

## AUTISM & WANDERING

According to data from a 2011 study conducted by the Kennedy Krieger Institute, **almost half of all children with autism wander.**

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 times it is to get **to something** (water, park, train tracks, etc.) or to get **away from something** (noise, bright lights, commotion, etc.). Someone with ASD is likely aware when attention has shifted away from them and may 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.



Join Autism & Safety:  
wandering prevention  
on facebook



## CAREGIVER RESOURCES

### NATIONAL AUTISM ASSOCIATION

[nationalautism.org](http://nationalautism.org)

### AWAARE COLLABORATION

[awaare.org](http://awaare.org)

### AUTISM SPEAKS AUTISM SAFETY PROJECT

[autismsafetyproject.org](http://autismsafetyproject.org)

### ASA SAFE & SOUND SAFETY INITIATIVE

[autism-society.org](http://autism-society.org)

### IDs & SAFETY PRODUCTS

Autism Safety Shop: [nationalautism.org](http://nationalautism.org)

Medicalert: [medicalert.org](http://medicalert.org)

Road ID @ [roadid.com](http://roadid.com)

[tattooswithapurpose.com](http://tattooswithapurpose.com)

### SERVICE DOGS

[blessingsunleashed.org](http://blessingsunleashed.org)

[4pawsforability.org](http://4pawsforability.org)

### PERSONAL LOCATING & MEDICAL DEVICES

Project Lifesaver: [projectlifesaver.org](http://projectlifesaver.org)

LoJack SafetyNet: [lojacksafetynet.com](http://lojacksafetynet.com)

Caretrak Systems: [caretrak.com](http://caretrak.com)

Alzheimer's Comfort Zone: [alz.org/comfortzone](http://alz.org/comfortzone)

A Child is Missing: [achildissing.org](http://achildissing.org)

### FOR FIRST RESPONDERS & CAREGIVERS

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children:

[missingkids.com](http://missingkids.com) | 1-800-THE-LOST

Autism Risk Management:

[autismriskmanagement.com](http://autismriskmanagement.com)

The Autism & Law Enforcement Education Coalition:

[sncarc.org/alec-first-responder-training.html](http://sncarc.org/alec-first-responder-training.html)

The Law Enforcement Awareness Network

[leanonus.org](http://leanonus.org)

Autism Alliance for Local Emergency Responder

Training: [AutismAlert.org](http://AutismAlert.org)

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

# AUTISM & SAFETY

NATIONAL AUTISM ASSOCIATION SAFETY INITIATIVE

wandering

prevention & safety information

## 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.
- ✓ 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 PERSONAL LOCATING DEVICE

Check with local law enforcement for Project Lifesaver or LoJack SafetyNet services. These personal locating devices are worn on the wrist or ankle and locate the individual through radio frequency. Various GPS locating 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 shoe ID or 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 TRUSTED 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
- ✓ Nearby water sources and favorite attractions/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

The above information is courtesy of Dennis Debbaudt.

For more information, visit National Autism Association's Safety Site at [autismsafety.org](http://autismsafety.org)