

AUTISM AFFECTS 1 OUT OF EVERY 68 CHILDREN.

Almost half of children with autism wander away from safe settings.



education









awareness



safety resources

BIG RED SAFETY

TEACHER TOOLKIT

NATIONAL AUTISM ASSOCIATION

Part of the Big Red Safety Box Program brought to you by the National Autism Association. Supported by American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, Alex and Ani, and Jasco Products Company.



Dear Educator;

If you are receiving this ***Big Red Safety Teacher Toolkit,*** it means you are an educator of one or more students diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who may be prone to wandering off from a safe environment, and whose diagnosis may interfere with their ability to recognize danger and/or stay safe.

Wandering, elopement, "running" or bolting behaviors among those within our community present unique safety risks, and create extraordinary worry and stress among caregivers and educators. **Drowning fatalities following wandering incidents remain a leading cause of death among those with ASD.**

The National Autism Association is committed to providing direct aid and support to those at risk. As such, we are pleased to provide you with this teacher toolkit. In this toolkit, you will find the following tools and resources:

- *Door Alarms*
- *Stop Sign Prompts*
- *This booklet that includes an Educator Checklist, Fact Sheets, Additional Stop Sign Prompts, Social Story, Calming Cards, Student Profile Sheet for Educators, and Caregiver Resources Sheet*

Regardless of any tools your school may have in place, if your students' diagnoses interfere with their ability to recognize danger or stay safe, it is critical that you maintain close supervision and security within the school environment.

We hope you'll find this teacher toolkit helpful. For more information on wandering prevention, please visit awaare.org.

Sincerely,

The National Autism Association

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ABOUT AUTISM & WANDERING

Similar to wandering behaviors in seniors with dementia or Alzheimer's, children and adults with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are prone to wandering away from a safe environment.

Children with autism typically wander or bolt from a safe setting to get to something of interest, such as water, the park, or train tracks – or to get away from something, such as loud noises, commotion, demands, or bright lights.

Dangers associated with wandering include drowning, getting struck by a vehicle, falling from a high place, dehydration, hyperthermia, abduction, victimization and assault.

Because children with autism are challenged in areas of language and cognitive function, it can be difficult to teach them about dangers and ways to stay safe.

Wandering may also be also referred to as: Elopement; Bolting; Running (i.e. "My student is a runner.")

WANDERING TYPES

- **Goal-directed wandering:** wandering with the purpose of getting to something (water, train tracks, park, an item or place of obsession, etc.)
- **Bolting/Fleeing:** the act of suddenly running or bolting, usually to quickly get away from something, a negative reaction to an event, anxiety, fear, excitement, stress or uncomfortable stimuli.
- **Other:** wandering due to disorientation, boredom, transition or confusion; or individual simply becomes lost.

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AUTISM & WANDERING STATISTICS

- Roughly half, or 49%, of children with an ASD attempt to elope from a safe environment
- 42% of wandering cases involving a child with autism 9 and younger have ended in death
- 29% of wandering happens from a classroom or school
- More than one third of ASD children who wander/elope are never or rarely able to communicate their name, address, or phone number
- Two in three parents of elopers reported their missing children had a "close call" with a traffic injury
- 32% of parents reported a "close call" with a possible drowning
- Wandering was ranked among the most stressful ASD behaviors by 58% of parents of elopers
- 62% of families of children who elope were prevented from attending/enjoying activities outside the home due to fear of wandering
- 40% of parents had suffered sleep disruption due to fear of elopement
- Half of families with elopers report they had never received advice or guidance about elopement from a professional

Source: Pediatrics: Elopement and Wandering (2012)

Source: National Autism Association, Lethal Outcomes in ASD Wandering (2012)

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AUTISM WANDERING PREVENTION & RESPONSE: Educator Checklist Tool

IMPORTANT FACTS

- Nearly half of children with autism engage in wandering behavior
- Increased risks are associated with autism severity
- Accidental drowning accounts for approximately 90% of lethal outcomes

TOOL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

☑ **Door & Window Chimes**: very inexpensive & effective. Available through NAA or most Walmart Stores.
☑ **Simple Stop Signs:** teachers/aides can print and adhere stop signs to doors and windows as a visual prompt.
☑ **Social Stories:** create social stories that teach students with autism to stay with a trusted adult.
☑ **Color-coded Prompts:** use specific objects or tools to demonstrate when it's outside time versus inside time.
☑ **Student Profile Sheet:** ask parents to download and fill out a student profile sheet that contains important contact information, and information about fleeing triggers, and favorite attractions. (available at awaare.org)

STEPS TO PREVENT ASD WANDERING

☑ Ensure close adult supervision of any student with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).
☑ Ensure proper architectural barriers around school grounds are in place.
☑ For any at-risk child, conduct a ***Functional Behavioral Assessment*** to help pinpoint underlying reasons for wandering/bolting.
☑ Develop a ***Behavioral Intervention Plan*** to address underlying reasons.
☑ Ensure all school staff is familiar with the risks of ASD wandering and are trained to respond properly in the event of a wandering emergency.
☑ Ensure school staff follows proper protocol in keeping gates and doors closed and school grounds secure.
☑ Be aware, and ensure school staff is aware, of any known triggers that could prompt fleeing in any child (loud noises, meltdowns, etc.) and work to prevent and appropriately respond to these episodes in a manner that ensures the child's safety.
☑ For a student who demonstrates bolting behaviors due to fear or stress, etc., assign a common area "safe place" they can run to, such as the library, so they stay within the building and can be easily found.
☑ Assign a 1:1 aide to students with autism who are especially prone to wandering.
☑ Ensure all emergency response protocols are up to date and enforced.
☑ Because students are often shifted to different classrooms for therapy sessions, it's important that those prone to wandering are never left unattended.

STEPS TO RESPOND TO ASD WANDERING

☑ Always call 911 immediately if a student is missing.
☑ Always search areas that pose the highest threat first, such as nearby water and busy streets.
☑ Immediately notify parents of wandering incidents, even if the incident seems small or insignificant.
☑ Thoroughly assess any wandering incident and put measures in place to prevent re-occurrence.

NATIONAL AUTISM ASSOCIATION

SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENT PROFILE FOR EDUCATORS

PLACE STUDENT'S PHOTO HERE

STUDENT'S NAME & AGE

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

MEDICAL CONDITION(S)/ALLERGIES/DIETARY RESTRICTIONS

EMERGENCY CONTACT

DO'S & DONT'S

SIGNS OF ESCALATION

STUDENT'S TRACKING FREQUENCY (IF APPLICABLE)

LIKES/ATTRACTIONS/FAVORITE THINGS

TRIGGERS/DISLIKES/FEARS

IF LOST, MAY LIKELY BE FOUND AT

BEST CALMING METHODS

NOTE: immediately notify parent or caregiver of a wandering incident, even if it seems small or insignificant. If the student is ever missing, CALL 911 and search areas that pose the highest threat first, such as nearby water sources and traffic. Avoid the following: non-emergency restraint, prone or supine restraints, and seclusion practices as these can cause new behaviors or worsen existing behaviors.

ADDITIONAL INFO

1



HAPPY!

Everything's Okay

2



WORRIED

First I can try:

- Take 5 deep breaths
- Sing a song in my head
- Squeeze a squishy ball
- Put my worry in my pocket
- Tell my teacher why I am worried

Then I can try to finish my work!

3



SAD

First I can try:

- Take 5 deep breaths
- Sing a song in my head
- Squeeze a squishy ball
- Put my sadness in my pocket!
- Do a little drawing
- Ask for a break
-Tell my teacher why I am sad

Then I can try to finish my work!

4



ANGRY

First I can try:

- Take 10 deep breaths
- Sing a song in my head
- Squeeze a squishy ball
- Put my anger in my pocket!
- Do a little drawing
- Ask for a break
- Tell my teacher why I am angry

Then I can try to finish my work!

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My name is _____

This is my classroom.

Picture of classroom

I learn in my classroom with my teacher & classmates.

Picture of student with teacher and classmates

It's important for me to stay in my classroom.

Picture of student in classroom.

Staying in my classroom will keep me safe.

My teacher will be happy that I am safe.

Picture of teacher.

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STOP SIGN PROMPTS

Print, cut, adhere to doors and windows. For additional laminated Stop Signs with adhesives, visit nationalautism.org





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PARENT/CAREGIVER RESOURCE SHEET

Please note: if you have a student who is at risk of wandering away from home, you may supply caregivers with a copy of this resource sheet. Caregivers may also apply for a free NAA Big Red Safety Box. Simply have them contact us at naa@nationalautism.org.

GENERAL RESOURCES

National Autism Association: **nationalautism.org**
AWAARE Collaboration: **awaare.org**
Autism Safety Coalition: **autismsafetycoalition.org**

SWIMMING LESSONS

YMCA Listing **nationalautism.org**
Super Swimmers **superswimmersfoundation.org**

CHILD SAFETY PRODUCTS

NAA's Big Red Safety Shop: **nationalautism.org**

TRACKING SYSTEMS & ID PRODUCTS

Project Lifesaver **projectlifesaver.org**
LoJack SafetyNet **lojacksafetynet.com**
Caretrak Systems: **caretrak.com**
Alzheimer's Comfort Zone: **alz.org**
Road ID **roadid.com**

SERVICE DOGS

Blessings Unleashed **blessingsunleashed.org**
4 Paws for Ability **4pawsforability.org**

FOR FIRST RESPONDERS & CAREGIVERS

Reverse 911 **achildismissing.org**
National Center For Missing And Exploited Children **missingkids.com** 1-800-THE-LOST

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A MULTI-LAYERED APPROACH IS BEST

A multi-layered approach to prevent, and respond to, wandering emergencies is necessary to achieve optimal safety for your student. This includes making every attempt to educate your student on self-help skills, making every attempt to educate them about safety and potential dangers by using social stories, language, prompts, or any communication mechanism best suited for their individual needs. It's important that educators work to understand what is causing, or contributing to, the wandering or bolting behaviors so that any triggers may be addressed or eliminated.

The most important thing is that at-risk students are learning to keep themselves safe, while proper safeguards and adult supervision are also in place to help ensure their safety.

No matter what prevention strategies are put into place, educators should never allow themselves to feel a false sense of security. For more information, please visit awaare.org.

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BIG RED SAFETY TEACHER TOOLKIT

NATIONAL AUTISM ASSOCIATION

ABOUT THIS TEACHER TOOLKIT

This Big Red Safety Toolkit is part of NAA's Big Red Safety Box Program, dedicated to wandering prevention and bringing children and adults with autism home safely. Other Big Red Safety initiatives include:

- *The Big Red Safety Box*
- *The Big Safety Booth*
- *The Big Red Safety Shop*
- *The Big Red Safety Toolkit for Caregivers*
- *The Big Red Safety Toolkit for First Responders*



NAA's Big Red Safety Box initiative ships critical resources to at-risk children and adults with autism. The initiative also helps provide employment for adults with autism and other disabilities.

For more information on autism-related wandering, please visit awaare.org. For specific questions, please contact the National Autism Association at 877-622-2884.

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