



Safety on the Spectrum™

# Safety Toolkit Resources



800.328.8476 | [AutismSociety.org](https://www.AutismSociety.org)

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# What is Autism?

The Connection Is You™



## Autism Spectrum Disorder

**Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**, is a complex, lifelong developmental condition that typically appears during early childhood and can impact a person's **social skills**, **communication**, **relationships**, and **self-regulation**. The Autism experience is different for everyone. It is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is often referred to as a "spectrum condition" that affects people differently and to varying degrees.

While there is currently no known single cause of Autism, early diagnosis helps a person receive resources that can support the choices and opportunities needed to live fully.



Relationships



Communication



Self-Regulation



Social Skills

## Autism Signs & Characteristics

- Repetitive behaviors, movements, or phrases
- Lack of response to normal stimuli (i.e. his/her name, visual cues)
- Atypical verbal communication or non-speaking
- Difficulty understanding or expressing feelings
- Avoiding eye contact

## Facts & Statistics

**Over 7 million individuals in the United States** are on the Autism spectrum; Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability in the U.S.

**1 in 36 children are diagnosed with Autism.** Since 2000, the Autism prevalence rate has been consistently increasing from one in 150 to now one in 36.



**31% of children with ASD have an intellectual disability**, 25% are in the borderline range, and 44% have average to above-average IQ scores.

Over the next decade, an estimated **700k to 1.1 million+ Autistic teens** will enter adulthood and age out of school-based services.



**Vaccines do not cause Autism.**

**Boys are 4x more likely** than girls to be diagnosed with Autism.

**The cost of caring for Autistic Americans is estimated to rise to \$460+ billion by 2025** in the absence of more-effective interventions and supports. An estimated \$175 to \$196 billion of these costs are for adult services.



## To Whom It May Concern:

\_\_\_\_\_ NAME \_\_\_\_\_ has a history of wandering, meaning they may leave a safe area or wander away from a responsible caregiver. \_\_\_\_\_ NAME \_\_\_\_\_ may wander for a variety of reasons which are often goal-directed (i.e. communicate or obtain a want/need, seek or avoid sensory input). It is reported that at least 49% of people with Autism will wander at least once in their lifetime. Wandering poses a serious risk of injury or death – especially related to traffic and water-related incidents. Because of these risks, safety precautions and preventative supports are important to be addressed by \_\_\_\_\_ NAME \_\_\_\_\_'s IEP and school team.

Leaving \_\_\_\_\_ NAME \_\_\_\_\_ unattended puts them at an increased risk for wandering and potentially dangerous circumstances. To keep \_\_\_\_\_ NAME \_\_\_\_\_ safe while under your instructional care, there must be appropriate supports in place.

### Some safety considerations for team discussion and planning:

#### 1. Historical wandering scenarios:

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#### 2. Known patterns of wandering:

- Why? \_\_\_\_\_
- When? \_\_\_\_\_
- Where? \_\_\_\_\_
- Why, if known? \_\_\_\_\_

#### 3. Precipitating factors (things that may happen immediately before wandering, potentially triggering wandering or signaling that wandering may soon occur):

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4. What has been known to increase likelihood of wandering?

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5. What has been effective in decreasing likelihood of wandering?

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6. What is the school's protocol for wandering events?

a. When wandering occurs from a school-environment

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b. When wandering occurs during an off-site event (ex: field trip)

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7. What level of adult supervision is required to keep \_\_\_\_\_ NAME safe?

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8. What additional layers of protection are needed? (ex: visuals, direct instruction, locked doors, alarms, physical barriers)

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Signed,

Parent/Guardian

# Emergency Identification Sheet

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

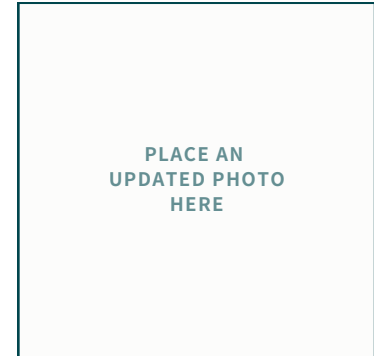
## Personal Identifying Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Physical Description: i.e., 5'10, 150 lbs., brown hair, green eyes, etc.

Identifying marks or scars:

Do they wear a locative device? ID bracelets? If so, provide some information



## Emergency Contacts

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## Medical Information

Medical needs or medications: \_\_\_\_\_

Allergies or dietary restrictions: \_\_\_\_\_

## Other Helpful Considerations

Identify locations the individual is likely to go: Be specific: water/pool/lake/ocean, movies, gas station, etc.

What does escalation look like? Crying, running, rocking, aggression, etc.

De-escalation techniques: What has helped in the past?

Best way to approach individual:

Identify likes: Favorite toys, characters, songs, tv shows, etc.

Identify dislikes/triggers: Things to avoid, fears, sensitivities; noises, lights, helicopters, etc.

Preferred Communication: Speaking/non speaking, visuals, sign language

A safe word or any identifier to indicate to the individual that you are a safe person:

# Wandering Letter

Dear \_\_\_\_\_, RECIPIENT

Our \_\_\_\_\_ is Autistic. Their name is \_\_\_\_\_ NAME.

As of today, \_\_\_\_\_ DATE, they are \_\_\_\_\_ AGE years old and are \_\_\_\_\_ INCHES in height and weigh \_\_\_\_\_ LBS.

**Individuals with Autism can wander from known locations and from the most supervised of settings.**

\_\_\_\_\_ NAME has a tendency to wander, elope or bolt from environments that you and I might perceive as safe. Wandering, like all behavior, is a form of communication, often communicating wants or needs.

Individuals who wander are likely to be found in/ or around water or in/or around traffic. Both environments are dangerous for individuals with Autism.

\_\_\_\_\_ NAME is prone to wandering and therefore requires careful supervision.

If you see \_\_\_\_\_ NAME unsupervised, please stay with them and immediately call me \_\_\_\_\_ NAME (contact information is below).

In addition, please **call 911** and tell them that you have found \_\_\_\_\_ NAME.

Here is some additional information about \_\_\_\_\_ NAME and ways you can help support them:

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**Thank you.**

## My Contact Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to Autistic Individual: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Autistic Individual

Name/Nickname: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Height: \_\_\_\_\_

Weight: \_\_\_\_\_

Photo (optional)

## Wandering History Log

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Weather: \_\_\_\_\_

Responsible person: \_\_\_\_\_

Where did they wander from? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did they wander to? \_\_\_\_\_

Events or behavior leading up to the wandering:

\_\_\_\_\_

Presumed function of wandering (seeking, avoiding, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_

When were they found? \_\_\_\_\_

Where were they found? \_\_\_\_\_

Who found them? \_\_\_\_\_

**Medical needs:** (Were they up to date on medication, on a new medication, sick, noticeable behavior difference prior to wandering?)

\_\_\_\_\_

Was law enforcement involved?  Yes  No Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Was medical care required?  Yes  No Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Was social services involved?  Yes  No Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

## Wandering History Log

Is locative technology used, if so, what device?

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Was locative technology part of finding your loved one?

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In your own words, describe what happened:

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### NOTES:



# Wandering Prevention Checklist

- Communication**

Teach and practice communication skills to express needs, wants, or discomfort.
- Community Awareness**

Inform neighbors and local businesses about the individual's tendencies and share emergency contact information.
- Emergency Preparedness**

Create an emergency plan with neighbors, local law enforcement, and first responders. Provide them with relevant information about the individual.
- Environmental Modifications**

Make modifications to the home environment to reduce potential hazards. Remove or secure items that may be dangerous to the individual.
- Identification and Documentation**

Ensure the individual carries identification with contact information. Keep recent photographs and medical information accessible.
- Monitoring Technology**

Explore wearable GPS devices, tracking apps, or monitoring systems to keep track of the individual's location.
- Physical Exercise**

Incorporate regular physical activities to channel energy and reduce restlessness.
- Professional Guidance**

Consult with professionals, such as behavioral therapists or autism specialists, for personalized strategies and support.
- Regular Check-ins**

Regularly check on the individual, especially during potentially challenging times, to ensure their well-being.
- Routine and Predictability**

Establish and maintain consistent daily routines. Predictability can reduce anxiety and the likelihood of wandering.
- Safety Education**

Educate the individual about safety rules and the dangers of wandering. Use visual aids and social stories to reinforce concepts.
- Secure Environment**

Install secure locks on doors and windows. Consider alarms or chimes to alert you when doors are opened.
- Sensory Needs**

Address sensory sensitivities to minimize discomfort. Provide sensory-friendly spaces and tools for self-regulation.
- Social Engagement**

Encourage social engagement and activities that provide a sense of connection and fulfillment. Loneliness can contribute to wandering.
- Supervision Plan**

Develop a supervision plan based on the individual's needs and tendencies. Establish clear guidelines for caregivers and support personnel.
- Tracking Tools**

Keep recent photographs, medical records, and detailed information readily accessible for use in case of an emergency.
- Visual and Auditory Cues**

Use visual and auditory cues to signal transitions or changes in routine. This helps the individual anticipate and adapt.

# Legal and Advocacy Resources

Organization	Website	Description
<b>American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD)</b>	<a href="#"><u>AAIDD</u></a>	Offers resources and information on legal issues related to intellectual and developmental disabilities, including publications and professional development.
<b>The Arc</b>	<a href="#"><u>The Arc</u></a>	Offers advocacy for and supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Provides resources and information on legal rights.
<b>Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)</b>	<a href="#"><u>ASAN</u></a>	Offers resources and support in navigating legal issues for people with disabilities.
<b>Autism Society of America Helpline</b>	<a href="#"><u>Autism Society Helpline Information</u></a>	Offers information and referral line with dedicated information and referral (I&R) specialists who can provide referrals, discuss options, and share materials and tools, by email, our website, and through our toll-free number, 1-800-328-8476.
<b>Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA)</b>	<a href="#"><u>COPAA</u></a>	Offers information on protecting and enforcing legal rights for students with disabilities.
<b>Disability Rights Education &amp; Defense Fund (DREDF)</b>	<a href="#"><u>DREDF</u></a>	Offers resources and legal support, advancing civil and human rights for people with disabilities.
<b>National Council on Disability (NCD)</b>	<a href="#"><u>NCD</u></a>	Offers education in policies and practices ensuring equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities, including legal rights and advocacy.
<b>National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)</b>	<a href="#"><u>NDRN</u></a>	Offers protection and advocacy services at national, state, and local levels, while promoting the legal rights of people with disabilities.
<b>Protection &amp; Advocacy Systems, Inc. (P&amp;A)</b>	<a href="#"><u>National Disability Rights Network</u></a>	Offers state by state advocacy for the rights of individuals with disabilities. Locate the P&A system in your state for local assistance.
<b>Wrightslaw</b>	<a href="#"><u>Wrightslaw</u></a>	Offers information in special education law, education advocacy, and legal resources for parents and professionals.

# Wandering Emergency Plan Information



## 1. Identify/ Assess

Bring awareness to caregivers and other key stakeholders that the individual wanders. Identify potential triggers for wandering and ways to increase safety.



## 2. Make a Plan

Sample plan:

- Identify who will be calling 911.
- Identify who will alert the neighbors or key stakeholders (relatives, school, educators, etc.) to search.
- Identify the places that the individual is likely to wander to (water, movies, drains, etc.).
- Identify who is going to search identified places and in what order.



## 3. Implement

Call 911, alert key stakeholders, implement the plan, check water first, and search identified favorite spots. Follow the plan as practiced.



## 4. Fine Tune/Adjust/Modify

Continue to monitor the individual for changes in behavior, changes of favorite spots or interests, and keeping information up to date so that the plan can be as useful as possible.

**Emergency planning is one of the many ways that you can practice safety in your community.**

# Caregiver Tips: Interacting with Law Enforcement Officers



## 1. Consider registering with your local law enforcement agency.

What does disclosure look like for your family? Determine if disclosing your loved one's disability is in your family plan. Registering with your local law enforcement agency can be an important step in your family's safety plan.

**Many police and sheriff agencies provide an identification form that includes specific information like:**

- Allergies
- A photo of your loved one
- Eloping or wandering tendencies
- Medication and dietary needs
- Personality traits
- Sensory behaviors

This information is generally added to an agency's dispatch office, so officers have this information if called to your home. Contact your local Autism Society affiliate for additional information.



## 2. Carry Identification

**It may be beneficial to have your loved one carry an ID card or medical bracelet that provides basic information, medical diagnosis, and emergency contact numbers.**

There are many free resources online to find such ID cards and you can also contact your local law enforcement agency or Autism Society affiliate.

Practice communicating personal information such as name, address, and phone number with your loved one. If they are non-speaking, assist them in adding their contact information to their communication device, or practice writing onto paper, or typing their information into a laptop, tablet or electronic device.



### 3. Interacting with a Law Enforcement Officer

Everyone is expected to obey the law and rules in your community, regardless of disability or circumstance. Social stories and visual aids can be helpful in practicing safe and appropriate interactions with law enforcement.

**Share these tips to assist your loved one in interacting with a law enforcement officer to ensure a safe and positive interaction.**

- **When an officer approaches, stay where you are.**
  - Do your best to stay in the space you are in and allow the officer to approach you.
  - Do not approach the officer.
- **Keep your hands out of your pockets.**
  - It is good practice to keep your hands where the law enforcement officer can always see them.
  - Do not reach for your identification or anything unless the officer asks you to do so.
- **Do not attempt to touch or hug a law enforcement officer.**
  - Law enforcement officers carry guns and tools on their person.
  - They may mistake your gesture for trying to grab their gun or personal items.
- **Disclose your diagnosis to the officer.**
  - It is understandable that an interaction with law enforcement can be a high stress situation.
  - The officer may not understand the difficulties you are having.
  - Disclosure can create an opportunity to advocate for your needs.



### 4. Educate your local police or sheriff's department.

**Visit your local precinct and introduce your loved one to officers and staff.**

Not only is it important for law enforcement to get to know your loved one, but this will facilitate a positive first interaction with law enforcement.

**Encourage your local police department to conduct regular and meaningful law enforcement trainings or work with your local Autism Society affiliate.**



# Trusted Neighbor 101



**Developing trusting relationships with those in your neighborhood can be helpful as you consider strategies for keeping your loved one with Autism safe.**

Trusted neighbors, familiar with neighborhood routines and close by in emergencies, serve as valuable resources to help create a sense of community and safety for those with Autism and their caregivers.

**After you've identified which neighbors to include in your safety plan, consider talking to the neighbor, sharing your safety concerns, and asking for their help in your safety plan.**

Be specific about how you'd like them to help. If a neighbor agrees to help, introduce your loved one to the neighbors and facilitate a familiar relationship as much as possible.

## **How Neighbors Can Help in a Safety Plan:**

- Watch for loved ones leaving their home without a guardian.
- Help search for an individual if they are missing.
- Act as a safe place an individual can go in emergencies.

## **What Information to Consider Sharing with Trusted Neighbors:**

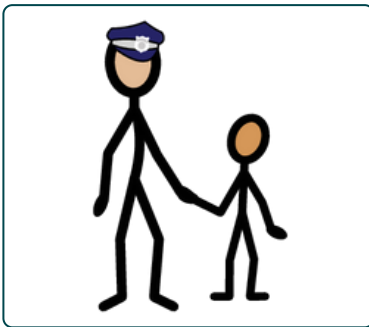
- [Emergency Identification Sheet](#)
- [Wandering Letter](#)
- Tendencies / what is typical for them
- Likes / dislikes
- Sensory Information – what is comforting and what can be triggering?
- Who to call if the neighbor sees something concerning or if they see the individual alone without a guardian, or with someone they haven't seen before
- Guidance for ways to interact with individual

# What is the Role of a Police Officer in the Community?



## Protect and Serve:

Police officers protect us from harm and keep our community safe.



## Help with Emergencies:

When there's an emergency or someone needs help, police officers are there to help.



## Solve Problems:

Police officers solve crimes and arrest criminals.



## Educate and Support:

Police officers educate us about safety, laws, and how to stay out of danger. They're here to support us and answer our questions.

# Examples of Police Officers Helping



## Police Officers



Directing traffic to keep everyone safe on the roads.



Support the community during accidents or emergencies.

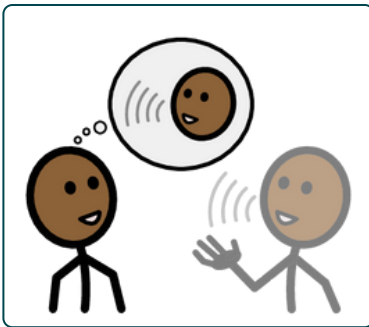


Helping lost people find their way home.

# How to Interact with Police Officers



## Police Officers



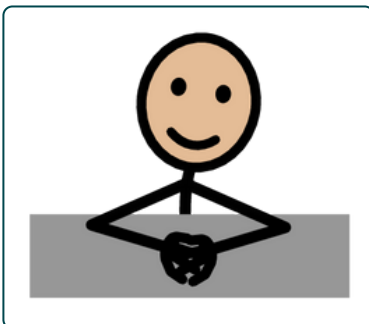
### Follow Instructions:

When a police officer speaks to us, we should listen carefully and follow their instructions.



### Ask for Help:

If we're ever in trouble or need assistance, we can ask a police officer for help.



### Keep Your Hands to Yourself:

Never touch or hit a police officer.

# Police: Traffic Stop

1



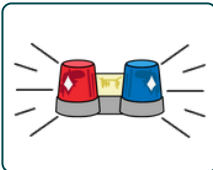
Police officers stop cars to make sure everyone is following the rules. This is part of their job to keep the community safe.

2



When we ride in a car, sometimes a police officer will need your car to stop.

3



You may see bright lights and hear loud alarms when the police officer wants your car to stop.

4



The police officer will walk to the window of the driver or front seat passenger to ask questions.

5



The police officer may shine a flashlight into the car.

6



Even though it might be a little scary, we try to stay calm and follow the police officer's instructions.

7



While your car is stopped, you may have to wait while the police officer goes back to their car.

8



The police officer will tell the driver of the car when it's okay to start driving again.



# Emergency Communication Board

	10	 no	 need time	 help	 I / me	 when?	 yes	 police
	9	 don't want	 too loud	 bathroom	 lost	 where?	 want	 firefighter
	8							
	7	 hurt	 too bright	 drink	 family	 what?	 good	 EMT
	6							
	5	 stop	 move around	 food	 scared	 who?	 go	 nurse
	4							
	3							
	2							
	1							
	0							

# Emergency Communication Board

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 . ? !

A B C D E F G H I

J K L M N O P Q R

S T U V W X Y Z

**YES**

**SPACE**

**NO**

# Safety on the Spectrum™

## Safety Checklist

### At Home

- Place visual supports at eye level at all doors. Example: Place a picture of a stop sign at eye level on each door.
- Move locks to high-to-reach locations, make access more difficult.
- Install door chimes to aid auditory support when individuals enter and exit the home.
- If you use locative technology, consider adding a geofence to your house (if supported by your device).
- Add physical boundaries to your property, including fencing, and locks to gates.

### Away From Home

- Alert caregivers, school staff, and others of wandering behavior so that they can help keep your loved one safe.
- Include key stakeholders and create an approved zoning or safety plan for school and other frequently visited locations.
- Introduce your child to first responders and neighbors to help build trust and comfort.
- Consider if locative technology is the right decision for your family.

### Building a Foundation

- Use social stories to support safe interactions and reduce anxiety about new experiences.
- Enroll in swimming and water safety classes.
- Make safety everyone's responsibility.

**The connection is you.™**



**Autism Society**

800.328.8476 | [AutismSociety.org](https://www.AutismSociety.org)

# I am Autistic.

See back of card for important information.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Autistic people may:**

- Communicate non-verbally
- Move their bodies atypically
- Struggle managing change
- Seek or avoid sensory stimulation
- Become very anxious easily
- Need extra processing time
- Require support to remain calm

## **may not:**

- Understand police authority
- Process or follow directives
- Control body movements
- Be able to articulate their needs
- Respond to new people/events
- Respond to traditional de-escalation strategies

**Individual Support Needs:**



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