

## Trauma Informed On the Go: Emergency preparedness kits



### Purpose

An emergency preparedness kit (or “go bag”) is useful for handling unexpected events. Beyond just survival, it can also help regulate your nervous system during stressful situations. During an emergency, our brain enters a stress-activated state, which can make clear thinking and problem-solving more difficult. Having a go bag with all your essential needs can remove some of the panic out of stressful situations, giving you a sense of direction when it matters most. A trauma informed approach to creating a go bag embraces proactive planning, reducing uncertainty, and play before an emergency event happens. It includes a combination of physical, social, and emotional needs when in a time of crisis.

### Who

You don’t need to make your go bag alone! Beyond what goes in the bag, your kit can also reflect your community: trusted friends, family, and neighbors who you may get support from or be supported by. By involving your community in the making of your go bag, you can share resources, lean into each other’s strengths, and create mutual emergency plans for within and outside your immediate geographic area. Creating a go bag together is also a great way to identify who might need immediate support in different emergency scenarios, strengthening your plan in uncertain times.

### When

A go bag is not a one-time preparation. We recommend checking and updating it at least once a year. This process isn’t just about refreshing supplies—it’s an opportunity to reflect on changes in your life and adjust your kit accordingly. Take this time to notice how your needs have shifted, what brings you comfort now, and how your family or group has grown. Kids might need bigger clothes, your favorite comfort snacks may have changed, or you may want to add new items that help with regulation and co-regulation. Treat it as a moment to pause, reflect, and prepare—not just for emergencies, but for the journey ahead.

### Expanding the “Bag”

Typically, when most people think of emergency preparedness kits, they think of a big event, like an earthquake, and a very thoroughly prepared backpack with a week’s supply of food. Your go bag may be used for an event like this, *and* putting your go bag in this context can be daunting.

But guess what? Your “go bag” doesn’t need to be a “bag”! It also doesn’t need to be used exclusively for a big emergency. Your go bag can come in all different shapes and sizes depending on your needs and capacity. It can also be used for any unexpected events - from an extreme weather event to a highway being shut down because a shipment of fish got spilled on the road!

# Trauma Informed Considerations For Assembling Your Go Bag

1

## Self-Assessment

Unexpected events can trigger stress responses that affect decision-making, emotional regulation, and physical needs.

By reflecting on how you typically react in unexpected situations, you can better prepare a go bag that is tailored to you in a crisis. For example:

- *If you tend to freeze or shut down...* include a written checklist of what to do first in an emergency.
- *If you experience heightened anxiety or panic...*include a small notepad with affirmations or reminders.
- *If you go into problem-solving mode and take charge...* pack a way to communicate—battery-powered radio, extra power bank, or community contact list.
- *If you struggle with sensory overload in chaotic situations...* include headphones to manage overwhelming sounds or a hat if bright light can feel too much.

2

## Fostering Regulation & Co-Regulation

Because stress activation can happen during unexpected events, consider including items in your go bag that support regulation and co-regulation. For example:

- A shareable snack
- A large coat or blanket
- A game multiple people can play
- A list of people you trust and may need to support

3

## The Simple Things

Your go bag doesn't need to be a high-tech or expensive emergency kit—prepare based on your capacity and needs. You can prepare for however long you can — whether it's a few hours or several days. The act of exploring what and who might be available during an unexpected event is preparedness in itself. Some tips to consider:

- Consider securing important items like medications in a locked medical bag.
- You can store essential documents on an encrypted USB drive to protect privacy and ensure access when needed. You can also store essential documents in a waterproof bag in your freezer, an identifiable and fortified household item if an event were to happen in the home.
- You can store your go bag anywhere and have more than one. For example, a small kit in a school backpack, the trunk of your car, under your desk at work.

4

## Centering Community & Curiosity

Approaching the process of assembling your go bag with curiosity and community can transform it from a fear-driven task into an empowering experience. This shift reinforces a sense of agency, preparedness, and control. Bringing in your community into assembling your bag can help identify physical, social, and emotional resources available to you during an unexpected event along with common risks. Consider including:

- A community resource map
- Ritual around growth and change
- A letter to yourself and your community rewritten when you update your go bag
- Taking your go bag camping with friends and family to see what might be missing

## Physical

What weather should I be prepared for?

If I cannot carry certain essential items, like water, where are the closest access areas?

Where do I store my bag, in my home, in my vehicle, or at work?

Start your contact list including: phone numbers, addresses and websites. Include listing your personal contact and those you would want to reach.

Learn, Plan, & Train with NOAA (National Weather Service Forecast)  
[www.nws.noaa.gov](http://www.nws.noaa.gov)

Oregon Emergency Management  
[www.oregon.gov/OMD/OEM/index.shtm](http://www.oregon.gov/OMD/OEM/index.shtm)

## Social

Do the contents consider the people in my life I trust?

Does it provide multiple ways to communicate and stay connected with my community during an emergency?

How will I notify people in my life that I trust that I am safe or in need?

Make a plan with:  
<https://www.ready.gov/plan>

Make a kit:  
<https://www.ready.gov/kit>

Learn about different hazards with Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries  
[www.oregontsunami.org](http://www.oregontsunami.org)

Learn about different wildfire events with Watch Duty  
<https://app.watchduty.org/>

## Emotional

Does this go-bag bring me a sense of comfort?

Was it made in collaboration with the people I trust?

Are there items included that I know can be calming and entertaining?

Sign up for weather alerts with the National Weather Service  
<https://www.weather.gov/>

