts should have access to pertinent personal documents about your older loved one, such as financial, legal, health care and long-term care information that might be needed in an emergency.
- Include notes about things to remember. This might include prescriptions or medical equipment instructions, arrangements for a pet, the local hospital to contact, and other such concerns.
- Make sure to distribute a copy of your **STAY IN TOUCH** plan to each contact on your team.

Udate your **STAY IN TOUCH** plan as situations change

- Review your **STAY IN TOUCH** plan with your team, as a group if possible, to insure that everyone is committed and understands their role.
- Realize that a success factor of any plan is maintaining current contact information. Encourage each team member to help by notifying each other of any changes.
- Take note of any physical or medical needs of your older loved one that might require a change in your plan. For instance, if your older loved one stops driving and requires transportation, then consider how this service can fit into your plan. Taking advantage of community services now can help in the event of an emergency situation later.
- Reassess your ability and that of your contacts to be available when needed. Personal or professional situations can change at any time.

CELL PHONE COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR A CRISIS SITUATION

- During an emergency many people are trying to use their cell phone. Try to limit non-emergency calls to “free up” network space and conserve battery power. Keep all calls as brief as possible.
- Try communicating via text message, email or social media to limit cell phone usage.
- Have extra charged batteries for your cell phone and/or car-charger adapters available.
- If call forwarding is available on your landline, utilize this service to forward calls to your cell phone.
- Maintain a list of emergency numbers in your cell phone.
- Subscribe to text alert services from local/state government or local media outlets.
- Conserve cell phone power by reducing the brightness of your screen, putting your phone in airplane mode and closing apps you are not using that draw power.

Communicate regularly and test your **STAY IN TOUCH** plan

- Check with your **STAY IN TOUCH** team regularly. Even an occasional surprise call might help determine strengths or weakness in your plan. For example, there could be a problem if you can only get an answering machine when you call one of your contacts, or there is a long delay in receiving a return call.
- Use gatherings as an opportunity to review your plan, and even share it with other friends and family members for their information. You might inspire someone else to follow your lead.
- Test elements of your plan occasionally. You can check that computers and phones are operating properly or walk through an evacuation drill with your loved one.

Have peace of mind knowing that you have a **STAY IN TOUCH** plan

- Stay calm. If an emergency situation arises, follow your plan.
- Don't panic should the plan not work exactly as anticipated. If one contact cannot be reached at the time needed, be confident that you have included other resources.
- Take an opportunity following an emergency situation to evaluate your plan. Be honest about what worked and what did not. Seek input from your loved one and your team. Change what needs to be changed, then update and redistribute your **STAY IN TOUCH** plan.



Connecting You to Community Services

800.677.1116

www.eldercare.gov

www.facebook.com/eldercarelocator

The Eldercare Locator is the first step to finding resources for older adults in any U.S. community and a free national service funded by a grant from the U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA). The Eldercare Locator is administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a).

EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

(Suggested possible contacts - list name, phone number and email address)

- Family Members
- Neighbors
- Friends
- Family or friends not in your area
- Area Agency on Aging
- Local Red Cross
- Doctors
- Other community organization



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Administration on Aging

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