

# SAFETY & WANDERING PREVENTION CHECKLIST

for Parents & Caregivers of Children & Individuals on the Autism Spectrum



**POLICE AUTISM  
COMMUNITY  
TRAINING**  
PACTAUTISM.COM

**THIS CHECKLIST IS DESIGNED FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS OF CHILDREN ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM AND PROVIDES TIPS ON WANDERING/ELOPEMENT, COMMUNICATION, AND INTERACTIONS WITH FIRST RESPONDERS. SAFETY IS IMPORTANT FOR AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS AT EVERY AGE, BUT WE HAVE DESIGNED THIS TO GUIDE PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS WHO ARE FACING THESE CHALLENGES FOR THE FIRST TIME.**

## WANDERING & ELOPEMENT SAFETY

### Am I knowledgeable of the wandering triggers?

- Children on the autism spectrum may wander from a setting to get away from a situation they find stressful or frightening. Common examples include: **loud noises (such as sirens), bright and/or flashing lights, and commotion.**
- Children on the autism spectrum can also be impulsive and may wander or bolt from a safe setting to get to something of interest. Common examples include: **water sources, parks, and train tracks.**
- For more information on wandering and elopement, see [here](#).

### Have I secured my home?

- Install secured locks.
- Install a home security alarm system or invest in inexpensive battery-operated alarms for your doors and windows (see [here](#)).
- Invest in a fenced yard, if possible.
- Adhere printable STOP signs to doors, windows, and other exits, such as gates (see [here](#)).
- Monitor any changes in your home's security, especially during warmer weather or seasonal transitions.



### Have I taught/am I teaching my child about wandering dangers?

- To increase your child's safety outside of the home, help them learn their personal information - like their address or an important phone number. For children who do not use verbal speech, this can be taught on an iPad or with a visual support card. Take your child on walks around their community, helping them to learn what is around them, increasing the chance that they can find familiar places without getting lost. Importantly, teach water safety skills - not just how to swim, but how to be safe around bodies of water.
- When teaching new concepts, try to "show" and not "tell." Use favorite characters, topics, props, and visual prompts in your explanation. You can also use social stories to teach your child about how to be safe in their community.

- Have I addressed wandering at school, summer camp, and other external settings?**
  - Familiarize yourself with your child's school's/summer camp's policies on wandering prevention.
  - Write a letter requesting that you always be informed, in writing, of any wandering incident on or off school grounds/campgrounds. Keep this for your documentation.
  - Make note of all architectural barriers (fences, gates, etc.) around the school, daycare, or summer camp, or lack thereof. Make the facility aware of any lack of barriers and ask for barriers to be put in place.
  
- Have I enrolled my child in swimming lessons?**
  - Drowning is the cause of death for almost 3 in 4 children on the autism spectrum who wander off alone.
  - To find swim lessons, contact your local parks and recreation facility or YMCA. Many communities offer free or low-cost programs. You can also contact your state's Family Voices affiliate organization (*\*use the locator tool [here](#)*).
    - See this [resource](#) from the National Autism Association.
  - Remember that teaching your child how to swim, does NOT mean your child is safe in water. If you own a pool, fence your pool, using gates that self-close and self-latch higher than your child's reach. Remove all toys or items of interest from the vicinity of the pool when not in use.
  - Advise your neighbors with pools of these safety precautions and your child's tendency to wander.
  
- Have I obtained a wearable ID for my child that contains all my contact information?**
  - Consider these safety alert cards:
    - See some examples [here](#) on our website.
  
- Have I looked into tracking devices and/or personal locator technology?**
  - [Smart 911](#), [Project Lifesaver](#), and [SafetyNet Tracking](#), in addition to other programs, may be available through your local law enforcement agencies. Please contact your local police station and/or visit the links above.
  
- Have I set expectations with and for my child before going out in public?**
  - Before going out in a public place, communicate the plan with your child and other family members. Be sure to establish a timeline and rules.
  - Consider noise-canceling headphones if loud noise is a trigger for your child.
  - Create a "tag, you're it!" strategy for public outings. This is a well-coordinated system that "tags" the adult who is to closely supervise your child and ensures that your child is *always* supervised by a trusted adult.
  - Work on communication and behavior strategies with your child and other family members. Practice strategies to self-calm with your child and make sure others

understand how important it is to keep your child engaged and busy to reduce his/her urge to wander.

## INTERACTIONS WITH FIRST RESPONDERS AND NEIGHBORS

### Have I introduced my child to local first responders?

- Provide the name of your child or adult, a current photograph, and a physical description including any scars or other identifying marks or behaviors.
- Consider holding a “Meet & Greet” so that your child and local first responders can mingle and interact in a friendly, stress-free environment. See our Meet & Greet instructions [here](#).
  - You can also present [this](#) customizable and printable “About Me” one-pager we designed to help facilitate these types of introductions.
  - Consider using [this](#) social story to help your child with introductions.

insert image here

**ABOUT ME**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_  
I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old.  
I am in the \_\_\_\_\_ grade.  
My birthday is \_\_\_\_\_  
My favorite color is \_\_\_\_\_

**I LIKE ...**

insert drawing/image here    insert drawing/image here    insert drawing/image here

**I HAVE AUTISM**

**PLEASE NOTE THAT I MAY:**  
(Check all applicable boxes)

- Not speak
- Not follow your directions
- May wander
- May be unaware of safety concerns

If you need help with me, please contact:  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### Have I introduced my child to trusted neighbors?

- Give your neighbor a simple handout containing your name, address, and phone number, as well as some information about your child.
  - Consider using this customizable and printable “About Me” one-pager we designed to help facilitate these types of introductions.
- Be sure to alert your neighbor if your child:
  - Has a fear of, or is drawn to, cars and/or animals
  - Gravitates to pools or nearby ponds or creeks
  - Does/does NOT respond to their name, have sensory issues or meltdown triggers

## COMMUNICATION

### Do I have visual supports?

- Visual supports are useful tools that incorporate the use of symbols, photos, written words, and objects to help communicate and build language skills.
- See [here](#) for our visual support resources.