

- **ASK HOW YOU CAN HELP BEFORE giving assistance.**
- **ASK ABOUT LIMITATIONS** that may affect the person's ability to evacuate. For example:
  - > **Are you able to run or walk rapidly without assistance?**
  - > **Do you use a mobility device, such as crutches, cane, a walker, etc.?**
  - > **Do you use a communication device, such as a communication book or electronic device?**

**SOME DISABILITIES ARE VISIBLE, SOME ARE NOT.**

## **ENCOUNTERING People with Disabilities in Emergency Situations**

### **RESOURCES**

#### ***Montgomery County Emergency Services (MCES)***

MCES is a private, not-for-profit, psychiatric hospital in West Norriton providing comprehensive crisis intervention, psychiatric evaluation, and suicide prevention. The staff works with the police and Emergency Management Services (EMS) to identify, evaluate, and provide recommendations of county resources regarding individuals demonstrating unusual or threatening behaviors.

**24/7 Crisis Line – 610-279-6100**

#### ***Access Services***

Access Services provides supports and services for individuals with special needs.

**Access Adult Mobile Crisis Line – 855-634-4673**

**Montgomery County Children's Support Hotline – 888-435-7414**

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#### **“Encountering People with Disabilities in Emergency Situations”**

Adapted from “Tips for First Responders” produced by Center For Development and Disability,  
University of New Mexico

## People Who Are **DEAF, HARD OF HEARING, OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED**

- **FLICK THE LIGHTS OR STOMP ON THE FLOOR** to get the person's attention, when entering, and **STATE THE EMERGENCY**.
- **OFFER YOUR ELBOW FOR SUPPORT** and then guide the person from the building. Maintain a dialogue describing the nearest exit and obstacles in their path, including stairs, doorways, narrow passages and ramps.

## People With **SERVICE ANIMALS**

- **DO NOT SEPARATE THE ANIMAL FROM THE PERSON**. Service animals **MUST** be evacuated with the person.
- However, **IF THE ANIMAL IS OUT OF CONTROL OR PRESENTS A THREAT** to people, it may be necessary to **REMOVE IT SEPARATELY**.

## People Who Use **WHEELCHAIRS**

- **ASK IF THEY NEED ASSISTANCE IN TRANSFERRING** from one type of chair to another. Depending on the person's upper body strength they may be able to transfer on their own or with minimal assistance.
- **ASK IF ANY WHEELCHAIR PARTS CAN BE REMOVED**, and be sure to take all parts with you and reassemble the chair as quickly as possible.
- **BEFORE LIFTING, ASK THE PERSON ABOUT THEIR ABILITY TO MOVE THEIR EXTREMITIES**. Movement may be limited by catheters, muscle spasms, leg bags, braces, or other durable medical equipment.

## People With **AUTISM, INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES, DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES, OR OTHER COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENTS**

- **APPROACH CALMLY. BE DIRECT**. Look at the person, speak calmly, use concrete phrases and repeat, if needed.
- **AVOID USING "YES/NO" QUESTIONS**, or phrases with double meaning like "Knock it off" or "Cut it out."
- **AVOID TOUCHING** the person. Use gestures to give directions.
- **REDUCE DISTRACTIONS** (lower radio volume, turn off sirens or flashing lights).
- **BE AWARE OF SOCIAL BEHAVIORS** often associated with people with these disabilities:
  - › **DO NOT INTERPRET ODD BEHAVIORS AS DEFIANCE OR DISRESPECT**. The person may look at you oddly, laugh inappropriately, or may not seem to take the situation seriously. These behaviors are not meant to be disrespectful or defiant.
  - › **BE ALERT FOR OUTBURSTS OR IMPULSIVE, UNEXPLAINED BEHAVIOR**. If possible, wait until the behavior subsides before having the person evacuate the premises.
  - › **REPEAT REASSURANCES**
    - » "You may feel afraid"
    - » "That's OK"
    - » "We're going to keep you safe"
    - » "Good job"
    - » "Keep up the good work"