

---


# Safety in the Home and Community

As a general rule, parents do what they can to make their homes a safe environment for their children. As children grow, they begin to be more aware of dangers. Children with ASD, however, may not. There are many behaviors or just natural curiosity an ASD child has that can increase the risk of danger and harm to themselves, others, or property. It is the responsibility of caregivers to create a safe environment as well as to teach their children to be safe.

Below is a list of suggestions for safety in your home and community. It is by no means exhaustive but can give you some ideas. Choose those that seem to best suit your situation and needs.


- Arrange furniture appropriately for ease of movement and safety.
- Safeguard electrical outlets and appliances.
- Use door and window locks and alarms where appropriate.
- Make sure hazardous items including fire-starting items are properly stored and secured.
- Use visual signs for boundaries, for safe/unsafe objects, etc.
- Display autism alerts, such as identifiers and labels, in windows at home or car, on the child's backpack, or other places it might be helpful.
- Contact your local 911 call center and law enforcement to let them know about your child and any potential safety risks. Some agencies have registries and specially trained law enforcement personnel that can be requested to come to your home in emergency situations.
- Create an emergency contact form that includes information about your child, likes, dislikes, best ways to support them, who to contact in case of emergency, and any other information you feel is important. Keep a copy on your fridge, in your car, purse, or backpack, distribute it to trusted neighbors, school personnel, therapists/aides, anyone else who might need it so they will have access to it. Keep it up-to-date.



- 
- Create a safety plan and share it with all appropriate organizations and entities that work with your child. This should target the areas of safety your child struggles with. Autism Speaks offers an [Autism Safety Kit](#) with a variety of forms that can be helpful when creating your safety plan. It should consider what actions should be taken in the event that your biggest concerns become reality. Ask yourself:
    - What is the biggest safety concern?
    - Has your home, school, and any community activities been evaluated for safety, and have prevention measures been put in place?
    - Does your child always wear or carry ID with them which includes contact information?
    - Do neighbors/appropriate people know your child?
    - Are safety skills being taught at school? Are safety goals included in the IEP?
    - Do you know when it's appropriate to contact 911 or local law enforcement for additional support?


There are some additional suggestions to prevent wandering and elopement, a common problem with ASD children. These include:

- Meet your neighbors and let them know if your child is a wanderer so that they can alert you if they see them alone on the street.
- Teach your child to communicate that they need a break since elopement often occurs to get out of a stressful situation.
- Explain what the plans are to your child before leaving home with them so they know what to expect and what you expect from them.
- Consider identification options for your child should they be unable to communicate verbally with others. Even highly verbal children can sometimes find it difficult to speak or communicate clearly in stressful situations.

- 
- Wearable ID such as a shoe tag, bracelet, necklace, etc.
  - Handout card kept in a pocket, wallet, or backpack that explains the disability, what to expect, and what to do
  - Non-permanent tattoos with contact information
  - iPhone Emergency Screen - there is an option to add medical information that can be accessed by first responders without having to unlock the phone
- Consider a locating device for your child. There are many options including using the GPS in a cell phone or a wearable watch/bracelet.
  - Teach water safety as drowning continues to be a leading cause of death for children with autism.
  - Create a wandering/elopement plan and share it with all appropriate organizations and entities that work with your child. Autism Speaks has created some documents for creating a plan that might be helpful.
    - [Family Wandering Emergency Plan Form](#)
    - [Autism Elopement Alert Form](#)
    - [Safety and Wandering Checklist](#)
  - Practice your response to elopement, just as you would practice what to do in case of fire, earthquake, or other emergencies.

## **Teach Safety**

- Teach skills for safety at your child's level.
- Practice necessary safety skills in as many settings as possible. Teach safety using social stories, visual aids, videos, virtual reality technology, games, activity schedules, signs and charts, peer and adult modeling, etc.
- Encourage aides/school/behaviorists to work with your child on the safety plan.
- Teach swimming and water safety.
- Teach your child that law enforcement/first responders/trusted adults are people they should go to in emergency situations. Teach them how to identify who these individuals are. Practice interactions with law enforcement, both going to them for help and them coming to you/your child.

- 
- Use intervention techniques, such as rewards and consequences, to teach safety such as reinforcement for safe appropriate behavior and loss of privileges for unsafe inappropriate behavior.
  - Teach your child to navigate their community as independently as possible. Some helpful skills include:
    - Familiarity with local roads and names of streets, and which areas of town should be avoided
    - Safety in crossing the street or rail tracks
      - No headphones at crossings
      - Look twice in both directions
    - Know North, South, East, West, how to tell time, and how to find significant landmarks to orient themselves if lost or distressed
    - Know names of caregiver(s) and cell phone numbers from memory
    - Know how to use public transportation
    - Always carry an ID card and contact information when in the community

### Resources

- Safe Now:  
<https://www.safenow.org/autism-safety/>
- Debbaudt Legacy Productions:  
[https://dennisd1.sg-host.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/plan\\_response\\_English.pdf](https://dennisd1.sg-host.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/plan_response_English.pdf)
- Autism Society:  
<https://www.autism-society.org/living-with-autism/how-the-autism-society-can-help/safe-and-sound/safety-in-the-home/>
- Autism Speaks:  
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/creating-safety-plans-people-autism>  
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/interacting-law-enforcement>