

# *Autism and Safety – How can I keep my child Safe?*

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Autism presents a unique set of safety concerns for parents. The advocacy and awareness groups, Unlocking Autism (UA) and the National Autism Association (NAA), have teamed up to provide the following safety information for parents. Not all suggestions listed below are right for every family in every neighborhood. You should carefully consider the best safety options for your individual child.

*“We had no idea Louis was out of the house, when we received a call from a neighbor. Thankfully, they were familiar with Lou and knew how to reach us.”*

## *Are You Prepared for an Autism Emergency?*

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A leading cause of concern for parents with a child with autism is children who run or wander away. In a recent online survey conducted by NAA, an incredible 92% of the parents who responded reported their children were at risk of wandering. This is a problem that must be addressed in every city and town across America. Please review the following information and contact your local first responders to get a plan in place for your child and others who may be at risk in your community.

Wandering can occur anywhere at anytime. The first time is often the worst time. Another concern is preparation in the event that you become incapacitated or injured while caring for a person with autism at home or in the community. If you are concerned that your child may wander, now is the time to get to know your local law enforcement, fire and ambulance agencies. Ask your local 911 call center to “red flag” this information in their 911 computer data base. Should you need help in the future, dispatchers can alert patrol officers about your concerns before they arrive. By providing law enforcement with key information before an incident occurs, you can expect better responses.

*Make sure any alterations you make to your home not delay or prevent fire, police, ambulance or rescue personnel from getting to her or him immediately in an emergency.*

*An ounce of prevention... You know the expression, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Following are some tools and ideas to help you plan for and prevent emergencies.*



## *Survey and secure your home*

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Are there changes you can make to help ensure your child's safety? If wandering is an issue for your family, consider contacting a professional locksmith, security company or home improvement professional to prepare your home. You may find it is necessary to prevent your child from slipping away unnoticed by:

- Installing secure dead bolt locks that require keys on both sides.
- Installing a home security alarm system.
- Installing inexpensive battery-operated alarms on doors and windows to alert you when they are opened. These are available at stores like WalMart and Radio Shack.
- Placing hook and eye locks on all doors, above your child's reach.
- Fencing your yard.

## *Create an informational handout about your child*

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Having a description of and information about your child could be an incredibly valuable tool in ensuring his or her safety. It should be copied and carried with you at all times, at home, in your car, purse or wallet. Include a photo of your child and any important information. Be sure to include your name, address and phone number. Circulate this handout to family members, trusted neighbors, friends and co-workers. The handout will also come in handy if you are in an area other than your neighborhood and need the help of or are approached by the police. This is one item it is important to have before you actually need it.

## *Alert your Neighbors*

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The behaviors and characteristics of a child with autism have the potential to attract attention from the public. Law enforcement professionals suggest that you reach out and get to know your neighbors.

Decide what information to present to neighbors:

- Does your child have a fear of cars and animals or is he drawn to them?
- Is your child a wanderer or runner?
- Does he respond to his name or would a stranger think he is deaf?

Plan a brief visit to your neighbors:

- Introduce your child or provide a photograph.
- If a neighbor spots your child outside of your yard, what is the best way for them to get your child back to you?
- Are there sensory issues your neighbors should know about?



Give your neighbor a simple handout with your name, address, and phone number. Ask them to call you immediately if they see your child outside the home. This approach may be a good way to avoid problems down the road and will let your neighbors:

- Know the reason for unusual behaviors
- Know that you are approachable
- Have the opportunity to call you before they call 911

*Knowing your neighbors and making them comfortable with your child's differences can lead to better social interactions for your child.*

## *Some Things to Consider...*

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### *Teach your child to swim*

Too often, children with autism are often attracted to water sources such as pools, ponds, and lakes. Drowning is a leading cause of death for a child or adult who has Autism. Be sure your child knows how to swim unassisted. Swimming lessons for children with special needs are available at many YMCA locations. The final lesson should be with clothes on.

### *A Medical ID Bracelet for your child*

You may want to purchase an ID Bracelet for your child, especially if your child is non-verbal. Include your name and telephone number. State that your child has autism and is non-verbal if applicable. If your child will not wear a bracelet or necklace, consider a temporary tattoo with your contact information.

### *A personal tracking device*

Some use a small unit that is put in a child's pocket or backpack and work with your computer or mobile phone so that you can monitor your child's location. Others involve a handheld unit for the parent which tracks the location of the child's wristband. Some units work with local law enforcement and rescue personnel. The tracking distance for the devices varies considerably and ranges from 300 feet for parent monitored units to one mile on the ground and 5-7 miles from the air for those monitored by rescue personnel. Some systems include waterproof tracking devices. Prices range from around \$200 for some parent monitoring units to around \$7,000 for units tied into local rescue personnel. Many local law enforcement agencies have purchased units for tracking residents with autism, Alzheimer's and Down's Syndrome.

*For more information on safety you can visit:*

*Autism Safety Toolkit*

[www.nationalautismassociation.org/safetytoolkit.php](http://www.nationalautismassociation.org/safetytoolkit.php) or

[www.unlockingautism.org](http://www.unlockingautism.org)

and

*The Autism Safety Project*

[www.autismsafetyproject.org](http://www.autismsafetyproject.org)

