

## **Safety Considerations for Youth with Special Health Care Needs**

Youth with special health care needs (YSHCN) may have unique needs for safety and injury prevention. Parents must consider the developmental level and physical capabilities of the teen. To ensure a safe environment, parents of YSHCN may need alternative safety equipment. This could include specially-designed car safety seats. It might be extra door locks to protect adolescents who may wander at night, such as children with autism.

Things to do as a Healthcare Provider:

- Provide information or resources to improve the quality of life for families. For example, a family may not be able to travel together without special equipment.<sup>1</sup>
- Increase awareness of possible challenges in creating a safe environment for YSHCN.
- Guide parents toward local and national resources.

Many YSHCN have safety issues as they enter a new school and begin to deal with the community at large. They often are vulnerable and might get bullied or abused. They may be at risk of maltreatment. This could include child neglect and physical or sexual abuse. A YSHCN's mental or physical condition may impede their ability to defend themselves.

- Discuss appropriate caregiving.
- Highlight risks for abuse.
- Discuss the potential of bullying.
- Encourage parents to watch for risks at home, in the community, and at school to protect their child.

Planning for YSHCN requires understanding and anticipating the child's needs. Parents should choose roles for family members. They should know about community resources to ensure safety. Parents of YSHCN should develop a disaster plan.<sup>2</sup> It can include:

- Lists of medications.
- Food and supply needs.
- Equipment.
- Contact information for health care professionals on the care team.

The plan also can include the use of an Emergency Information Form.<sup>3</sup> It should have advanced registrations for special needs shelters and evacuation plans.

Adapted from Bright Futures

([https://brightfutures.aap.org/Bright%20Futures%20Documents/BF4\\_Safety.pdf](https://brightfutures.aap.org/Bright%20Futures%20Documents/BF4_Safety.pdf))

1. Automotive Safety Program: Special Needs Transportation. Prevention.org Web site. <https://preventinjury.pediatrics.iu.edu/special-needs/>. Accessed June, 2019

2. DSHS Maternal and Child Health CSHCN web site.  
<https://www.dshs.texas.gov/mch/CSHCN/EmergencyPrep.aspx> Accessed June, 2019
3. Emergency Information Form for Children with Special Health Care Needs. DSHS Maternal and Child Health CSHCN Web site. <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/mch/CSHCN/EmergencyPrep.aspx>. Accessed June, 2019