



WANDERING AND DROWNING PREVENTION

Wandering can occur anywhere at any time.

Children with autism typically wander or bolt from a safe setting to get to something of interest, such as water, the park, or train tracks; or to get away from something, such as loud noises, commotion, animals, or bright lights.

Dangers associated with wandering include drowning, getting struck by a vehicle, falling from a high place, dehydration, hypothermia, abduction, victimization, and assault. Drowning often occurs as a result of wandering.

- Individuals with autism are typically drawn to water as it makes them feel relaxed and calm.

Preventative Measures

- Enroll your child in swim lessons- Final swimming lessons should be with clothes and shoes on.
- Be aware of bodies of water nearby; use Google maps aerial view
- **Address known goals-** allow child to explore obsessions under safe supervision in a safe environment (for example, if your child's goal is to get to water, try scheduling consistent "water play" times each day, or at the same time each week)
- Create a **Support Team** of dependable family/friends/neighbors who are generally available and can help look
 - Assign each a designated place to search prior to incident-Start with child's preferred places
- Enroll neighbors and close friends/family in www.achildmissing.org database
 - If child goes missing, it sends an automated call to homes in your neighborhood
- During walks, hiking, or any other outdoor activities, use the "Bookends" approach – one adult on each side of the child.
- Inform summer school/daycare/babysitter/teacher (new to child) of child's wandering tendencies
- Give child job to do when out of the home- focus on job vs wandering

Teach Your Child About Wandering Dangers

- Teach them about the dangers of wandering into traffic and water, as well as encounters with strangers. Use various methods to teach them how to respond if they find themselves alone or lost.
- Use the types of language/lingo they like and would respond to. Use favorite characters, topics, props and visual prompts in your explanation if necessary.
- Social Stories
- Make a simple map of the neighborhood and take your child around to show where he/she can go.
- Discuss wandering dangers and safety tips daily; read over social story daily
- Establish a "safe spot" at home and out in the community (i.e. the front porch is the "safe spot" at home and the child cannot go past it without an adult; in the community, the shopping cart is the "safe spot" and the child must hold onto it until back in the car)



First Responders

- Introduce your child to them at stations so your child is familiar with them and knows where to go when lost/for safety and so the first responders are familiar with your child
- Leave info sheet with:
 - child's name, picture, and address
 - parents' name and phone numbers
 - another emergency contact
 - communication level
 - interests and what calms them
 - warnings about response to sound/light/touch if applicable
 - List the main places your child may likely go within the neighborhood as well as the most dangerous areas

Neighbors

- Alert neighbors, especially those with pools or on a lake, of wandering tendencies and water seeking behaviors
 - Introduce them to your child so they are familiar with one another and to increase your child's compliance
 - Leave your phone number with neighbors

Secure Your Home

- Installed secure locks. (make sure that you can still easily escape in an emergency)
- Installed a home security alarm system or inexpensive battery-operated alarms or wind chimes on doors and windows (available at stores like Walmart and Radio Shack) or bells on your door handles.
- Placed hook and eye locks on all doors, above your child's reach.
- Fence your yard.
- Place tape lines on the sidewalk that your child sees and knows that he/she is not allowed to cross when alone
- Adhere printable STOP SIGNS to doors, windows and other exits, such as gates.
 - Stop sign- can also teach that this means to stop and that he/she can only leave/go with an adult
 - ID tag -Bracelet, Necklace, Shoe tag
 - Tracking devices (Project Lifesaver, LoJack SafetyNet, AngelSense, Care Trak Systems, EmFinders)

Secure Your Pool

- Empty inflatable or portable pools immediately after use and store upside down and out of your child's reach; these type of pools can pose a drowning risk
- If you own a pool, fence your pool. Use gates that self-close and self-latch higher than your child's reach.
- Remove all toys or items of interest from the pool when not in use.
- Ensure all pools and spas have compliant drain covers.
- Teach your child to stay away from pool drains.
- Install an alarm on the door leading from the house to the pool.
- Keep pool and spa covers in working order.
- Have life-saving equipment such as life rings or reaching poles available for use.
- Teach your child to get to the pool steps or the pool edge; in various pools in the community (generalization).
- Neighbors with pools should be made aware of these safety precautions and your child's tendency to wander.

Special thanks to Laura Golden, OTR, OTD and IDD Council Member for her preparation of this document.