

# AUTISM WANDERING TIPS



## Nearly half of children with autism will wander, or elope, from safe environments.

And more than one-third of children who wander are considered nonverbal.<sup>1</sup> Children with autism go missing under a variety of circumstances. They may seek out small or enclosed spaces. They may wander toward places of special interest to them. Or they may try to escape overwhelming stimuli such as sights, sounds, surroundings or activities of others.

## We recommend families of children with autism talk to those closest to them about their child.

This could be neighbors, teachers, friends, extended family or anyone who might spend time with or near the child. These are the people who will notice your child is missing when you are not around. If your child does go missing, they should **immediately call local law enforcement**. But they should also begin searching since time is of the essence. Many times it is the person last with the child who can help the most.

<sup>1</sup> Anderson, C., J. K. Law, A. Daniels, C. Rice, D. S. Mandell, L. Hagopian, and P. A. Law. "Occurrence and Family Impact of Elopement in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders." *Pediatrics*, 2012, 870-77. Accessed March 27, 2015. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2012/10/02/peds.2012-0762.abstract>.

## Tips for parents and guardians

- Identify the risks for your child and let those who are close to the child know (neighbors, relatives, teachers and other trusted community members) where he or she may go. Make this part of your plan when you move to a new neighborhood.
- Contact law enforcement to determine if they administer any programs to help track your child in case of a wandering incident.
- Keep a map of local bodies of water, proximity to highways, and other landmarks near your home and child's school readily available. Encourage your child's school to post the map in the main office so it is readily accessible in case of emergency. Remember, a child's perception of natural water sources may be different than a dislike or fear of baths or pools.
- Have a current photo and Child ID available for your child(ren).
- Alert the community about other potential interests and attractions your child may have, including roadways/signs, highways, trains, heavy equipment, fire trucks, bright lights, traffic signals, and buses.

## Tips for community members

- Know children who wander may be resilient and tenacious, going farther and longer than many people would expect.
- Children with autism may be non-verbal, non-responsive to their name being called, and fearful of any close contact with people they do not know. They may bolt from something that makes them scared or uncomfortable and run towards something that attracts them, even if we perceive it is dangerous.
- Children with autism may shrink away from touch, so maintain a safe distance, keeping the child in sight without restraining the child.
- If you come across a child who appears lost, stay with the child and call local law enforcement immediately. Wait with the child until help arrives.