

AUTISM & WANDERING

In 2008, Danish researchers found that the mortality rate among the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) population is twice as high as the general population. In 2001, a California research team found that elevated death rates among those with ASD were in large part attributed to drowning.

Drowning often occurs as a result of wandering off. **Drowning, along with prolonged exposure and other factors, remain among the top causes of death within the autism population.** Although there is no known data that recognizes whether deaths associated with wandering are on the rise within the autism population, anecdotal reports suggest an increase.

There are various reasons someone with ASD may wander. Many parents report their child gravitates towards water, so nearby lakes, ponds and creeks may continue to be a desired destination. Too, someone with ASD is likely aware when attention has shifted away from them and will take the opportunity to slip out quickly in order to reach a desired area or item of interest.

Family gatherings or other events may give a false impression of “all eyes on” someone with ASD. However, heavy distractions can present opportunities to leave unnoticed. Visiting relatives or episodes of distress also may increase the risk for wandering. This also holds true in warmer months when persons with ASD are more likely to play outside or attend summer or day camps.

WANDERING CAN OCCUR ANYWHERE AT ANYTIME. THE FIRST TIME IS OFTEN THE WORST TIME.

Join Autism Wandering Prevention on Facebook



CAREGIVER RESOURCES

AWAARE COLLABORATION

awaare.org

NAA/UA AUTISM SAFETY TOOLKIT

nationalautismassociation.org/safetytoolkit

AUTISM SPEAKS AUTISM SAFETY PROJECT

autismsafetyproject.org

ASA SAFE & SOUND SAFETY INITIATIVE

autism-society.org

CHILD SAFETY PRODUCTS

mypreciouskid.com

SelectAutismMerchandise.com

tattooswithapurpose.com

SERVICE DOGS

autismservicedogsofamerica.com

4pawsforability.org

TRACKING SYSTEMS & MEDICAL DEVICES

Project Lifesaver: projectlifesaver.org

LoJack SafetyNet: lojacksafetynet.com

EmFinders: emfinders.com

Caretrak Systems: caretrak.com

Alzheimer's Comfort Zone: alz.org/comfortzone

Medicalert: medicalert.com

A Child is Missing: achildismissing.org

FOR FIRST RESPONDERS & CAREGIVERS

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children:

missingkids.com | 1-800-THE-LOST

Autism Risk Management:

autismriskmanagement.com

The Autism & Law Enforcement Education Coalition:

sncarc.org/alec.htm

The Law Enforcement Awareness Network

leanonus.org

Autism Alliance for Local Emergency Responder

Training: AutismAlert.org

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS:

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Supported By: Age of Autism | Autism One | Autism Research Institute | Autism Speaks | Doug Flutie Jr.

Foundation for Autism | HollyRod Foundation |

National Autism Association | Safeminds | Talk About Curing Autism



prevention | safety tips | resources

SECURE YOUR HOME

Consider contacting a professional locksmith, security company or home improvement professional to promote safety and prevention in your home. **You may find it is necessary to prevent your loved one from slipping away unnoticed by:**

- ✓ Installing secure dead bolt locks that require keys on both sides.
- ✓ Installing a home security alarm system.
- ✓ Installing inexpensive battery-operated alarms on doors and windows to alert you when opened (available at stores like Walmart and Radio Shack).
- ✓ Placing hook and eye locks on all doors, above your child's reach.
- ✓ Fencing your yard.
- ✓ Adhering printable STOP SIGNS to doors, windows and other exits, such as gates.

CONSIDER A TRACKING DEVICE

Check with local law enforcement for Project Lifesaver or LoJack SafetyNet services. These tracking devices are worn on the wrist or ankle and locate the individual through radio frequency. Various GPS tracking systems are also available. See the **RESOURCES** section within this pamphlet for more information.

CONSIDER AN ID BRACELET

Medical ID bracelets will include your name, telephone number and other important information. They may also state that your child has autism and is non-verbal if applicable. If your child will not wear a bracelet or necklace, consider a temporary tattoo with your contact information. See the **RESOURCES** section within this pamphlet for more information.

TEACH YOUR CHILD TO SWIM

Swimming lessons for children with special needs are available at many YMCA locations. The final lesson should be with clothes on. **REMEMBER:**

- ✓ Teaching your child how to swim DOES NOT mean your child is safe in water.
- ✓ If you own a pool, fence your pool. Use gates that self-close and self-latch higher than your children's reach.
- ✓ Remove all toys or items of interest from the pool when not in use.
- ✓ Neighbors with pools should be made aware of these safety precautions and your child's tendency to wander.

The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend swimming classes as the primary means of drowning prevention. Constant, careful supervision and barriers such as pool fencing are necessary even when children have completed swimming classes. All families are encouraged to seek training in swimming, lifesaving, first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

ALERT YOUR NEIGHBORS

It is recommended that caregivers plan a brief visit with neighbors to introduce their loved one or provide a photograph. **Knowing your neighbors can help reduce the risks associated with wandering.**

- ✓ Give your neighbor a simple handout with your name, address, and phone number.
- ✓ Ask them to call you immediately if they see your child outside the home.
- ✓ Decide what other information to present to neighbors.
- ✓ Does your child have a fear of cars and animals or is he/she drawn to them?
- ✓ Does your child gravitate towards pools or nearby ponds or creeks?
- ✓ Does he/she respond to their name or would a stranger think they are deaf?
- ✓ Are there sensory issues or meltdown triggers your neighbors should know about?

ALERT FIRST RESPONDERS

Providing first responders with key information before an incident occurs may improve response. **Informational handouts should include all pertinent information, and be copied and carried with caregivers at all times.** Circulate the handout to family, neighbors, friends and co-workers, as well as first responders.

- ✓ Name of child or adult, current photograph and physical description including any scars or other identifying marks
- ✓ Identify your child's favorite song, toy or character
- ✓ Names, home, cell and pager phone numbers and addresses of parents, other caregivers and emergency contact persons
- ✓ Sensory, medical, or dietary issues and requirements
- ✓ Favorite attractions and locations where the person may be found
- ✓ Likes, dislikes, fears, triggers, and de-escalation techniques
- ✓ Method of communication: note if nonverbal, uses sign language, picture boards, or written words
- ✓ ID wear, jewelry, tags on clothes
- ✓ Map and address guide to nearby properties with water sources and dangerous locations highlighted

Additional tips can be found at autismriskmanagement.com (above information courtesy of Dennis Debbaudt)

For a generic form that can be used by any caregiver, regardless of city or state, visit AWAARE.org.