

# Autism, Wandering, and Water Safety

## Training Facilitator Guide

Developed by the  
Office of the Child Advocate  
June 2026



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## Introduction

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) may leave a safe place without telling anyone, a behavior often referred to as wandering, elopement, or bolting. Research shows this occurs in up to half of children with ASD. Wandering can happen for many reasons, such as when the child tries to get something they want or like, wants to escape overwhelming feelings or sensations, is transitioning, or is just exploring.

Drowning is the leading cause of death for children with ASD, often as the result of wandering. This usually happens at home, but can happen at school, programming, or on an outing. While this is a scary topic, there are ways to prepare for emergencies, prevent wandering and improve water safety.

In 2025, the Massachusetts Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) worked alongside the Massachusetts Department of Disability Services, Department of Children and Families, Department of Public Health, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Federation of Children with Special Healthcare Needs to develop educational resources for caregivers and communities supporting children with ASD. This collaboration resulted in the Autism, Wandering, and Water Safety Campaign.

## Why We Created this Guide

Since launching the Autism, Wandering, and Water Safety campaign, the OCA has delivered training for caregivers, educators, and providers to raise awareness and promote prevention strategies. Participants in this training consistently asked for tools and guidance to help bring this information back to their own organizations and communities. In response, we developed this guide to support broader dissemination of these important safety practices.

## Intended Outcomes

- Understand and identify key risk factors contributing to drowning deaths among children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), with a focus on wandering and elopement behaviors.
- Describe evidence-based methods for preventing wandering and drowning in children with ASD, including therapeutic strategies, home safety modifications, and caregiver education.
- Demonstrate how to navigate and connect families to relevant resources and services in Massachusetts that support drowning and wandering prevention for children with ASD.

## Disclaimer

This training material, entitled “Autism, Wandering, and Water Safety - What You Need To Know” (June 2026) and the companion “Autism, Wandering, and Water Safety - Training Facilitator Guide” (June 2026), were developed by the Massachusetts Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) in consultation with agencies and organizations supporting a [public awareness campaign relating to Autism, Wandering, and Water Safety](#). It is intended only for educational purposes, specifically to increase public awareness of strategies that promote drowning prevention among children with autism.

The OCA has made this material publicly available and expects that individuals, agencies, and organizations will use, adapt, and present this information in service of the public interest. However, anyone external to the OCA who delivers or facilitates presentation of this training material shall not represent themselves as an employee, agent, or other representative of the OCA. The individual or entity that delivers the training material is responsible exclusively for any errors, inaccuracies, or liabilities that arise from their communication of the material to others. Moreover, an individual’s or entity’s use of the training material does not establish an affiliation with, or endorsement by, the OCA or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

## About the OCA

The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) is an independent executive branch agency with oversight and ombudsperson responsibilities, established by the Massachusetts Legislature in 2008. The OCA's mission is to ensure that children receive appropriate, timely, and quality state services, with a particular focus on ensuring that the Commonwealth's most vulnerable and at-risk children have the opportunity to thrive. Through collaboration with public and private stakeholders, the OCA identifies gaps in state services and recommends improvements in policy, practice, regulation, and/or law. The OCA also serves as a resource for families who are receiving, or are eligible to receive, services from the Commonwealth.

## Training Instructions

This training can be used for virtual, hybrid, and in-person training formats. The PowerPoint you received includes speaker notes, which are also provided in this guide. For in-person training, you may want to consider bringing physical materials to hand out or place at a table. Materials that are available to print [directly from our website](#) include:

- Caregiver brochure
- Provider fact sheet
- Print out of financial resources table
- Print out of adaptive swim lessons

For virtual training, we included interactive chat prompts to increase engagement throughout the presentation. We also encourage tools like [Mentimeter](#) (which can be used virtually or in-person) or built-in polling features within Zoom or other presentation platforms.

# Speaker Notes

Speaker notes are available in the notes section of the PowerPoint and below.

## **Facilitator Info Slide: Remove Before Presenting**

### **Facilitator Info Slide: Please Remove before Presenting**

This is a self-led presentation developed by the Office of the Child Advocate that can be given to audiences of caregivers, educators, and anyone who might benefit from knowledge on how to support children with wandering tendencies around water safety.

This presentation takes approximately (30 - 60 minutes) to complete, and can be done in virtual, hybrid, or in-person formats.

Please review the accompanying facilitator guide before presenting.



## Slide 1

# Autism, Wandering and Water Safety

## What You Need To Know

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Facilitator Name, Title, Organization

Date



**Estimated Time: 45 Seconds**

### **Speaker Notes:**

- Thank you for joining us. My name is [insert name] and I am the [insert title] at the [insert organization name, if applicable].
- Today we are talking about a difficult but important topic.
- Wandering is a common challenge for families of children with autism. Our goal today is to provide water safety information and resources.

### **Interactive/Chat Options**

- As we begin, think about one experience you've had supporting a child or family where safety concerns felt especially urgent or complex.
- Feel free to share with us what brought you here today and what you hope to gain.

## Slide 2

### About this Training

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Disclaimer:

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### Estimated Time: 90 Seconds

### Speaker Notes:

- Before we get started, please note that this training material, entitled "Autism, Wandering, and Water Safety- What You Need To Know" (June 2026) and the companion "Autism, Wandering, and Water Safety- Training Facilitator Guide" (June 2026) were developed by the Massachusetts Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) in consultation with agencies and organizations supporting a [public awareness campaign relating to Autism, Wandering, and Water Safety](#). It is intended only for educational purposes, specifically to increase public awareness of strategies that promote drowning prevention among children with autism.
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<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/office-of-the-child-advocate>

<https://www.mass.gov/news/massachusetts-launches-campaign-to-prevent-drowning-deaths-among-children-with-autism>

## **Slide 3**

### Learning Objectives

01

Understand and identify key risk factors contributing to drowning deaths among children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), with a focus on wandering and elopement behaviors.

02

Describe evidence-based methods for preventing wandering and drowning in children with ASD, including therapeutic strategies, home safety modifications, and caregiver education.

03

Demonstrate how to navigate and connect families to relevant resources, and services in Massachusetts that support drowning and wandering prevention for children with ASD.

**Estimated Time: 30 seconds**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

- Our objectives today are to:
  - Understand and identify key risk factors contributing to drowning deaths among children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), with a focus on wandering and elopement behaviors.
  - Describe evidence-based methods for preventing wandering and drowning in children with ASD, including therapeutic strategies, home safety modifications, and caregiver education.
  - Demonstrate how to navigate and connect families to relevant resources, and services in Massachusetts that support drowning and wandering prevention for children with ASD.

## Slide 4

### Fast Facts



1 in 31 8-year-olds have autism



Drowning is the leading cause of death for children with ASD



Children with autism face a 160-fold increased risk of drowning

(Thomas et al., 2024)

### Estimated Time: 90 Seconds

#### Speaker Notes:

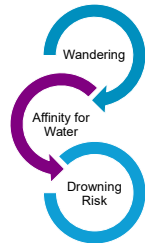
- To start, let's consider what we are seeing in the literature as well as in Massachusetts about the prevalence of autism
- and the risk of drowning. Many of you might have heard about this risk through news articles or from families who are concerned about how this risk impacts their lives.
- The CDC finds that 1 in 31 eight-year-olds has an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis in the United States.
- This is not because there is a rise in the diagnosis of ASD in children but instead is due to an increase in awareness and access to services.
- Children are now more likely to get the proper diagnosis that can help them learn, grow, and interact with the rest of their community.
- For the specific population of children with autism, drowning is the leading cause of death. Children with autism face a 160-fold increased risk of drowning compared to children who do not have autism.
- It is important we talk about why this is occurring and what's available to help prevent drownings in the future for children specifically in the case of children with autism spectrum disorder.

#### Interactive/Chat Option:

*What stands out to you about these statistics?*

## Slide 5

### High Risk Behaviors



- Wandering is more common in children with Autism

- When children wander, they may end up in unsafe places, like near water or in traffic

- Researchers note that children with autism may be especially interested in water

(Thomas et al., 2024)

**Estimated Time: Two Minutes**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

- One study found a nearly five-times greater occurrence of wandering in four- to five-year-olds with ASD compared to their neurotypical peers. A research study found that between one-quarter and one-half of caregivers reported wandering in the preceding six months. When we look at the connection between the diagnosis and drowning, we want to identify the high-risk behaviors leading to these adverse outcomes.
- Wandering, also called elopement or bolting, is the idea that a child will leave a supervised area. This could happen at home, or while at a park or grocery store. In most children, we see this in the early toddler stage. Parents know the risk of taking their eyes off a two-year-old for a moment. However, among children with autism, this behavior can persist much longer, sometimes all the way through adulthood.
- Children with ASD often have an increased interest in water. Some think this is due to the sensory pressure of water.
- Deep pressure can be very comforting, like a weighted blanket. Water is also sparkly and has movement, which is attractive to many children.
- When you combine wandering with an affinity for water, the risk is clear.
- A child who wanders may be dysregulated or overwhelmed by an unfamiliar environment and seek out a body of water for comfort. They might also associate it with fun, like a local pond they visit on walks.
- These factors lead to the increased drowning risk we see in the news.

## Slide 6

### Counseling Parents

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**Only 1 in 3**  
*of parents of children  
with autism receive  
counseling about  
wandering.*

(Thomas et al., 2024)

**Estimated Time: 90 Seconds (30 seconds of speaking and one minute to leave the poll open)**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

- For **[insert audience]** like you, it is vital to be knowledgeable enough to provide safety information while acknowledging the stress and fear caregivers face.

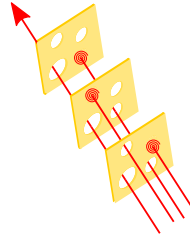
#### **Interactive/Chat Option (utilize a poll or Mentimeter):**

On a scale from 1-5, how confident are you in counseling a parent of a child with autism about wandering and water safety?

## Slide 7

### Layers of Prevention

Provide tools and guidance to support parents and providers develop a layered approach to prevention of wandering and drowning



(Wikipedia, 2023)

**Estimated Time: 45 seconds**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

- One study found that only one-third of parents of children with autism reported receiving any formal counseling about wandering.
- This is a significant gap.
- While it can be hard to talk about “taboo” topics like child death, acknowledging these concerns is important for injury prevention.
- If a child repeatedly wanders, the parent is under incredible stress and often feels isolated. Making sure we can talk about it and point them toward support is an essential tool.
- Caregivers need a layered approach to prevent wandering and subsequent drowning. It’s a complicated process that needs to be highly tailored to the family’s needs.

## Slide 8

### Prevention and Harm Reduction

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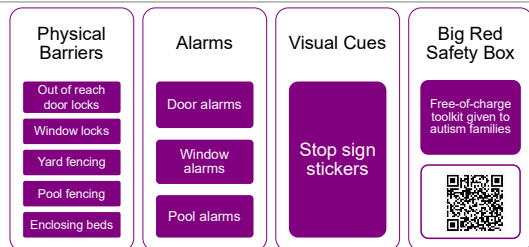
**Estimated Time: One Minute**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

- Earlier, we showed a graphic of the “Swiss Cheese Model” of prevention. Families often use several strategies at once.
- Here are the most common “slices” used:
- **Home Modifications:** Parents can use padlocks or decals to prevent wandering.
- **Therapies:** Depending on age, different therapies can help curb the behavior.
- **Tracking and Monitoring Devices:** We have a list of considerations to help you coach families on selecting a device.
- **Educating First Responders:** When elopement happens, first responders must be knowledgeable, as these calls differ from traditional 911 calls.
- **Safe Water Habits:** Knowing how to swim can buy time in an emergency, but a child in the water alone is a dangerous situation. Just because someone can swim doesn't mean they can swim in cold water or a pond.
- Now let's get into those home modifications and resources.

## Slide 9

### Home Modifications



Keep fire safety and emergency evacuation planning in mind

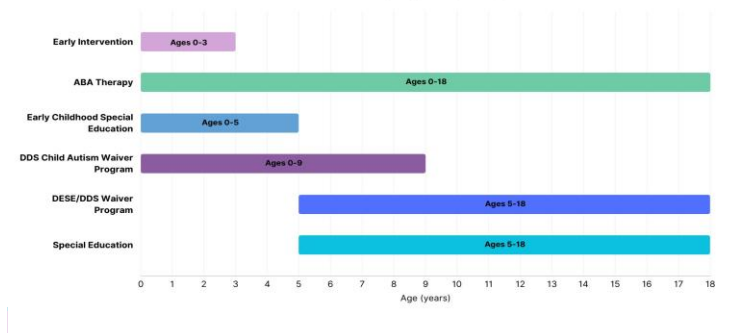
**Estimated Time: 90 Seconds**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

- Home modifications can be a quick fix. We focused on this because our review found that while it can happen at school or residential programs, **52% of children who fatally wandered started out at home.**
- Physical barriers include:
  - Ensuring door and window locks are out of reach.
  - Putting up yard and pool fencing.
  - Enclosing beds, such as using netting to help the child stay in bed so the caregiver can rest, and
  - Alarms on doors, windows, and pools.
- If an alarm goes off too often, people tune it out. Alarms are good practice, but they are not foolproof. Some children also respond well to "Stop" decals or "No-Go" signs.
- You must also balance the risk of wandering with the risk of being stuck during a fire.
- If you put high deadbolts on doors, make sure you have an emergency evacuation plan that you practice so you can get the bolts undone quickly. Fire spreads very fast. Balancing these risks is a necessary part of the conversation.

## Slide 10

### Autism Services By Age Eligibility



**Estimated Time: Two Minutes**

### **Speaker Notes:**

- This chart shows behavioral interventions across the lifespan up to age 18. These systems are complex. It can be stressful for a parent and/or caregiver to manage all of the stressors of life and navigate these systems.
- Wandering behavior can be addressed by Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and other therapeutic treatments.
- What we have here first and foremost is **Early Intervention: Early Intervention providers** can help assess and make plans to get children the skills they need, and it starts so early.
- Next is ABA therapy, that is **Applied Behavioral Analysis**: This can include things like floor time or other therapeutic interventions that help children get to the root of the behavior address that behavior and redirect to healthier behaviors. There's lots of ABA centers across the Commonwealth. But it can be difficult to navigate them. DDS programs offer financial supports for ABA and other therapies. MassHealth or other health insurance providers may also cover this cost.
- Then in the preschool ages we also have **early childhood special education** and then we move into **special education** in the school-age years starting at five.
- There's a **DESE and DDS waiver program** for children with autism spectrum disorder as well as the standard DDS Department of Developmental Services Child Autism Waiver program that runs from zero to nine. There are many resources and therapies that could help depending on the age and need of the child.
- Next, we have our tracking and monitoring devices. We have a handout that we'll be able to provide with many of these resources.

## Slide 11

### Tracking & Monitoring Devices

Tracking and monitoring devices can alert a caregiver as soon as a child has wandered, or help in locating a missing child

Consider:

- Price
- Wearability
- Type of technology
- Battery life
- Water resistance
- Monitoring alerts



<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/autism-wandering-and-water-safety-financial-resources#monitoringtracking-devices>



**Estimated Time: 90 Seconds**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

- Tracking devices can bring up complicated feelings, but they are helpful during an elopement. You don't have much time to reach a child, so real-time tracking is vital.
- Considerations for families include:
  - **Price:** Not all of these devices are affordable. Some of them can be paid for by service providers so you can get them for free.
  - **Wearability:** Autism often involves sensory challenges, making bracelets or anklets difficult. Some are “non-removable” while others are easily taken off.
  - **Technology:** Some devices have radio frequency-based technology that can pick up a signal easily. Other GPS devices need satellite access and may not work if wet or underground.
  - **Alerts:** There are devices that also notify you of the moment a child leaves a specific parameter.

#### **Interactive/Chat Option:**

Here is a list of products to consider. These products are not endorsed by us or the Office of the Child Advocate, but we do want to offer some of this research for caregivers who would otherwise have to do this on their own.

[SafetyNet Tracking Systems](#)

[Project Lifesaver](#)

[Apple Air Tag](#)

[Angel Sense](#)

[Verizon Gizmo Watch](#)

[JioBit](#)

[Amber Alert GPS](#)

[GPS Smart Sole](#)

## **Slide 12**

### **Educating Emergency Responders**

Proactively provide or prepare information for first responders

- Supports help seeking behavior in the child
- Grounds the caregiver in a moment of crisis
- Expedites and informs the response

File of Life

9-1-1 Disability Indicator Form

Meet and Greets

**Estimated Time: 90 Seconds**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

- One way we can prevent a situation from getting worse once wandering has occurred is by proactively preparing emergency responders. Families can visit police or fire stations to introduce their child. This helps the child feel comfortable and allows parents to explain how to search for their specific child.
- We also acknowledge that some families may have reasons that they do not want to have this proactive kind of contact with a police officer specifically. An alternative is to connect with their local fire department.
- Caregivers can keep a file of life including information about allergies, medications, contact information, and health problems that you'll want to have on hand for if they are calling 911. In that moment it can be incredibly hectic and stressful. People can panic and forget information that they want to provide. Keeping important information easily accessible, like on your refrigerator, can be helpful if you need to contact 911. Information to include might be:
  - Verbal/nonverbal status
  - Nearby water sources
  - The 911 Disability Indicator Form, which is available on mass.gov. This links your phone number and address to the dispatcher's system to show a vulnerable person lives there.

## Slide 13

### 9-1-1 Disability Indicator Form



- You are required to complete this form if you want your police department, fire department, or other emergency agency to know about you when you call 9-1-1 in an emergency.
- When filling out the form give your telephone number, full name, and home address.
- Check the necessary box or boxes.
- Sign and date** the form.
- Submit the form** to your 9-1-1 Municipal Coordinator for processing.
- If you have any questions regarding the contact information for your designated Municipal Coordinator, please email [DisabilityIndicatorForm@mass.gov](mailto:DisabilityIndicatorForm@mass.gov).

**9-1-1 Disability Indicator Form LANDLINE, WIRELESS & VOIP - Individual Record**  
The filing of this document will provide police, fire and other emergency agencies with an individual's 9-1-1 telephone number and address information for dispatching that individual in an emergency. This information is confidential and will ONLY appear on the dispatcher's 9-1-1 system when a 9-1-1 call originates from the phone number(s) provided below.

**\*PLEASE NOTE: IT IS IMPORTANT TO SUBMIT A NEW DISABILITY INDICATOR FORM UPON CHANGE OF SERVICE PROVIDER AND ADDRESS.\***

1. **LANDLINE** Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
2. **LANDLINE** Telephone Service Provider: \_\_\_\_\_  
3. **WIRELESS** Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
4. **WIRELESS** Telephone Service Provider: \_\_\_\_\_  
5. **VOIP** Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
6. **VOIP** Telephone Service Provider: \_\_\_\_\_  
7. Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
8. Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
9. Town & Zip code: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check appropriate designations for inclusion in the 9-1-1 Database to assist public safety dispatchers in responding to an emergency at your address. Any changes should be communicated to your designated Municipal Coordinator promptly.

Check all that apply to indicate that someone at the address:

"LSR" Life Support System: has equipment required to sustain their life.  
 "MR" Mobility Impaired: in wheelchair, wheelchair user or has another mobility impairment.  
 "H" Blind: is legally blind.  
 "HHR" Deaf or Hard of Hearing: is deaf or hard of hearing.  
 "TTY" May be communicating via TTY.  
 "SI" Speech Impaired: has a speech impairment.  
 "CI" Cognitively Impaired: is cognitively impaired.  
 **PLEASE REMOVE any designation previously on file.**  
 **PLEASE CHANGE existing designations to those shown above.**

**NOTICE:** By printing this document, you warrant that you are responsible for notifying the Municipal Coordinator of any changes with regard to the status of the above disability indicator(s). Further, you warrant that you will immediately address any 9-1-1 Equipment, Coverage, DDI and any other safety-related issues and immediately heretofore form and against any claims, liability, damages, attorney's fees and costs, including reasonable attorney's fees and costs, resulting from or arising out of the total provision or updating of this information.

I understand this information will remain as part of my 9-1-1 record until such time as I notify my 9-1-1 Municipal Coordinator to change or delete the same.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Municipal Coordinator) DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Individual) DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## Estimated Time: One Minute

## Speaker Notes:

- As mentioned in the previous slide, the 911 Disability Indicator Form links your phone number and address to the dispatcher's system to show a vulnerable person lives there. Here is an example of the form and instructions on how to fill out the form.
- When filling out the form give your telephone number, full name, and home address.
- Check the necessary box or boxes.
- Sign and date the form.**
- Submit the form** to your 9-1-1 Municipal Coordinator for processing.
- If you have any questions regarding the contact information for your designated Municipal Coordinator, please email [DisabilityIndicatorForm@mass.gov](mailto:DisabilityIndicatorForm@mass.gov).

## Interactive/Chat Option:

- Add this link to the chat: <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/request-a-disability-indicator-form-for-landline-wireless-and-voip-consumers>

## Slide 14

### Water Safety



Ability to swim can **Reduce Risk**



Safe water habits start at bathtime



Swimming lessons often need to be adapted for a child with Autism

---

**Estimated Time: One Minute**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

- The last “slice of cheese” is water safety. Swimming skills can buy time for responders, but the goal is to find the child before they enter the water.
- However, water play is a great time to start thinking about safe water habits.
- For example, before bath time have the child tap an adult on the shoulder. Teaching repetitive behaviors at home can translate to other bodies of water, creating an association that water requires supervision.
- Adaptive swimming lessons may also be available in your community. Lessons may include 1-on-1 instruction, specialized instructors, or “sensitizing” sessions to get the child used to the pool's smell, sound, and feel. The YMCA Association of Massachusetts and Mass.gov Learn to Swim page have lists of these providers across the Commonwealth.

#### **Interactive/Chat Option:**

Add this link to the chat: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/learn-to-swim>

**Slide 15**

# Navigation Support

AUTISM,  
WANDERING, AND  
WATER SAFETY  
CAMPAIGN

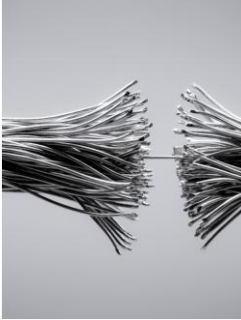
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**Estimated Time: One Minute**

**Speaker Notes:**

- Next, we'll talk about how we can support caregivers navigating a child with a tendency to wander. Families are often navigating multiple systems while maintaining constant vigilance.

## **Slide 16**



### **Caregivers Needs**

---

Caregivers are primarily responsible for:

- Identifying appropriate services
- Navigating waitlists
- Determining insurance coverage
- Determining eligibility criteria

On top of:

- 24/7 vigilance
- Limiting outings
- Few to no respite care options (formal or informal)

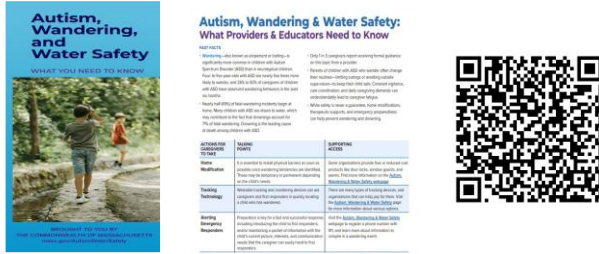
**Estimated Time: 30 Seconds**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

- Caregivers of children of all abilities who have experienced wandering episodes may be stressed and fearful for their child's safety should it happen again.
- Coordinating a child's care, remaining constantly vigilant for wandering, and engaging in the routine tasks of caregiving can understandably lead to burnout.
- When we ask parents to focus on wandering, we must do it supportively to ensure they get the specific help they need without added stress.

**Slide 17**

## Campaign Materials



**Estimated Time: 45 Seconds**

**Speaker Notes:**

- The campaign includes brochures that exist as a print-at-home version on our website.
- There is a checklist of action steps that can be done right away, as well as information on further resources for both caregivers and providers.
- The brochure shown here is translated into seven languages. Shown here is also one-pager for providers, which can help guide anyone supporting a caregiver through recommendations.

**Interactive/Chat Option:**


Visit [mass.gov/autismwanderingandwatersafety](https://mass.gov/autismwanderingandwatersafety) to find these resources.

## **Slide 18**

### Autism, Wandering, and Water Safety: Information for Caregivers

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ☉ Lock windows, doors, yards and water sources
- ☉ Know the dangers in your neighborhood
- ☉ Use a tracking device to support supervision
- ☉ Write down key information to share with emergency responders
- ☉ Ask your child's doctor, behavior specialist and teacher for help
- ☉ Introduce your child to local police, fire and emergency medical technicians
- ☉ Teach your child to swim and create safe water habits
- ☉ Tell your neighbors about your concerns and how to contact you
- ☉ Find Support
- ☉ Resources on this Page



**Estimated Time: Two Minutes (30 seconds or less of speaking time and at least a minute for participants to review the website)**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

- Now we are going to take a few minutes to walk through the resources on the website. We encourage you to open up your browser on your computer or phone to check out the website now.

#### **Interactive/Chat Option:**

Visit <https://mass.gov/autismwatersafety>

## **Slide 19**

### Listed Resources

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ADAPTIVE SWIM  
LESSONS LIST



FINANCIAL  
RESOURCES



TRACKING &  
MONITORING  
DEVICES



AUTISM  
SUPPORT  
CENTERS



911 DISABILITY  
INDICATOR

---

**Estimated Time: 45 Seconds**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

- On the website, visitors will find:
  - A list of adaptive swim lessons
  - Financial resources to support preventative practices
  - Where to find tracking and monitoring devices
  - Autism Support Centers
  - The 911 Disability Indicator Form

## **Slide 20**

### Mass.gov Webpages

Translates to 200+ languages!

Resources for:

- Caregivers
- Providers & Educators
- Emergency Medical Service Providers
- Community Members



**Estimated Time: One minute**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

- You don't have to remember this URL – just search for autism wandering and water safety you'll come across this campaign page. The pages translate to more than two hundred languages, and as you can see, have resources for a multitude of audiences.
- You will see the language icon in the right-hand corner which is depicted here.

#### **Interactive/Chat Option:**

Where could you share this website that might make an impact?

## **Slide 21**

### Have you provided or received counseling on wandering in real life?

**Let's Practice!**

**Role-Play:** Caregiver–Provider Conversation

**Activity:** One participant plays a caregiver concerned about their child's wandering, and another plays a provider (school staff, therapist, social worker, pediatrician, etc.).

**Audience Task:** Practice asking the right questions, offering prevention strategies, and referring to resources.



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**Estimated Time: 15- 30 Minutes (Optional)**

**Speaker Notes:**

- What Providers and Educators Need to Know (Handout)
- Ask participants to split up into groups of 2-3.
- One participant plays a caregiver, and another plays a provider (if there is a third person in the group they will observe)
- Review the “What Providers and Educators Need to Know Handout. Using the talking points listed in the handout practice asking the right questions, offering prevention strategies, and referring to resources.
- Participants can alternate if time allows.

## **Slide 22**

### Wrapping up

How confident are you in counseling a parent of a child with autism about wandering and water safety?

**Estimated Time: 90 Seconds (for polling time)**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

- Thank you for taking the time to learn more about what we can do as a community to create more safety measures for children.
- Earlier in the presentation, we asked you how confident you were in counseling a parent of a child with autism about wandering and water safety. Please take a moment to share your answer again (add polling feature if virtual; use QR code with Mentimeter if in-person).

## **Slide 23**

Thank You!

INSERT CONTACT  
INFORMATION

**Estimated Time: 30 Seconds**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

- We can now open it up for questions or discussion.

#### **Interactive/Chat Option:**

Share contact information

## **Slide 24**

### Reference

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Thomas, B., Crowley, M., Riley, S., & Rezendes, J. (2024). *Massachusetts Child Fatality Review Annual Report* (pp. 1–60). <https://www.mass.gov/doc/fy24-child-fatality-review-annual-report/download>

Wikipedia (Ed.). (n.d.). *Swiss cheese model* - *wikipedia*. Swiss Cheese Model- Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swiss\\_cheese\\_model](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swiss_cheese_model)



## **Reference Page**

## FAQs

*Answers to frequently asked questions from those receiving the training.*

### ***How do I talk about wandering and drowning risk without frightening or blaming parents?***

*Approach the conversation with empathy and curiosity. Acknowledge that constant vigilance is exhausting, recognize caregiver stress, and focus on practical supports and prevention strategies rather than judgment. The goal is to increase safety, not assign blame.*

### ***What if a participant asks a question I cannot answer?***

*Acknowledge the question, avoid guessing, and refer participants to the campaign website or appropriate local resources for more information.*

### ***Why are children with autism at increased risk of drowning?***

*Children with autism are more likely to wander (elope) and may be especially drawn to water. When these factors occur together, the risk of drowning increases.*

### ***Do all children with autism wander?***

*No. Wandering is common but not universal. Every child is different, and risk should be assessed individually.*

### ***What should I do if my child wanders or goes missing?***

*Call 9-1-1 immediately. Tell responders that the child has autism and provide information about communication needs, preferred locations, and nearby water sources.*

### ***What is the most effective way to prevent wandering?***

*There is no single solution. Experts recommend a layered approach that may include home modifications, supervision, behavioral supports, tracking devices, emergency planning, and water safety education.*

### ***Should I install locks, alarms, or fencing?***

*Many families find these tools helpful. However, safety modifications should always be balanced with fire safety and emergency evacuation planning.*

### ***Are tracking devices recommended?***

*Tracking devices can help locate a child quickly during an emergency. Families should consider factors such as cost, comfort, battery life, water resistance, and alert features when selecting a device.*

### ***Can swimming lessons prevent drowning?***

*Swimming lessons are an important harm-reduction strategy, but they do not eliminate risk. Even strong swimmers require supervision around water.*

### ***What services can help reduce wandering behavior?***

*Behavioral supports, including Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and other therapeutic interventions, may help address the underlying causes of wandering.*

### ***What is the 9-1-1 Disability Indicator Form?***

*This form allows emergency dispatchers to know that a vulnerable person lives at a particular address when a 9-1-1 call is placed, helping responders prepare appropriately.*

## Continued Learning

Please visit [www.mass.gov/AutismWaterSafety](http://www.mass.gov/AutismWaterSafety) to find resources and continued learning that you can share with training participants.

## Contact Us

**We want to hear from you!** We would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to fill out our feedback survey below to share any suggestions or comments you would like to share with us about the training materials.

[Autism, Wandering, and Water Safety Facilitator's Guide Feedback Survey](#)

Let us know if you have any questions or suggestions for the training by emailing us at [childadvocate@mass.gov](mailto:childadvocate@mass.gov).