

# 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 community members).
- Contact local law enforcement to determine if they administer any programs to help track your child in case of a wandering incident.
- All bodies of water should be identified in the community so they will be searched first if he or she wanders. A child's perception of natural water sources may be different than a dislike or fear of baths or pools.
- Alert the community about other potential interests and attractions your child may have, including roadways, highways, trains, heavy equipment, fire trucks, roadway signs, bright lights, traffic signals, and buses. Providing this information may help make the search and recovery more successful.
- When moving into a new neighborhood, identify the potential risks and alert community members about your child and where he or she may go.

## 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.