







Be REDy Booklet
for teachers

Autism & Wandering
Keeping Your Classroom Safe

BIG RED SAFETY BOX
For Teachers

NATIONAL AUTISM ASSOCIATION
One Park Avenue, Suite 1
Portsmouth, RI 02871
877.622.2884
nationalautism.org

Part of the Big Red Safety Box Program Brought to You By the National Autism Association

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Nearly Half of Children with Autism Wander from Safe Settings.

If you are receiving this booklet, it means you are an educator of one or more students diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who may be prone to wandering off from a safe environment.

Wandering, elopement, "running" or bolting behaviors among those within our community present unique safety risks and create extraordinary worry and stress among caregivers and educators. Drowning fatalities following wandering incidents remain a leading cause of death among those with autism.

Because people with autism have challenges in areas of sensory processing, impulse control and bodily autonomy, it is critical for parents and caregivers to understand ways to keep loved ones with autism safe.

As such, we are pleased to provide you prevention tips, resources, and tools designed to help keep your students safe. Our three *Be REDy Pals* will also help guide you with quick tips & insights.

Please remember that regardless of any tools your school may have in place, if your student's diagnosis interferes with their ability to stay safe, it is critical that you maintain close supervision and security at all times.

With hope,

Wendy Fournier

President, National Autism Association

In This Booklet, You Will Find:

- Stop Sign Prompts
- An Educator Checklist
- A Fact Sheet
- A Social Story
- Calming Cards
- A Student Profile
- Caregiver Resources

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About Autism & Wandering

Wandering/elopement is the tendency for an individual to leave the safety of a responsible person's care or safe area, which may result in potential harm or injury. This might include running off from adults at school or in the community, leaving the classroom without permission, or exiting the house when the family is not aware. This behavior is considered common and short-lived in toddlers but may persist or re-emerge in those with autism. ***According to research, nearly half of children with autism are at risk for wandering away from a safe setting and a third of those will be from a classroom or school.***

Because children/adults with autism are vulnerable to dangerous situations including drowning, traffic incidents, becoming trapped hot cars, etc., it's important to take critical precautions. ***Be aware that drowning fatalities remain a leading cause of death, along with traffic injury.***

Wandering/elopement is typically a form of communication, often occurring to get to something of interest or away from something bothersome, usually noise, commotion, fears/phobias, and demands. These impulses and incidents can increase with added anxiety and stress, especially if the individual has challenges with coping, calming, or regulating their emotions. ***Early signs of exit-seeking behavior can start in toddler-hood. They include social/demand avoidance, moving to a different area of building or home unnoticed, bolting when upset, and seeking out water or other quiet places.***

If A Student is Missing:

- Remain Calm
- Call 911
- Search Nearby Water First



Safety Toolbox





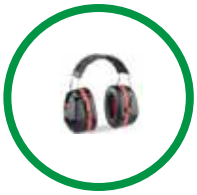
Door/Window Alarms



Visual Aids



Printed Materials



Calming/Sensory Aids

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Autism & Wandering Statistics

- Roughly half, or 49%, of children with autism attempt to elope from a safe environment
- Nearly a third of reported autism wandering cases either ended in death or the need for medical attention
- **29% of wandering happens from a classroom or school**
- 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 behaviors by 58% of parents of elopers
- 62% of families of children who elope were prevented from attending or enjoying activities outside the home due to fear of wandering
- 40% of parents had suffered sleep disruption due to fear of elopement
- Half of families with elopers report they had never received advice or guidance about elopement from a professional
- Half of families with elopers report they had never received advice or guidance about elopement from a professional
- **83% of all accidental deaths of missing children on the autism spectrum were drownings. Drownings made up only 36% of accidental deaths among children not on the autism spectrum.**



Children with autism will go straight to water regardless of its temperature or type.



Source: Pediatrics: Elopement and Wandering (2012)
Source: National Autism Association, Mortality & Risk in ASD Wandering (2017)
Source: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (2023)

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Identifying the 'Why' of Wandering

To find a BCBA near you, visit BACB.com and click 'Find a Certificant.'



It's critical to seek out the root cause of a student's wandering behavior – *why* is the child wandering/bolting? What do they want/not want? Wandering behaviors usually have a trigger or reason. To help with this, a Board Certified Behavioral Analyst (BCBA) can assess your student. Once you identify the reason or trigger, strategies can be created to prevent wandering incidents and teach your student about dangers.

When Anxiety/Triggers Cause Bolting:

Exit-seeking behavior can be goal-directed (to get to something of interest) or a panic response to escape something bothersome or traumatic, such as:

- Noise & commotion
- Transitions or disruption in routine
- Uncertainty & worries about social situations
- Fears and phobias
- Sensory oversensitivity and overstimulation
- Too many demands or expectations
- Being prohibited from using self-calming techniques, such as repetitive behaviors, stimming, or hyper-focusing on favorite topic
- Disorganization in communication/response (rushed to respond to a question)
- Arguing, fighting, crying nearby
- A repeated demand that escalates, such as needing to correct school work

Use Calming Strategies:

- *Give time & space*
- *Allow modifications*
- *Allow self-calming (stimming)*
- *Drawing, Coloring, Reading*
- *First/Then Strategies*

For a student who demonstrates bolting behaviors due to fear or stress, etc., assign a common area "safe place" they can run to, such as the library, so they stay within the building and can be easily found.

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Educator Checklist Tool

Tool Recommendations For Schools

- Door & Window Chimes: very inexpensive & effective. Available through NAA or most Walmart Stores.
- Simple Stop Signs: teachers/aides can print and adhere stop signs to doors and windows as a visual prompt.
- Social Stories: create social stories that teach students with autism to stay with a trusted adult.
- Color-coded Prompts: use specific objects or tools to demonstrate when it's outside time versus inside time.
- Student Profile Sheet: ask parents to download and fill out a student profile sheet that contains important contact information, and information about fleeing triggers, and favorite attractions. (available at nationalautism.org)

Steps to Prevent Wandering

- Ensure close adult supervision of any student with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).
- Ensure proper architectural barriers around school grounds are in place.
- For any at-risk child, conduct a Functional Behavioral Assessment to help pinpoint underlying reasons for wandering/bolting.
- Develop a Behavioral Intervention Plan to address underlying reasons.
- Ensure all school staff is familiar with the risks of ASD wandering and are trained to respond properly in the event of a wandering emergency.
- Ensure school staff follows proper protocol in keeping gates and doors closed and school grounds secure.
- Be aware, and ensure school staff is aware, of any known triggers that could prompt fleeing in any child (loud noises, meltdowns, etc.) and work to prevent and appropriately respond to these episodes in a manner that ensures the child's safety.
- For a student who demonstrates bolting behaviors due to fear or stress, etc., assign a common area "safe place" they can run to, such as the library, so they stay within the building and can be easily found.
- Assign a 1:1 aide to students with autism who are especially prone to wandering.
- Ensure all emergency response protocols are up to date and enforced.
- Because students are often shifted to different classrooms for therapy sessions, it's important that those prone to wandering are never left unattended.
- Avoid the use of non-emergency restraints and never lock an individual in a room as these practices could create new triggers or worsen existing behaviors.

Steps to Respond to Wandering

- Always call 911 immediately if a student is missing.
- Always search areas that pose the highest threat first, such as nearby water and busy streets.
- Immediately notify parents of wandering incidents, even if the incident seems small or insignificant.
- Thoroughly assess any wandering incident and put measures in place to prevent re-occurrence.

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Simply print, cut & adhere to your classroom door.



Stop Sign Prompts

Visual Teaching Tool





Social Story: *Staying In My Classroom*

Customize with your own images.

My Name Is: _____

Picture of school or classroom

This is my school.

Picture of child with teacher & classmates

I learn in school with my teacher & classmates.

Picture of child in classroom.

It's important for me to stay with my teacher and classmates.

Picture of child with teacher.

When I stay with my teacher and classmates, my teacher will know where I am.

Picture of child in classroom with teacher.

Staying in my classroom will keep me safe.

Picture of happy teacher.

My teacher will be happy that I am safe.

Cut out these Calming Cards, or use them as a guide to customize for your student

1



HAPPY!

Everything's Okay!

2



WORRIED

I Can Try To:
- Take 5 Deep Breaths
- Sing a song in my head
- Play with my fidget toy
- Ask for time and space
- Tell my teacher why I am worried

3



SAD

I Can Try To:
- Take 5 Deep Breaths
- Sing a song in my head
- Play with my fidget toy
- Make a 'favorite things' list
- Color or draw
- Ask for time and space
- Tell my teacher why I am sad

4



ANGRY

I Can Try To:
- Do 4-7-8 Breathing*
- Take time and space
- Play with my fidget toy
- Color or draw
- Look at a list of my favorite things
- Tell my teacher why I am angry

***Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold breath for 7 seconds, exhale for 8 seconds; repeat**

Annually (or more frequently) complete and share with school staff, family, friends, neighbors, caregivers, police, fire, and rescue professionals.

PERSONAL EMERGENCY PROFILE

DATE: _____

NAME: _____ AGE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: _____

PLACE PHOTO HERE

TRACKING FREQUENCY # (If applicable)

EMERGENCY CONTACT(S)

IF LOST, MAY BE FOUND AT: _____ (Likely places to go)

NAME: _____ PHONE NUMBER: _____

NAME: _____ PHONE NUMBER: _____

RESTRICTIONS (Allergies and diet)

MEDICAL NEEDS (Diagnosis, health concerns)

SIGNS OF ESCALATION (Changes in behavior that show increased or decreased anxiety, anger, etc. Recommendations for do's and don'ts.)

LIKES (Attractions, favorite things, hobbies, interests, foods, drinks, verbal exchanges, etc.)

DISLIKES (Triggers, sensitivities, fears, things to avoid, foods, drinks, verbal exchanges, etc.)

Symbols aid understanding and communication for everyone. Show and point to symbols when talking with a rescued person.

eat	drink	cold	Mom	Dad	call home	go home	deep breath
Yes	pain	safe	lost	Add personal message here	Add personal message here	Add personal message here	No

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A Multi-Layered Approach is Best.

A multi-layered approach to prevent, and respond to, wandering emergencies is necessary to achieve optimal safety for your student.

The most important thing is that the at-risk student is learning to keep themselves safe, while proper safeguards and adult supervision are also in place to help ensure their safety.

General Resources

National Autism Association: nationalautism.org

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children: missingkids.org



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- REMEMBER -

IF A CHILD OR ADULT WITH AUTISM IS MISSING, SEARCH WATER FIRST



#WANDERINGPREVENTION
#AUTISMSAFETY
#SEARCHWATERFIRST

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