

WANDERING IS A MAJOR CONCERN FOR PARENTS - ESPECIALLY THOSE WHOSE CHILDREN HAVE AUTISM

A study conducted in the United States found that nearly 50% of children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have a tendency to wander or bolt from a safe environment. More than one third of the children with autism who wander are unable to communicate their name, address or phone number. Many of these children and teenagers have little understanding of dangers associated with wandering including drowning, traffic-related injuries, accidents, falls, dehydration and hypothermia.



Children with ASD often leave a safe environment to get to something of interest, or away from something, such as loud noises or bright lights. As a parent, there is no one else that knows your child as well as you do. If you are the caregiver of a child/adult with autism, and your loved one demonstrates wandering tendencies, following are some preventative measures that may help keep him safe:

Secure your home

- Install a complete home alarm system or battery-operated alarms for your doors and windows;
- Alert trusted neighbours of your child's tendency to wander and ask that they immediately notify you if they see your child outside of the house;
- Use visual aids to deter your child - Place stop signs on all doors and windows;
- Create a family emergency plan and make sure that everyone involved understands his role and responsibilities.
- Consider putting an ID bracelet; or
- Shoe ID tags: these ID tags are a good alternative for children who cannot tolerate wearing an ID bracelet. The tags are water-resistant and attach easily to shoes. The child's emergency contact information and medical conditions can be written onto the insides of the tags using a Sharpie pen.

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Prepare a detailed information record of your child

Provide a copy of this hand-out to your child's school, any trusted neighbours and make sure you always have a copy with you at all times. Include the following details:

- Current photograph of your child, along with his complete physical description, including medical needs, method of preferred communication;
- All emergency contact information;
- All of the main places your child is likely to go within the neighbourhood;
- Dangerous areas that are located nearby, such as ponds, lakes, pools, busy intersections, etc.;
- Your child's favourite toys, songs or characters, as well as his likes, dislikes, fears, triggers and de-escalation techniques.

We also recommend that you work closely with your child's childcare facility or school to prevent any wandering episodes from occurring on their premises. Make sure that all personnel is informed about your child's special needs, especially during transitions. Ask the administration to immediately notify you of any wandering incident, including incidents where the child may have wandered within the building. All incidents should be well documented and include when and how the occurrence took place. This information can provide insight for any future incident.

Play Tag!

Finally, keep in mind that at times accidents happen to children when we assume that someone else is looking after them. Initiate a Play Tag system during family gatherings. Designate one adult to be in charge of the children and make sure this person knows exactly what his responsibilities are. Identify the adult in charge! For example, have him wear a colourful or playful accessory such as a hat. When his supervision duties are over, ask that he pass the hat on to the next person who will take over and so on and so forth.

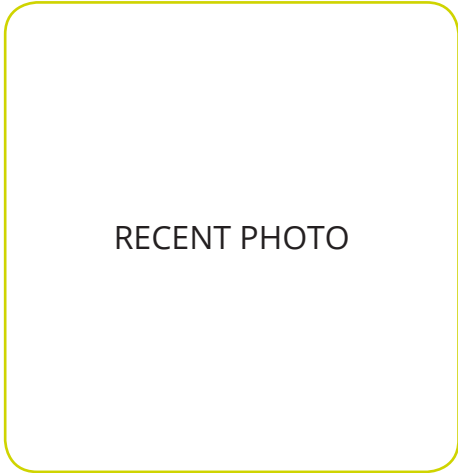
There are many things that parents can do to help children with autism overcome their challenges, but it's also important to make sure parents receive the support they need. When you're looking after a child with autism, taking care of yourself is not an act of selfishness—it's a necessity. Being emotionally strong allows you to be the best parent you can be to your child in need. Asking for and accepting help is a sign of strength, not one of weakness.

For more information regarding the Missing Children's Network personal safety workshops, offered year-round, please contact our offices at 514 843-4333 or visit our website at www.missingchildrensnetwork.ngo



CHILD IDENTIFICATION RECORD

Please carry a copy with you at all times.



NAME: _____
Family Name First Name Nickname

ADDRESS: _____
Number Street Apartment

City Province

POSTAL CODE: _____ TELEPHONE: _____

AGE: _____ HEIGHT: _____ WEIGHT: _____ SKIN COLOUR: _____

HAIR: _____ EYES: _____ BLOOD TYPE: _____

MOTHER TONGUE: _____ OTHER LANGUAGES SPOKEN: _____

MOTHER OR LEGAL GUARDIAN: _____
Family Name First Name Tel. (Home) Tel. (Other)

FATHER OR LEGAL GUARDIAN: _____
Family Name First Name Tel. (Home) Tel. (Other)

EMERGENCY CONTACT: _____
Family Name First Name Tel. (Home) Tel. (Other)

MEDICAL INFORMATION

CHRONIC ILLNESSES: _____ ALLERGIES: _____

DIETARY RESTRICTIONS: _____

CURRENT MEDICATIONS: _____

DENTAL HEALTH: _____ DENTAL DEVICES: _____

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION: CHILD'S LIKES AND DISLIKES

Favourite Places Favourite Toys

Favourite Songs

Likes Dislikes

Behavioural Triggers

Calming methods and any additional information First Responders may need

If the child is non-verbal, what is the preferred method of communication (sign language, picture boards, written words)

If the child is verbal, what is the preferred method of communication (preferred words, sounds, songs, phrases they may respond to)

Identification information: Does the child carry or wear jewelry, tags, ID card, medical alert bracelet)