



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.



38% of children with ASD have an intellectual disability, 24% are in the borderline range, and 39% 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:

2. Known patterns of wandering:

- a. Why? _____
- b. When? _____
- c. Where? _____
- d. Why, if known? _____

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

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

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

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

a. When wandering occurs from a school-environment

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

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

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

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:

Thank you.

My Contact Information

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Relationship to Autistic Individual:

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?

Was locative technology part of finding your loved one?

In your own words, describe what happened:

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
American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD)	<u>AAIDD</u>	Offers resources and information on legal issues related to intellectual and developmental disabilities, including publications and professional development.
The Arc	<u>The Arc</u>	Offers advocacy for and supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Provides resources and information on legal rights.
Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)	<u>ASAN</u>	Offers resources and support in navigating legal issues for people with disabilities.
Autism Society of America Helpline	<u>Autism Society Helpline Information</u>	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.
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA)	<u>COPAA</u>	Offers information on protecting and enforcing legal rights for students with disabilities.
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF)	<u>DREDF</u>	Offers resources and legal support, advancing civil and human rights for people with disabilities.
National Council on Disability (NCD)	<u>NCD</u>	Offers education in policies and practices ensuring equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities, including legal rights and advocacy.
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)	<u>NDRN</u>	Offers protection and advocacy services at national, state, and local levels, while promoting the legal rights of people with disabilities.
Protection & Advocacy Systems, Inc. (P&A)	<u>National Disability Rights Network</u>	Offers state by state advocacy for the rights of individuals with disabilities. Locate the P&A system in your state for local assistance.
Wrightslaw	<u>Wrightslaw</u>	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

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							
	6							
	5	 hurt	 too bright	 drink	 family	 what?	 good	 EMT
	4							
	3							
	2							
	1	 stop	 move around	 food	 scared	 who?	 go	 nurse
	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