

SAFETY AND ASD

Natasha Barber



Individuals with autism **die by accidental injury** at a rate

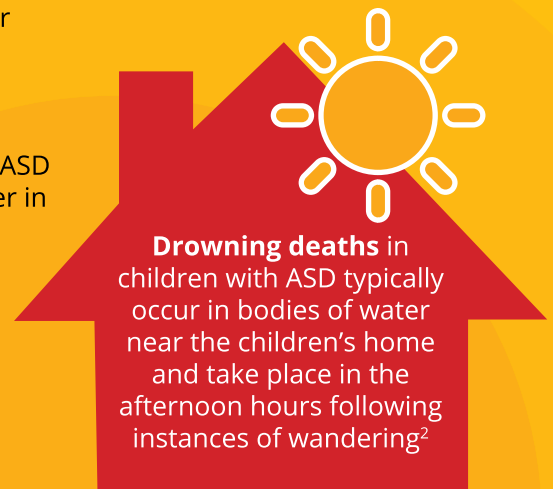
3x
higher than the
general population³

49%
of children with
ASD **wander**¹



Accidental drowning after
wandering accounts for

90%
of deaths in children with ASD
aged 14 years and younger in
the U.S.¹



Drowning deaths in
children with ASD typically
occur in bodies of water
near the children's home
and take place in the
afternoon hours following
instances of wandering²

More
than **1/3**
of children with ASD are
not able to communicate
their name, address or
phone number¹



Children with ASD are

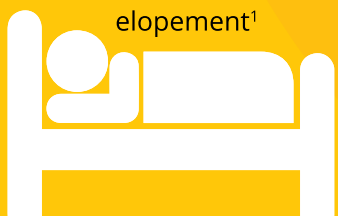
8x
more likely to elope
than their neurotypical
siblings (ages 7 to 10)¹



2/3

of parents of elopers
reported that their missing
children had a "close call"
with a traffic injury¹

40%
of parents with a child
on the spectrum suffer
sleep disturbances
due to fear of child
elopement¹

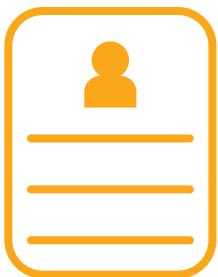


1. nationalautismassociation.org
2. Guan, J. and Li, G. (2017). Characteristics of Unintentional Drowning Deaths In Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Injury Epidemiology*, 4:32.
3. Guan, J. and Li, G. (2017). Injury Mortality in Individuals with Autism. *American Journal of Public Health*, 107(5):791-793.

While child safety is a concern for all parents, it is significantly magnified for parents whose child has autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Children with ASD often do not have an age-appropriate understanding of risk and danger. One of the biggest safety concerns for parents with a child on the spectrum is that the child wanders. If you have a wanderer, you know that your child will wander off the instant you turn your head for even one moment. This poses a significant risk for children as they may quickly find themselves lost, on a busy street, or in a body of water, unbeknownst to the parent. The statistics related to children with autism who wander are staggering. The National Autism Association reports that drowning, due to wandering, is the leading cause of death among children with autism spectrum disorder. The association also reports that two out of three parents with a child that wanders report having had a “close call” with traffic. Parents with children on the spectrum need to implement careful safety measures to keep them out of harm’s way.

The safety measures that are put in place for toddlers should be implemented for children with autism. This includes locking away cleaning products, securing furniture, turning down the temperature of hot water, hiding electrical cords, placing safety plugs in electrical outlets and keeping small objects out of reach. In addition, you may wish to consider the following safety measures to protect your child.

FOR CHILDREN WHO WANDER



Use Child Identification

It is important that your child wear personal identification at all times. Children prone to wandering could easily find themselves lost and have no way to communicate their name or address. There are many products available to provide child identification. While some parents have their child wear an ID bracelet or necklace, children can find these invasive and uncomfortable. Another suggestion is to put an ID tag on a child’s shoe, through the shoelaces. Personalized iron-on stickers are also available that can go on hats, shirts, backpacks, lunchboxes, shoes, and on anything else the child might wear. It is important to list these key pieces of information on the ID tag, if possible:

- Name
- Parent’s phone number
- Autism
- Non-verbal
- Flight risk

It can also be helpful in certain situations to write your phone number on the top of your child’s hand, and then cover it with liquid Band-Aid. This will last all day and act as a tattoo. Decide what works best for your child and your family.



Safeguard all Doors and Windows

Windows and doors that lead to the outdoors must be safeguarded. This is how wandering children can leave the house, unannounced, and find themselves in imminent danger. There are various forms of door and window locks that range in both price and complexity. Deadbolts and chain locks can be used, but most parents find that these are easily unlocked by determined children. Door alarms are effective for alerting parents that their child has opened the door. However, by the time the parent gets to the opened door, the child could be on a busy street or in the backyard pool. Depending on the child’s age and ability, electronic keyless door locks can be particularly effective. When a parent installs an electronic key lock on the inside of the door, it means a code is required in order to leave the house. Each child has different needs and abilities. Families must work to find the solutions that are effective for them.



Use Visuals

Most children on the spectrum are visual learners. This means that visual aids are an excellent way to reinforce unsafe items. Stop signs can be printed and put on every door and window. This will not deter determined wanderers, but it will be a constant visual reminder that they must stop at doors and windows.



Inform Others about Your Child’s Autism

Smart911 is a US National registry that lets you provide local emergency response units with any information you would like them to know about your child. You could let them know that your child has autism, and that he/she is non-verbal and is a flight risk. In case of a 9-1-1 call from your house or your neighbourhood for a wandering child, the proper authorities would have your child’s identification readily available. You can register here: <https://www.smart911.com>. You can also fill out Autism Emergency Contact Forms that can be given to your local police station, neighbors, babysitters and even bus drivers. This will alert them to know that your child is a flight risk, how to get a hold of you in an emergency or wandering event, and that your child may or may not be able to communicate.



Detect Night Wandering

Many children on the spectrum will wander at night. Parents can buy inexpensive motion detectors and put them outside their child's bedroom. Certain detectors will notify parents in another room when motion is detected. They can then safely take their child back to bed.

FOR CHILDREN WHO CLIMB



Many children on the spectrum simply do not understand the dangers of climbing. Often they are seeking stimulation, and spinning and climbing can fill these needs. All furniture in the house must be secured, especially dressers, bookshelves, televisions, appliances and any other large furniture. If the furniture were to fall on your child, the results could be catastrophic. Another strategy to minimize risk is to remove any unnecessary furniture from a room, or to hide furniture, such as a dresser, in a closet.

VEHICLE SAFETY



Autism ID in Case of an Accident

If you were to get into a car accident, it's important for first responders to be able to identify that your child has autism. Seatbelt covers/cozies are becoming popular and can be placed around the seatbelt where your child sits. Parents can also put a small ID card in the glovebox or in their wallet, as this is one of the first places a first responder looks for ID at the scene of an accident. There are also car decals and car window signs that could identify that your child has autism, and that he/she is a flight risk and is non-verbal. This is important information for first responders so that they can keep your child safe.



Keeping the Seatbelt On

Many children with autism are like the great magician Harry Houdini and seem to be able to escape from any restraint. There are seatbelt buckle covers that prevent children from unlocking their seatbelt, but a determined child can likely escape from a seatbelt without the latch. For very determined children, there are seatbelt harnesses that latch onto the seat rails embedded in every vehicle. These are usually used for car seats. The harnesses are certified to be used as seatbelts if configured correctly. They are similar to the harnesses used on buses for special needs children.

While parents cannot prevent every skinned knee or bump, they should do everything in their power to minimize the risk of extreme situations that can turn into tragedy. It will be challenging but eventually, families will find what works for them. Be persistent and think outside the box until you and your child are comfortable and safe.

FREE SAFETY KITS

The organization Autism Mom Knows Safety (Natasha Barber) is committed to helping those with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who have wandering tendencies and wander or elope from a safe environment. These individuals may be non-verbal or unable to recognize danger. The AMKS Safety Kit (download or printed copy sent by mail) is a free-of-charge toolkit that is given to autism families to spark the safety conversation in their home. It is meant to educate, raise awareness and share simple tools for autism safety that can help prevent wandering. The resources can also help others bring your child safely home if he/she wanders out of the house. Access your free AMKS Safety kit here: <https://www.amks.life/>



Natasha Barber is a mother of two boys. Her youngest is on the autism spectrum and has influenced her to form a non-profit organization called "Autism Mom Knows Safety." Natasha has appeared in numerous parenting blogs such as "Mobile Mommies" and "Paradigm Behavior." Several years ago, she launched a campaign that involves sending free safety toolkits to caregivers worldwide. The toolkit offers practical resources to help prevent wandering and elopement of children with ASD.



Natasha has been recognized for her work with awards from the Michigan Association of Rehabilitation Organizations (2017) and from the CAREERS & the disABLED magazine (2018). Natasha is the author of Tommy's Lessons, a children's book series. Books in the series include *My Tomato*, *Guacamole and Onion Sandwich*, *My Magic Pet Fish*, *My Super Cool Ant Farm* and *The Waiting Song*, a book written to help children with autism learn how to wait.

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A yellow diamond-shaped sign with a thick orange border. The sign contains the text "CHILD WITH AUTISM ON BOARD" in bold, black, uppercase letters, centered within the diamond.

**CHILD WITH
AUTISM
ON BOARD**

EMERGENCY CONTACT FORM

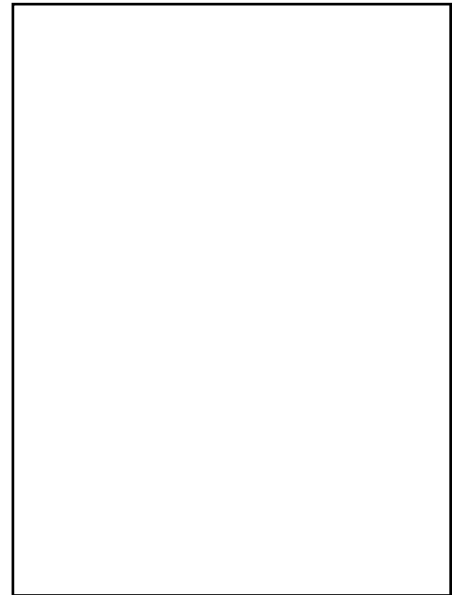
CHILD'S NAME: _____

HAIR COLOR: _____ HEIGHT: _____

AGE: _____ WEIGHT: _____

.....
METHOD OF COMMUNICATION (VERBAL & NONVERBAL)

ADDRESS: _____



.....

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY CONTACT:

EMERGENCY CONTACT

NAME: _____

RELATIONSHIP
TO CHILD: _____

MOBILE: _____

HOME: _____

WORK: _____

ALTERNATE

CONTACT NAME: _____

RELATIONSHIP TO
CHILD: _____

MOBILE: _____

HOME: _____

WORK: _____

.....
ALLERGIES: _____

**POTENTIALLY
LIFE-THREATENING**



MEDICATIONS: _____

