



ABOUT AUTISM & WANDERING

Similar to wandering* behaviors in seniors with dementia or Alzheimer's, children and adults with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are prone to wandering away from a safe environment.

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, or bright lights.

Dangers associated with wandering include drowning, getting struck by a vehicle, falling from a high place, dehydration, hyperthermia, abduction, victimization and assault.

Because children with autism are challenged in areas of language and cognitive function, it can be difficult to teach them about dangers and ways to stay safe.

WANDERING DEFINED

When a person, who requires some level of supervision to be safe, leaves a supervised, safe space and/or the care of a responsible person and is exposed to potential dangers such as traffic, open water (drowning), falling from a high place, weather (hypothermia, heat stroke, dehydration) or unintended encounters with potentially predatory strangers.

***Wandering is also referred to as:** Elopement; Bolting; Running (i.e. "My child is a runner.")

WANDERING TYPES

Goal-directed wandering: wandering with the purpose of getting to something (water, train tracks, park, an item or place of obsession, etc.)

Bolting/Fleeing: the act of suddenly running or bolting, usually to quickly get away from something, a negative reaction to an event, anxiety, fear, excitement, stress or uncomfortable sensory input.

Other: nighttime wandering; wandering due to disorientation, boredom, transition or confusion; or the individual simply loses their way/becomes lost

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AUTISM-WANDERING STATISTICS

- Roughly half, or 49%, of children with an ASD attempt to elope from a safe environment, a rate nearly four times higher than their unaffected siblings.
- In 2009, 2010, and 2011, accidental drowning accounted for 91% total U.S. deaths reported in children with an ASD ages 14 and younger subsequent to wandering/elopement.
- More than one third of ASD children who wander/elope are never or rarely able to communicate their name, address, or phone number
- Two in three parents of elopers reported their missing children had a “close call” with a traffic injury
- 32% of parents reported a “close call” with a possible drowning
- Wandering was ranked among the most stressful ASD behaviors by 58% of parents of elopers
- 62% of families of children who elope were prevented from attending/enjoying activities outside the home due to fear of wandering
- 40% of parents had suffered sleep disruption due to fear of elopement
- Children with ASD are eight times more likely to elope between the ages of 7 and 10 than their typically-developing siblings
- Half of families with elopers report they had never received advice or guidance about elopement from a professional
- Only 19% had received such support from a psychologist or mental health professional
- Only 14% had received guidance from their pediatrician or another physician

Source: Interactive Autism Network Research Report: Elopement and Wandering (2011)

Source: National Autism Association, Lethal Outcomes in ASD Wandering (2012)

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