

Safety on the Spectrum™

Safety Toolkit

Rail Safety and Wandering



800.328.8476 | AutismSociety.org

The Safety Toolkit is brought to you in partnership with
Canadian National Railway

What is Autism?



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 selfregulation**. 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.

Autism Signs & Characteristics

- Repetitive behaviors, movements, or phrases
- Lack of response to stimuli
- (i.e. their name, visual cues)
- Communication differences 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 31 children are diagnosed with Autism. Since 2000, the Autism prevalence rate has been consistently increasing from one in 150 to now one in 31.

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.

Autism is over 3x more common among boys than among girls.



Relationships

Communication



Self Regulation

Social Skills



A Love of Trains



The fascination with trains within the Autism community is a well-documented phenomenon that goes far beyond a simple hobby. While every Autistic person is unique, research highlights a significant trend toward transportation-related interests.

15% to 20%

of Autistic individuals have an intense interest in trains or transportation at some point in their lives.

75 to 95%

of Autistic children develop "circumscribed interests" (deep, focused passions). Of those, nearly 1 in 5 (19%) focus specifically on transportation.

Why Trains?

Predictability and Logic



The world can feel chaotic and unpredictable. Trains, however, operate on linear tracks and fixed schedules. They have clear points of origin and destination. For someone who thrives on routine, the railway timetable can be a source of comfort.

Sensory Appeal



The sensory experience of a train can be both stimulating and soothing: The repetitive motion of wheels spinning or the rhythmic passing of telephone poles provides a consistent visual pattern. The "clickety-clack" of the tracks and the steady hum of the engine provide a predictable, rhythmic white noise that may help with regulation.

Systemizing and Classification



Research suggests that many Autistic individuals demonstrate higher systemizing tendencies, meaning they may enjoy identifying patterns, understanding rules, and engaging with predictable systems. Trains can be categorized by model, engine type, year of production, and other technical features.

A Connection to the World



A deep interest in trains can open doors to learning, exploration, and connection; like visiting a train station, exploring maps, learning schedules, or connecting with others who share similar interests, these experiences create opportunities for engagement in structured and meaningful ways.

Wandering

What is wandering?

Wandering is when a person leaves a safe area or responsible caregiver (CDC, 2019). Wandering can occur under any kind of supervision and in people of all age groups. People with Autism, developmental disabilities, and Alzheimer's/Dementia are at an increased risk of injury or death due to wandering. Those who wander may not communicate with speech or understand the risks and potential dangers involved.

Why do people wander?

Wandering is often a form of communication. Examples include:



Biological factors
“I have to use the bathroom”
or “I’m hungry”



Personal want/need
“I forgot my stuffed animal on my bed, and I need it!”



Sensory safety
“It’s too loud/crowded, and I need to find a quiet place!”



Dysregulation
“I’m having trouble coping and need to leave.”



Curiosity
“I want to explore.”

Approximately 49% of individuals with Autism will wander or elope at least once.

Those who wander are commonly found:

- 1. In or near train stations or tracks**
- 2. In or near water**
- 3. In or near traffic**
- 4. In wooded areas**
- 5. At another residence**
- 6. At preferred places**

In the event of a missing person



Call 911, then immediately arrange a search of train tracks, stations, and all nearby bodies of water

Questions to consider if your loved one has wandered:

- Do they have a locative device?
- What is most likely to elicit a response from them? (a certain song, high-interest keyword, calling their name?)
- Where does the missing person like to go?
- Does the missing person have medical conditions that could pose further risks?

Railway Safety 101



Train stations and train tracks can be appealing environments.
They can also present serious safety risks.

The appeal of railway property



Railway property (stations, tracks and crossings) can attract someone seeking sensory input, routine or movement by providing:

- predictable movement
- repetitive sounds and motion
- open, sometimes accessible, spaces
- proximity to familiar spaces such as home, school or work

Environmental awareness



- Identify nearby train tracks or stations.
- Share this information with caregivers and identified stakeholders.
- Include transportation areas in safety planning.

Why this creates a risk



- Because of their size, trains appear to be much farther away and travelling much slower than their actual speed.
- Trains can carry loads that are wider than the railcars themselves. A person standing too close could get hit.
- The average train needs at least 2 km (1.2 miles) to stop, even in an emergency.
- Tracks are not always physically restricted, but still remain private property.

Emergency resources

Look for blue ENS signs posted at railway crossings and along tracks.
Each sign includes:

- A location ID number
- An emergency phone number



In an emergency:

Call the number on the sign

Provide the location ID to responders

Staying Safe Around Train Tracks



Trains are big, fast, and heavy vehicles that carry people or goods from one place to another.



Trains travel on metal tracks. Some trains are loud and noisy while others are quiet



Trains need a long time and distance to come to a complete stop, it is important to give them plenty of room.

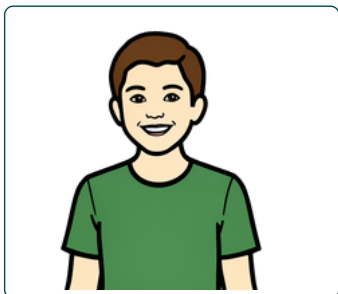
Staying Safe Around Train Tracks



Walking, playing, or taking photos on train tracks is dangerous. I stay safe by staying far away from the tracks.



If I need to cross tracks outside of a station, I only cross at marked pedestrian crossings or bridges.



Following these rules helps keep me and everyone around me safe.

Wandering Strategies

Proactive Tips to Secure Your Home and Surrounding Area



Install door alarms on each door or window in the house.



Identify all bodies of water in close proximity to the home.



Have a safety plan

- Call 911
- Check all surrounding bodies of water and railway property.
 - Enlist the help of neighbors, friends, and caregivers.
 - Go to known areas of interest.



Railway awareness

- Identify all railway tracks, crossings, and bridges in the area.



Support communication needs

- Ensure access to effective communication, especially ways to communicate basic needs/wants, express distress, and request help.



Learn about locative technology

Decide if GPS or tracking as a last line of defense is right for you/your family.



Tools and maintenance

- Install self-latching pool fences around pools and **other** bodies of water.
- Turn off pool pumps, hot tubs, jacuzzis, and whirlpools.
- If drains have not been updated or the suction from jets is high, know how to turn them off to prevent hair, clothing, jewelry, etc., from pulling someone underwater.



Talk to trusted neighbors

about your loved one. Trusted neighbors can be of assistance in case of an emergency.



Be mindful of the specific things that may act as a deterrent or scare the individual

- Loud noises, helicopters, drones, megaphones, crowds, etc.



Monitor the individual for changes in behavior, changes of favorite spots or interests.



Get to know your local law enforcement before an emergency

- If a loved one goes missing and law enforcement is familiar with them, it will help law enforcement identify how to best approach them in the event of an emergency.
- Share an informational sheet about your loved one and keep the information up to date.

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, railways, 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 bodies of 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 in favorite spots or interests, and keep 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.

Emergency Identification Sheet

PLACE AN
UPDATED PHOTO
HERE

Personal Identifying Information

Name /Nickname

Date of Birth / /

Language(s) Spoken (if applicable)

Physical Description

Identifying Marks or Scars

Do they wear a locative device, ID bracelets, typically carry a cell phone or use an AAC? If so, please include details.

Emergency Contacts

Name

Phone number

Address

Name

Phone number

Address

Medical Information

Medical Needs/Medications/Allergies

Emergency Considerations and Approach

Identify locations where the individual may be likely to go (i.e. a park, a family member's home, pool, lake, train station or tracks, a shopping center, etc.)

What does escalation look like for the individual? (i.e. crying, aggression, running, rocking)

Deescalation techniques: What has worked in the past?

What is the best way to approach the individual?

Identify likes: Topics of interest, toys, characters, songs, tv shows

Identify dislikes and triggers: Things to avoid (noise, light, fire engines, foods etc.)

Preferred communication: Is the individual nonspeaking? (Visuals, sign language etc.)

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

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 the individual

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 for personalized strategies and support.
- ☐ **Regular Check-ins**
Regularly check in 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 they 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.

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.
- ☐ Educate the individual on rail safety best practices. For resources visit: www.cn.ca/railsafety



Wandering Letter

PLACE AN
UPDATED PHOTO
HERE OF INDIVIDUAL

Dear (RECIPIENT) _____

Our (RELATIONSHIP)_____ is Autistic. Their name is
(NAME)_____ .

As of today (DATE) _____ , they are (AGE) _____ years old and are _____ in
height and weigh _____.

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 at _____ (contact information is also 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:

My Contact Information:

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Relationship to Autistic

Individual: _____

Autism Disclosure Cards



The front of the card has a dark teal header with the Autism Society logo and the text 'I am Autistic.' in large white font. Below this, in smaller orange text, it says 'See back of card for important information.' The bottom half of the card is white and contains three lines for personal information: 'Name:', 'Emergency Contact:', and 'Phone:'.

 Autism Society

I am Autistic.

See back of card for important information.

Name: _____

Emergency Contact: _____

Phone: _____



The back of the card has a dark teal background. It lists characteristics of autistic people in two columns: 'Autistic people may:' and 'may not:'. Below this, there is a white section for 'Individual Support Needs:'.

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:

