



WANDERING: Tips for Keeping Loved Ones with Autism Safe

Do not isolate yourself: Talk to neighbors about children or family members with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their challenges, in case they wander out of your home or yard. Give them your contact information. Consider asking them, and any other friends and family who live nearby, whether they would be willing to help you search for your child in an emergency situation. Keep a list handy of names and phone numbers for those who agree.

Meet first responders: Go to your local police station, fire station, and EMS to talk about your loved one with autism and give officials a current photo and a personal information handout. (We have an example you can use [here](#).) If possible, bring children with autism so they can see people from whom it would be safe to seek help. Adults with ASD and those with high-functioning autism or Asperger's Syndrome may have sophisticated spoken language but still not respond properly to officers. It is important to teach these individuals what to say if they are lost or hurt and to self-advocate. You can let first responders know that ASNC also offers training sessions for them if they would like to learn more about how to interact with individuals with ASD. Our Autism Resource Specialists have found that when requests come from families, rather than our organization, first responders are much more receptive to having the training.

Register your child: NC counties keep special-needs registries, and families can register their loved one. If a 911 call comes in from the family's home, the registry automatically pulls up important information for first responders.

In your home: Consider putting safety items in place such as a home security alarm system, window locks, and alarms on windows and doors to alert you if someone is trying to open them. For some children, a simple lock is effective if it is out of their reach. Sometimes putting a "stop" sign on doors and windows can prevent a person with ASD from going any farther. Consider putting a fence around your home with locked gates. If you have a pool, make sure the pool is not accessible without supervision. Teaching your child to swim is important, but it isn't a guarantee that it will save someone from drowning.

At school/day care: Discuss with your teachers your concerns about your child's safety. Make sure they and any other caregivers know what to do if your child wanders. Make safety part of Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals.

Teaching your loved one: Teach your child how to safely cross the street; the meaning of street signs, such as "STOP"; and who is a safe person and who is a stranger. Talk to your child about safe places to go if they are lost or hurt: police stations, fire stations, schools, etc. Consider using social stories or picture schedules to teach them what to do in dangerous situations that they might encounter once they wander.

Identification information: Consider a wearable ID such as a bracelet, tags in their clothing or on their shoes, or even electronic tracking devices. For sources, [click here](#).