



Autism, Wandering, and Water Safety

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Safety Checklist

- ☐ Lock windows, doors, yards, and water access
- ☐ Know the dangers in your neighborhood
- ☐ Use a GPS or tracking device to support supervision
- ☐ Write down important information to share with emergency responders
- ☐ Teach neighbors about your family's concerns and how to contact you
- ☐ Ask your child's doctor, behavior specialist, and teacher, for help
- ☐ Introduce your child to local police, firefighters, and EMTs
- ☐ Teach your child to swim and create safe water habits

Know the Dangers

Children with **ASD** are more likely to leave a safe place without an adult. This is called **wandering**. Some people call it elopement or bolting. Many children with autism are interested in water. If they wander to water, it can be **dangerous**.

The #1 cause of death for children with autism is drowning, usually after wandering.

There are things you can do to help stop wandering and help emergency workers to find your child if they go missing.



If your child is missing, call 911 immediately.

Help Stop Wandering

KEEP YOUR HOME SAFE

- Put locks or guards on your doors and windows.
- Put stop signs up on your doors and windows.
- If possible, add a fence to your yard.
- Fence and alarm any pools or other water sources.

USE A TRACKING DEVICE

Look for one that is easy to wear, waterproof, and has a long battery life. These can enhance, but not replace, supervision.

ASK FOR HELP FROM EXPERTS

Talk to your child's doctor, behavior specialist, and teacher about skills to prevent wandering, like asking for what they want or need, knowing what's dangerous, creating safe water habits, and how to get help if they need it.



Plan for an Emergency

KNOW THE DANGERS NEARBY

- Look around your neighborhood for risky places like pools, ponds, or lakes. Write down places that your child is drawn to.

TALK TO YOUR NEIGHBORS

- Ask your neighbors to keep an eye out and keep water areas safe.

MAKE AN EMERGENCY INFO SHEET

- Create a file with important information about your child. Include things like a current photo, physical description, how they communicate, and where they might go.

MEET LOCAL HELPERS

- Some police and fire stations have programs where your child can meet first responders. You can also register your phone number with them.

TAKE WATER SAFETY AND SWIM LESSONS

- Learning to swim and be safe around water can help your child stay calm and give emergency workers more time to help if needed.

Visit Our Website

For more information about wandering and emergency preparedness, especially:

- A list of tracking devices,
- State programs and foundations that can pay for services, and
- Emergency preparedness planning tools



mass.gov/AutismWaterSafety

Caregiver Support

- Worrying about your child's safety all the time can be stressful and tiring. If you need help, try contacting an **Autism Support Center** near you. You are not alone.



www.mass.gov/info-details/autism-support-centers-list

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