Wendy Fournier
National Autism Association
June, 2013

AUTISM-RELATED WANDERING:
KEEPING OUR KIDS SAFE
autism-related wandering
When a person, who requires some level of supervision to be safe, leaves a supervised, safe space and/or the care of a responsible person and is exposed to potential dangers such as traffic, open water (drowning), falling from a high place, weather (hypothermia, heat stroke, dehydration) or unintended encounters with potentially predatory strangers.

Wandering is also referred to as:

- Elopement
- Bolting
- Fleeing
- Running (Sometimes you’ll hear, “My son is a runner.”)
WANDERING: TYPES

• **Goal-directed wandering:** wandering with the purpose of getting to something (water, train tracks, park, an item or place of obsession, etc.)

• **Bolting/Fleeing:** the act of suddenly running or bolting, usually to quickly get away from something, a negative reaction to an event, anxiety, fear, excitement, stress or uncomfortable sensory input.

• **Other:** nighttime wandering, or wandering due to disorientation, transition or confusion.
Wanderers may be likely to enter someone else’s home. This can be especially dangerous for night-time wanderers.
DANGERS

- Drowning
- Exposure, Dehydration, Hypothermia
- Traffic Injuries
- Falls
- Physical Restraint
- Encounters with strangers
- Encounters with law enforcement
Wandering Occurs Across All Settings, Including:

- Homes
- School environments
- Daycares
- Summer Camps
- Residential and Day Program Facilities
- Public Places
- Parks, Camp Sites, Hiking Trails
- Vehicles
- Homes of grandparents, relatives, babysitters, neighbors & friends
Wandering Occurs Under All Types Of Supervision, Including:

- Mothers, fathers, step-parents, foster parents
- Teachers, aides, school staff, therapists
- Grandparents, relatives, neighbors, friends
- Babysitters
- Older siblings
- Residential staff
- Camp or summer counselors
- Mentors, shadows, employers
- Healthcare & service professionals
Wandering behaviors may show early on:

- Behaviors can begin early on, but may seem insignificant.
- A child may wander from one classroom to another, inside a public setting, or from room to room within a home without responding to his/her name.
- Wandering behaviors can occur in those who have not shown tendencies in the past.
Wandering Data: Occurrence and Family Impact of Elopement in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders, 2012
Occurrence and Family Impact of Elopement in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders

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KEY WORDS: autism spectrum disorders, elopement, wandering

ABBREVIATIONS:
AD—autistic disorder
ASD—autism spectrum disorder
IAN—Interactive Autism Network
PDD—pervasive developmental disorder
SCQ—Social Communication Questionnaire
SRS—Social Responsiveness Scale

Drs P. Law and Anderson designed and implemented the survey instrument and were responsible for data collection; Drs Daniels, Anderson, and P. Law conducted statistical analyses; Drs Daniels and Anderson drafted the first manuscript; Drs Rice, Mandell, Hagopian, and K. Law made substantial contributions to interpretation of the data and critical review of the manuscript for key intellectual content; and all authors approved the final version to be published.

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2012-0762
doi:10.1542/peds.2012-0762

Accepted for publication Jun 20, 2012

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WHAT’S KNOWN ON THIS SUBJECT: Anecdotal accounts that suggest elopement behavior occurs in children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), that injuries and fatalities can result, and that associated family burden and stress are substantial. However, there has been little research characterizing the phenomenon or its frequency.

WHAT THIS STUDY ADDS: Nearly half of children with an ASD elope, and more than half of these “go missing.” Elopement is associated with autism severity, and is often goal-directed. Addressing elopement behavior is an important aspect of intervention for many individuals with ASDs.

abstract

OBJECTIVES: Anecdotal reports suggest that elopement behavior in children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) increases risk of injury or death and places a major burden on families. This study assessed parent-reported elopement occurrence and associated factors among children with ASDs.

METHODS: Information on elopement frequency, associated characteristics, and consequences was collected via an online questionnaire. The study sample included 1218 children with ASD and 1076 of their siblings without ASD. The association among family sociodemographic and child clinical characteristics and time to first elopement was estimated by using a Cox proportional hazards model.

RESULTS: Forty-nine percent (n = 598) of survey respondents reported
AUTISM WANDERING/ELOPEMENT: STATISTICS

• **Roughly half, or 49%,** of children with autism attempt to elope from a safe environment, a rate nearly four times higher than their unaffected siblings.

• **More than one third of children** with autism who wander are never or rarely able to communicate their name, address, or phone number.

• **Two in three parents** of elopers reported their missing children had a “close call” with a traffic injury.

• **32% of parents** reported a “close call” with a possible drowning.

• **Half of families with elopers** report they had never received advice or guidance about elopement from a professional.
WANDERING: EFFECTS ON THE FAMILY:

- Living under great stress
- Lowered quality of life
- 62% of families with children who elope were prevented from attending/enjoying activities outside the home due to fear of wandering
- 40% suffered sleep deprivation
- Lack of support/understanding/resources
- Fear of accusations of neglect - CPS or Police involvement
- 58% of parents report wandering/elopement as the most stressful of ASD behaviors
Autism Wandering/Elopement Lethal Outcome Cases from 2009 to 2011:

- accidental drowning accounted for 91%
- 68% died in a nearby pond, lake, creek or river
- 23% were in the care of someone other than a parent
- lethal outcomes in ASD wandering/ elopement in girls were twice as high than in boys

_Lethal Outcomes In Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Wandering/Elopement; Lori McIlwain, Wendy Fournier Jan 2012_
WARM CLIMATES A FACTOR?

More ASD wandering/elapsed deaths happened in locations with heavier seasonal transitions as opposed to climates that are consistently warm year-round.

One reason for this could be that home security patterns change with the seasonal patterns, especially during transitions from winter to spring and into summer months. Open doors, screen doors, open windows, cooling units, outdoor activities and general changes in the home layout or routine may be an explanation.
AUTISM WANDERING/ELOPEMENT: TRENDS NOTED

- Cases in young children routinely spiked in early spring and rapidly declined in early fall
- Winter: fewer missing-person reports of younger children; slight increase in school-related incidents
- Little to no seasonal changes in the frequency of missing adults or teenagers
Based On NAA’s Monitoring Of Missing Person Cases, Autism-related Wandering Incidents Happen Most:

- During warmer months
- During holidays such as Mother’s Day, Memorial Day, Father’s Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, and other warm-climate holidays
- During family gatherings, other gatherings, or outdoor activities
- Camping & hiking outings
- Visits to non-home settings, such as a friend’s home or vacation setting
- After a family moves to a new home
- When adjustments have been made to a home to accommodate warmer weather, especially window screens, window fan units, A/C units and screen doors.
- During classroom transitions from one classroom to another, or during other transitions.
- During times of stress or when escalation triggers arise (typically the child/adult will bolt)
effects on the family
Wandering: Effects On The Family

Living under great stress; Lowered quality of life; Unable to leave home; **Sleep deprivation**; Lack of support/understanding/resources; Fear of accusations of neglect - CPS or Police involvement

- **58%** report wandering/elopement as the most stressful of ASD behaviors
- **62%** of families with children who elope were prevented from attending/enjoying activities outside the home due to fear of wandering
- **40%** of parents had suffered sleep disruption due to fear of elopement

*Interactive Autism Network Research Report ASD Elopement, 2011*
What We Often Hear:

“My house is like Fort Knox.”

“It’s Alcatraz at our house.”

“Our house is a fortress.”

“We lock down our windows have keyed locks on both sides of the door.”

“It’s a fire hazard, but my child would more likely get hit by a car.”

“I can never die.”

“I have to live just one day longer than my son.”
Autism Wandering/Elopement Stories

“Any advice or help you can offer would be gratefully received. My son is 11 and has been running all his life. Our house is usually locked down and a complete fire hazard with all windows and doors locked.

We didn't realize he had gone until the police arrived. He knows to keep quiet and we just didn't hear him go. He was trying again last night, shaking the front door in frustration at 2am shouting 'where's the key.'”
Autism Wandering/Elopement: Stories

I have an autistic grandson who wanders off at every chance. He has twice been pulled from a body of water in Florida. He has been picked up wandering in the street more than once. He has no understanding of the dangers of traffic or strangers.

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I lost valuable time with my other child, not to mention many heartaches in parking lots and public parks. Oh yes, there's that stigma of the harness for her safety and my sanity.

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I am a paraeducator at the elementary level, and see this a lot!

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My son has wandered at airports, on ferries, in hotels, it's terrifying. He waits until your attention is elsewhere for a moment, then he's gone.
Comments from a parent:

“His main stimulus for eloping is to go see dogs, even though we have a service dog for him.”

“Our house is a fortress: punch keycode locks (double-sided) on all the doors, windows bolted from opening too far, fence in the backyard faces in so he can't climb it, etc. His latest episode was actually picking (not learning the keycode) the lock with a knife to escape!”

“Being a 14 year old, who is very tall for his age, our fear is that he will enter the wrong house pursuing dogs and become seriously injured.”

“My son has wandered at airports, on ferries, in hotels, it's terrifying. He waits until your attention is elsewhere for a moment, then he's gone.”
Autism Moms Have Stress Similar To Combat Soldiers

By MICHELLE DIAMENT
November 10, 2009

Mothers of adolescents and adults with autism experience chronic stress comparable to combat soldiers and struggle with frequent fatigue and work interruptions, new research finds. These moms also spend significantly more time caregiving than moms of those without disabilities.
effects on family

vicious risk cycle
case studies
Case Study: Prolonged Exposure

- Logan Mitcheltree - Age 9
- South Williamsport, PA
- December 2004
- Slipped out of home unnoticed
- Found frozen to death in the woods after a 3-day search
- **Tracking device likely would have prevented lethal outcome**
Case Study: Prolonged Exposure

- James Delorey – Age 7
- South Bar, Nova Scotia
- December 2009
- Slipped out of home with his dog
- Found unconscious after 2-day search
- Died that evening in hospital
- Nova Scotia now has Project Lifesaver Tracking
Case Study: Extraordinary non-lethal outcome

- Robbie Wood – Age 8
- Hanover County, VA
- October 2011
- Found alive nearly six days after he wandered away from his family in a wooded park.
- Found in a fetal position in quarry
- Suffered minor injuries
- *Project Lifesaver was available, but Robbie was not enrolled.*
Case Study: Struck, Killed by Vehicle

- Sean Taglione – Age 12
- Troy, MI
- January 2012
- Struck and killed by Vehicle.
- Wandered from home at around 6:00 PM.
- **Police were called; while a search was being done, officers came across an accident scene.**
- Sean had run into the road directly in the path of a vehicle and was struck.
- Pronounced dead shortly after midnight.
Case Study: Found Safe

- Scotty Meyer – Age 5
- Prescott, WI
- July, 2012
- Slipped away from home during a moment of distraction
- Found alive by a volunteer searcher the next day near railroad tracks and a river
- *Project Lifesaver was available, but Scotty was not enrolled.*
Case Study: Drowning, Creek

- Benjy Heil – Age 7
- Wisconsin Rapids, WI
- June 2007
- Slipped out of his home
- 6-day search ended when Benjy’s body was found in a nearby creek
- Benjy had been seen by a neighbor.
- **Endangered Missing Advisory or AMBER Alert** may have prevented worst outcome
Case Study: Drowning, Pool

- Ashley Brock – Age 6
- Brunswick, ME
- May 2008
- Slipped out of yard during family gathering
- Drowned in neighbor’s unsecured pool
- **Searchers missed her at first check**
Case Study: Drowning, River

- Adam Benhamama – Age 3
- Laval, Quebec
- April 2011
- Slipped away while playing outside at friend’s home
- **Search lasted three days and was called off**
- Adam’s body was found 5 ½ weeks later

68% of autism drowning deaths in the U.S. over last three years were in a creek, river, pond or lake.
Case Study: Murder, Stranger Encounter

- Leiby Kletzky – Age 9
- Brooklyn, New York
- July 2011
- Walked home from day camp for first time on his own.
- Parent prepped him, practiced route.
- Reported missing after he did not return home from day camp.
- **Had become lost, asked man for directions.**
- Dismembered body found in man’s apartment.
Case Study: Extraordinary Non-Lethal Outcome

- Joshua Robb – Age 8
- San Bernardino County, CA
- September 2011
- Squeezed through the metal bars of his school playground and ran into a nearby forest.
- Missing overnight during lightning storms.
- Dehydration was noted.
- The boy’s favorite music was played to draw him to safety.
Case Study: Stranger and Police Encounter

- Connor – Age 13
- Cary, NC
- Multiple goal-directed and bolting incidents from three different schools
- Will flee following certain triggers
- Two identical school incidents involving unescorted transitions from speech therapy to classroom (fire code prohibits locked doors)
- Picked up by a man in a car after wandering from school playground
- School did not contact police
- Police had to search for where he belonged, did not recognize his autism, or note autism in police report
- **ID would have spared the additional trauma**
Case Study: Goal-Directed Wandering

- Aly – Age 13
- Portsmouth, RI
- Drawn to water
- Also a "bolter"
- Home “secure”
- Pulled out screen, jumped 7 feet down into our back yard
- Neighbor brought her home

- NEVER HAVE A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY
prevention resources
BECOME AWAARE

With little public understanding about autism-related wandering, coupled with a lack of resources to combat occurrences, drowning deaths associated with autism elopement remain a leading cause of fatalities among children and adults on the autism spectrum. Although no formal data exists about the number of wandering incidents per year, cases are becoming increasingly common and awareness alone can play a major role in reducing occurrences. To learn more, click here.

RESEARCH

Autism is a diagnosis that represents many symptoms, some of which can lead to serious health and safety risks, including death. In 2008, Danish researchers found that the mortality rate among the autism population is twice as high as the general population. In 2001, a California research team attributed elevated death rates in large part to drowning. Drowning, prolonged exposure, and other wandering-related factors remain among the top causes of death within the autism population. Currently, no estimates exist and no formal methods are in place to track how many children and adults wander per year, but in a 2007 online poll through the National Autism Association, 92% of parents reported that their child/ren with autism have a tendency to wander.

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE WANDERS

- Call 911
- Implement your Family Wandering Emergency Plan (FWEP)
- Click here for more information

QUICK LINKS

- Autism Risk Management
- Project Lifesaver
- A Child Is Missing
- AWAARE Brochure
- Social Stories

NEWS, ALERTS, BLOGS

- News Stories
- Join our Facebook Group

DOWNLOAD & SHARE
prevention resources

NAA’s Big Red Safety Toolkits for Caregivers & First Responders at AWAARE.org
• **Go to AWAARE.org** – our site dedicated to autism-related wandering

• **Teach Your Child About Wandering Dangers:** dangers of traffic, water, and encounters with strangers; how to respond if they find themselves alone or lost. Use lingo they respond to, favorite characters, props, visual prompts if needed

• **Home Security is a Must.** Install secure dead bolt locks; Install a home security alarm system; Place hook and eye locks on all doors above child’s reach; Fence yard; Safeguard pools – self-latching gates, motion sensors; Use Baby monitor; Get inexpensive (but very effective) door chimes
TEACH YOUR CHILD TO SWIM!

YMCA Locations that offer Special Needs Swimming Instructions
(Sorted alphabetically, by State)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YMCA</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Zip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Community YMCA</td>
<td>Anchorage</td>
<td>AK</td>
<td>99507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YMCA of Calhoun County</td>
<td>Aniston</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>36201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham YMCA</td>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>35242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hogan Family YMCA</td>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>35758</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glendale- Peoria YMCA</td>
<td>Goodyear</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>85306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest Valley Regional YMCA</td>
<td>Phoenix</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>85048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahwatukee Foothills YMCA</td>
<td>Prescott</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>85301</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prescott YMCA</td>
<td>Tucson</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>85710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ott Family YMCA</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Understand and Avoid Triggers:

- What type of wandering best describes your child?
- What triggers may cause your child to flee?
- Work on calming/de-escalation methods to help your child cope with triggers and provide alternatives to running/fleeing
- Address known triggers with other caregivers and advocate for de-escalation techniques to be implemented in all settings
- Understand your child’s goal – water, trains, park, favorite food, etc.
- Allow safe exploration of obsessions in supervised, safe environment
- Document specific fascinations and share with first-responders, school staff, family, neighbors, etc.
prevention resources

• **Use a “Tag, You’re It” System:** Many incidents occur during a family gathering, camping trip, school function or transition. Encourage parents to establish a “tag” strategy to identify the adult who is primary supervisor during a period of time. Use physical tag prompt, eye contact and verbal acknowledgment. Make sure tagged caregiver understands responsibilities and expectations.

• **Use a “Bookends” Approach:** If hiking or walking outdoors, make sure two responsible adults act as bookends – one adult on each side of the child, or one in front and one behind.

• **Use a Double Shoulder or Arm Lock:** Maintain physical contact when walking through parking lots or other busy public places.
STAY EXTRA VIGILANT...

MOVING TO A NEW HOME? We’ve seen multiple deaths occur following a move to a new apartment/home.

VISITING A RELATIVE OR FRIENDS? We’ve seen multiple deaths occur during a visit to another home setting.

HIGH ALERT DAYS:
Mother’s Day
Father’s Day
Memorial Day
July Fourth
Labor Day

ALWAYS USE “TAG, YOU’RE IT” SYSTEM
• **Wearable Identification:** A medical ID bracelet or other wearable ID is crucial. State-issued IDs are an option, as are Shoe ID tags. Temporary tattoos are ideal for vacations, amusement parks, field trips.

• **Alert Trusted Neighbors:** It is recommended that caregivers plan a brief visit with trusted neighbors to introduce child or provide a photograph. Knowing neighbors can help reduce the risks associated with wandering.

• **Adhere Visual Prompts to Doors, Windows and Gates.** Stop Signs can be a very effective reminder for children with autism. Simply Google “Stop Sign”, download the image and print.
Develop a Family Wandering Emergency Plan

- Download a Family Wandering Emergency Plan (FWEP) at AWAARE.org
- Designate an emergency point person to help contact neighbors, police, and assist in making arrangements for other children, provide them with copy of your FWEP
- List the places your child may be likely to go, and areas of potential danger
- Assign “search angels” with designated locations
- Keep phone numbers for “search angels”, law enforcement, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and local media on hand
Talk with Local First Responders

*Providing key information before an incident occurs may improve response*

- Download a First Responder Alert Form at AWAARE.org
- Provide name of your child, current photo, physical description
- Provide complete contact information for all caregivers
- List favorite places or attractions, include map with dangerous locations highlighted
- Note likes, dislikes fears, triggers and de-escalation techniques
- Explain your child’s method of communication if non-verbal, ability to respond to his/her name
- Provide a copy of NAA’s Big Red Safety Toolkit for First Responders
AUTISM ELOPEMENT ALERT FORM
PERSON-SPECIFIC INFORMATION FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

Individual’s Name ____________________________________________
(First) (M.I.) (Last)

Address: ___________________________________________________
(Street) (City) (State) (Zip)

Date of Birth __________________ Age ______ Preferred Name ____________

Does the Individual live alone? __________

Individual’s Physical Description:
____ Male ______ Female Height: _______ Weight: _______ Eye color: _______ Hair color: _______

Scars or other identifying marks: __________________________________________________________

Other Relevant Medical Conditions in addition to Autism (check all that apply):
____ No Sense of Danger ______ Blind ______ Deaf ______ Non-Verbal ______ Mental Retardation
____ Prone to Seizures ______ Cognitive Impairment ______ Other

If Other, Please explain: __________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

Prescription Medications needed:
____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

Sensory or dietary issues, if any:
____________________________________________________________________________________
Prevention at school, camp, other settings:

• Ask what protocols are in place to prevent and respond to wandering incidents and other emergencies
• Periodically ask teachers, aides, counselors, school administrators, residential caretaker, etc. if your child has wandered
• “Has my child ever wandered outside school building?”
• “Has my child ever fled from a teacher or been left unattended during transitions?”
• Take a tour of the school/facility and note possible areas of concern, ask for each area to be addressed
• Write a letter requesting that you immediately be informed of any wandering incident, prevention and response protocols – include this information in IEP
• Consider asking physician about wandering diagnosis code V40.31 (Wandering in Diseases Classified Elsewhere) went into effect in October 2011.
Sample IEP Letter available at AWAARE.org:

My child, Alyssa attends XXX School and has a diagnosis of autism. She is prone to wandering, elopement and fleeing incidents. **Aly’s sense of danger is impaired and all measures must be taken to ensure her safety.**

Due to Aly’s tendency to wander, **she requires constant one-on-one adult supervision and should never be allowed to independently transition to or from any school setting.**

Aly wears a Project Lifesaver bracelet that emits a unique radio signal once per second. Should Aly wander from adult supervision, the **Fire Department should be called IMMEDIATELY** to respond with receiving equipment that can locate Aly’s wristband. School staff is not to delay in contacting the Fire Department in an attempt to locate Aly on their own.

**We require immediate parental notification** at [phone #] of ANY wandering incident, including incidents where Aly may have wandered unsupervised within the school building. **All incidents must be documented in writing** including when and how the occurrence took place so that appropriate prevention methods can be developed and implemented.
prevention resources

TRACKING TECHNOLOGY

• Radio Frequency/GPS/Cellular

• Local law enforcement agencies may use Project Lifesaver, CareTrak or LoJack SafetyNet programs – check to see if they are available

• Several GPS devices on retail market – caregiver implemented
### Prevention Resources

**Tracking Technology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Radio Frequency</th>
<th>GPS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pros:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run by Trained Law Enforcement</td>
<td>Geofencing alerts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterproof</td>
<td>Available in most areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Battery Life/No Charging</td>
<td>Cons:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not waterproof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child frequently unprotected while unit is charging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caregivers are primary search team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cons:</strong></td>
<td>Subscription/Monthly Fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No geo-fencing alert capability</td>
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## tracking technology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PROJECT LIFESAVER</th>
<th>LOJACK SAFETynet</th>
<th>VARIOUS GPS UNITS</th>
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<tr>
<td>TECHNOLOGY</td>
<td>radio frequency</td>
<td>radio frequency</td>
<td>A-GPS</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIRECT TO CONSUMER</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>BATTERY LIFE</td>
<td>30 days</td>
<td>30 days</td>
<td>average 2-3 days</td>
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<tr>
<td>WATERPROOF</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEARABLE</td>
<td>yes - wristband</td>
<td>yes - wristband</td>
<td>depends on unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REMOVE TO CHARGE</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEOFENCING/PERIMETER NOTIFICATIONS</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOS BUTTON</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>depends on unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAREGIVER MONITORING/LIVE TRACKING ONLINE</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>POLICE INVOLVEMENT NECESSARY</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
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<tr>
<td>SET UP FEE</td>
<td>$300</td>
<td>$99</td>
<td>$69.95 - $300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONTHLY FEE</td>
<td>None for first year. Agencies may charge small fee for battery and wristband replacements.</td>
<td>$30</td>
<td>$20 - $40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
prevention resources

TRACKING TECHNOLOGY

• What is Geofencing?

• Customizable parameters

• Electronic notifications via cell call, text or email

• Multiple geofences are possible for home, school, camp, etc.
prevention resources

ESSENTIALS

✓ Locks
✓ Door/Window Chimes & Alarms
✓ Stop Signs (awaare.org)
✓ Swimming Lessons (nationalautism.org)
✓ ID’s
✓ Tracking device if necessary
✓ ICD-9 if necessary
✓ Social Stories (awaare.org)
✓ Family Emergency Plan (awaare.org)
✓ External safeguards/protocols
✓ FINDING OUT THE WHY
✓ ADDRESSING THE WHY
prevention resources
CAREGIVER CHECKLIST

I Have Secured My Home (Adequate Locks, Hook & Eye Chains, Inexpensive Door Chimes, Stop Signs on all doors/windows/gates, Pools & Neighbors’ Pools secured, Home Security System if able, Baby Monitors, Fenced Yard if able)
I’ve Identified Reasons Why My Child Wanders/Bolts & Am Teaching My Child About Dangers and Ways to Stay Safe
I Have Enrolled My Child Into Swimming Lessons (YMCA listing of special-needs lessons @ nationalautism.org)
I Have Looked Into Tracking Devices (projectlifesaver.org; safetynetbylojack.com)
I Have Alerted My Trusted Neighbors (neighbor-notification sheets at awaare.org)
I Have Alerted My Local First Responders About My Child, Nearby Water Sources, & Reverse 911 (free for law enforcement -- achildismissing.org; first-responder forms at awaare.org)
I Have Talked To My Child’s Doctor About the Wandering Diagnostic Code V40.31 (use code only if necessary)
I Have Obtained A Wearable ID For My Child That Contains All Of My Contact Information
I Have Completed My Family Wandering Emergency Plan (available at awaare.org)
I Will Initiate A “Tag, You’re It” System During Family Gatherings, Commotion, Transitions
I Will Monitor Any Changes In My Home’s Security, Especially When Warmer Weather Or Seasonal Transitions Affect My Home’s Layout (Windows, Screen Doors/Windows, Window Units)
I Will Remain On High Alert After Moving To A New Home, On Holidays, Vacations, During Outdoor Activities & Visits To Friends/Family’s Homes, Public Places, Parks, Other Non-Home Settings
I Have Addressed Wandering At School, Summer Camp, and Other External Settings
I Continue To Reassess As My Child Grows and/or Learns New Ways To Possibly Exit
I Continue To Document Actions Taken To Protect My Loved One
incident response
✓ Stay calm
✓ Call 911
✓ Implement your FWEP
SEARCH WATER FIRST
first responder resources
Cover Story
FBI Magazine
Nov/Dec 2012
Missing Children With Special Needs

Finding and safely recovering a missing child with special needs often presents a unique and difficult challenge for families, law enforcement, first responders, and search teams. The behaviors and actions of a missing child with special needs are often much different than those of a missing nonaffected child. While the behaviors will differ from child-to-child, missing children with certain special needs may:

- Wander away, run away, or bolt from a safe environment
- Exhibit a diminished sense of fear causing them to engage in high-risk behavior such as seeking water or active roadways
- Elude or hide from search teams
- Seek small or tightly enclosed spaces concealing themselves from search teams
- Be unable to respond to rescuers

A special-needs condition may be characterized by debilitating physical impairments, social impairments, cognitive impairments, or communication challenges.

Heightened Risk Factors Associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders

One such cause for these types of impairments and challenges is autism. Generally speaking, no two children with autism are alike — each child is unique. The symptoms vary from the most severely affected child who may be nonverbal and low functioning, to those with milder forms, such as Asperger’s Syndrome or Pervasive Developmental Disorder—Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), who may be higher-functioning. This does not suggest all missing children diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome or PDD-NOS are not at risk — the risk factors must be weighed for each individual child regardless of the diagnosis. It is also important to note that the chronological age of individuals with autism is often irrelevant to their level of functioning. For example a 15-year-old may have the cognitive function of a much younger child.

For reasons not entirely clear, missing children with autism, especially those who are severely affected, have a tendency to wander or elope from a safe environment and will often seek bodies of water such as streams, ponds, lakes, rivers, creeks, storm-water retention/ detention basins, and backyard and public swimming pools. According to the National Autism Association, in the United States between 2009 and 2011, accidental drowning accounted for 91% of the total deaths reported in children with autism ages 14 and younger subsequent to wandering or elopement. Children with autism may also exhibit other interests or fascinations posing similar dangers such as going to active roadways/highways, trains, heavy equipment, fire trucks, roadway signs, bright lights, and traffic signals.

In the event of an extended missing episode the children are also at risk of exposure to weather and environmental hazards; dehydration; lack of adequate nutrition such as food and medication; traffic-related injuries/accidents; falls, especially down steep terrain; and even potential encounters with child molesters or others who would intentionally try to take advantage of or harm them.

Because of the tendency for children with autism to wander or elope it is vitally important to quickly identify the unique interests of the child and create

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This information is taken from a directive developed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) with the assistance of the National Autism Association (NAA)

- TREAT EACH CASE AS CRITICAL
- If child has a tracking device, immediately dispatch personnel with receiving equipment to last known location
- Immediately dispatch personnel to search and stand-by any nearby bodies of water
- Identify and dispatch personnel to other hazards in the area and known areas of interest for the child
- Utilize Reverse 9-1-1 program to alert the local community via a rapid-response neighborhood telephone alert system.
- Establish containment of any suspected routes the child may take
- For missing children that do not meet requirements for an Amber Alert, consider issuing an Endangered Missing Alert
incident response

• Children will sometimes seek out small, tight spaces.
• **Avoid known triggers.** If child fears loud noises or dogs, consider this during your search. Children with autism may sometimes avoid search team members because of their fears.
• **Use “favorite things” to attract child** in hiding or to engage child when found. Does the child like Winnie the Pooh? PLAY AUDIO. Does the child have a favorite song or phrase? PLAY OR SAY IT. Favorite food? SAY IT. “Time to get ice cream!”
• Each child with autism is different - are they attracted to anything unique? Train Tracks? Park swings? Museum?
• Night-time can be used to project lights, patterns, or favorite visuals that may draw in a child with autism.
• Our kids can survive out there a long time. Don’t give up too soon!

• **Listen to the parents.** They have critical information that could help find the child...
Case Study: Drowning, Pond

• Mason Medlam – Age 5
• Colwich, KS
• July 2010
• Slipped out a window left open for a fan
• **Mom was at work, told police to go to neighbor’s pond**
• Mom went straight to pond where she found her son’s lifeless body
• Mason was revived, but passed away in the hospital two days later
Case Study: Extraordinary Non-Lethal Outcome

- Ryan Pham – Age 7
- Australia
- February 2012
- Wandered away while visiting a friend’s home
- Sparked major overnight search effort
- Found naked in a creek
- **Rescued by a News Crew who heard mom speak about his “fascination with water.”**
first responder resources

- **NCMEC, TEAM ADAM**
  1.800.THE.LOST | missingkids.com

- **Reverse 9-1-1 – A Child Is Missing**
  Geo-targeted Local Phone Alerts; Free to Law Enforcement
  AChildIsMissing.org | Contact Claudia Corrigan | Phone: 954.763.1288 | E-mail: ClaudiaC@achildismissing.org

- **Project Lifesaver**
  Chief Gene Saunders | projectlifesaver.org

- **Take Me Home Database Software**; Free to Law Enforcement
  You enter detailed information on individuals at risk in the community.
  Can be searched by name or description.
  Contact Officer Jimmy Donohoe at 850.436.5416 or at jdonohoe@ci.pensacola.fl.us
first responder resources

WORKING TO PREVENT WANDERING INCIDENTS AND DEATHS WITHIN THE AUTISM COMMUNITY

AWAARE x COLLABORATION

contact us | promote this initiative  

HOME :: AUTISM & WANDERING :: FAQS :: SAFETY MATERIALS :: ABOUT US :: RESOURCES

AUTISM WANDERING AWARENESS ALERTS RESPONSE EDUCATION

SAFETY MATERIALS

NAA has created two new safety toolkits that can be downloaded here:

Caregiver Toolkit | First Responder Toolkit
Questions?

VISIT US ONLINE:
www.NationalAutism.org
www.AWAARE.org

CONTACT US:
e-mail: naa@nationalautism.org
phone: 877-622-2884