

wandering | defined



Types of Wandering:

- **Goal-directed wandering:** wandering with the purpose of getting to something (water, train tracks, park, an item or place of obsession, etc.)
- **Non goal-directed wandering:** wandering with seemingly no purpose; random & aimless movement from one place to another.
- **Bolting/Fleeing:** the act of suddenly running or bolting, usually to quickly get away from something, a negative reaction to an event, anxiety, fear, excitement, stress or uncomfortable sensory input.
- **Other:** any other type of wandering – nighttime wandering, or wandering due to disorientation, transition or confusion.

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Dangers of Wandering:

- Drowning
- Exposure, Dehydration, Hypothermia
- Traffic Injuries
- Physical Restraint
- Encounters with strangers
- Encounters with law enforcement

Mortality risk for individuals with ASD is nearly twice that of the general population. Drowning and accidents are leading causes of death.

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Effects on the Family:

- Living under great stress
- Lowered quality of life
- Unable to leave home
- Sleep deprivation
- Lack of support/understanding/resources
- Fear of accusations of neglect - CPS or Police involvement
- IAN Preliminary Data – 58% of parents report elopement as the most stressful of ASD behaviors

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why we're here



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Tragedy in the Autism Community:

- Logan Mitcheltree - Age 9
- South Williamsport, PA
- December 2004
- Slipped out of home unnoticed
- Found frozen to death in the woods after a 3-day search



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Tragedy in the Autism Community:

- James Delorey – Age 7
- South Bar, Nova Scotia
- December 2009
- Slipped out of home with his dog
- Found unconscious after 2-day search
- Died that evening in hospital



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Tragedy in the Autism Community:

- Ashley Brock – Age 6
- Brunswick, ME
- May 2008
- Slipped out of yard during family gathering
- Drowned in neighbor's unsecured pool



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Tragedy in the Autism Community:

- Jack Hensley – Age 5
- Tulsa, OK
- July 2009
- Struck and killed by an SUV
- News story noted: Police said Jack was wearing a medical bracelet that indicated his condition and that there were no signs of neglect



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Tragedy in the Autism Community:

- Benjy Heil – Age 7
- Wisconsin Rapids, WI
- June 2007
- Slipped out of his home
- 6-day search ended when Benjy's body was found in a nearby pond
- Benjy had been seen by a neighbor, an AMBER alert could have saved his life



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Tragedy in the Autism Community:

- Mason Medlam – Age 5
- Colwich, KS
- July 2010
- Slipped out a window left open for a fan
- Mom was at work, told police to go to neighbor's pond while racing home
- Mom went straight to pond where she found her son's lifeless body
- Mason was revived, but passed away in the hospital two days later



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Tragedy in the Autism Community:

- Savannah Martin – Age 7
- Lawton, OK
- February 2011
- Slipped out of the house while Mom was in the bathroom, her 2-year-old brother followed her
- Mom ran to pond, Savannah was face down, her brother was floating upright buoyed by his bicycle helmet
- A neighbor pulled both children from the water
- Savannah could not be revived, Tommy was treated for hypothermia



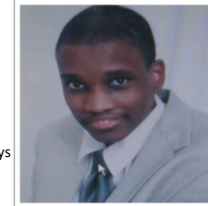
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Tragedy in the Autism Community:

- Brian Blakey – Age 31
- Tucson, AZ
- History of elopement
- September 2010
- Eloped through 2 unlocked doors, ran into the street and was hit by a truck, suffering a traumatic brain injury
- Hospitalized for 29 days, rehab for 34 days
- Multiple surgeries to rebuild his face
- Now able to walk again
- DDD investigation questionable, currently under review



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Tragedy in the Autism Community:

- Adam Benhamama – Age 3
- Laval, Quebec
- April 2011
- Slipped away while playing outside at friend's home
- Search lasted several days and was called off
- Adam's body was found 5 ½ weeks later



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Tragedy in the Autism Community:

- Kieran le Couteur – Age 6
- Australia
- March 2011
- Reported missing after 1 hour
- Neighbor reported history of wandering
- Wandered almost 3 Km from home
- Struck and killed by train
- Seen in traffic by multiple people nearly hit by a car
- Seen by others walking along track
- No one stopped



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Tragedy in the Autism Community:

- Daryl Gosein – 5, drowning
- Blake Murrell – 4, drowning
- Jackson Kastner - 4, drowning
- Aiden Lawson – 3, drowning
- Adlai Kugblenu – 5, drowning
- Erik Lippmann – 30, drowning
- Christian Dejons – 6, drowning
- Kaliya Marie Sullivan – 7, drowning
- Bernard Latimore – 10, drowning
- Devine Farrier – 11, killed by truck
- Kaitlin Bacile – 5, drowning
- Ryan Barrett 14, drowning
- Nathan Kinderdine 7, drowned in school pool

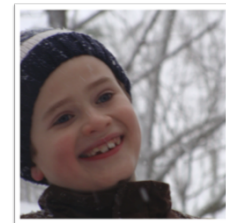
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Case Study: Connor

- 11 Years Old
- Multiple incidents from three different schools
- Picked up by a man in a car after wandering from school playground
- School did not contact police
- Police had to search for where he belonged
- Goal-directed incident
- Flees under distress
- Two identical incidents involving unescorted transitions, therapist encouraging "independence"



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prevention strategies



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Learn From Other Incidents:

- Research and review actual incidents
- How was the child able to wander?
- How was the child located?
- Was there a security/safety concern at school?

Learning from other stories may help you assess your own home and situations where wandering may be prevented and response may be enhanced.

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Develop a Family Wandering Emergency Plan:

- Download a Family Wandering Emergency Plan (FWEP) at AWAARE.org
- Designate an emergency point person to help contact neighbors, police, and assist in making arrangements for other children, provide them with copy of your FWEP
- List the places your child may be likely to go, and areas of potential danger
- Assign “search angels” with designated locations
- Keep phone numbers for “search angels”, law enforcement, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and local media on hand

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Secure Your Home:

- Install gates
- Install locks requiring keys
- Place hook and eye locks out of child’s reach
- Install home security alarm system
- Place battery-operated chimes on doors & windows
- Adhere STOP signs to doors and windows
- Fence your yard
- Safeguard pool – self-latching gates, motion sensors
- Baby monitor
- Consider a service dog
- Seek help from your community



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Understand and Avoid triggers:

- What type of wandering best describes your child?
- What triggers may cause your child to flee?
- Work on calming/de-escalation methods to help your child cope with triggers and provide alternatives to running/fleeing
- Address known triggers with IEP team and advocate for de-escalation techniques to be implemented at school
- Understand your child’s goal – water, trains, park, favorite food, etc.
- Allow safe exploration of obsessions in supervised, safe environment
- Document specific fascinations and share with first-responders, school staff, family, neighbors, etc.

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Teach Your Child About Wandering Dangers:

- Teach your child about the dangers of wandering into traffic, water, and encounters with strangers.
- Teach your child how to respond if they find themselves alone or lost outside of home (school, hotel, etc.)
- Use lingo they respond to, favorite characters, props, visual prompts if needed
- If your child has limited language, use social stories
- Use Stop signs

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Initiate Caregiver “Tag” System:

- Many incidents occur during a family gathering, school function or transition
- Establish a “tag” strategy to identify the adult who is primary supervisor during a period of time.
- Use physical tag prompt, eye contact and verbal acknowledgment
- Make sure tagged caregiver understands responsibilities and expectations

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Teach Your Child to Swim:

- Swimming lessons for children with special needs are available at many YMCA locations
- The final lesson should be with clothes/shoes on
- If you own a pool, use fencing with gates that self-close, self-latch and are out of your child’s reach
- Remove all toys/items of interest from the pool when not in use
- Make your neighbors aware of pool safety precautions and your child’s tendency to wander
- Seek training in swimming, first aid and CPR

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Consider a Personal Locating Device:

- Research available technology/features before deciding which device is best for your child
- Radio Frequency/GPS/Cellular
- Check with local law enforcement for availability of Project Lifesaver, CareTrak, LoJack SafetyNet and EmFinders (cellular) programs
- Several GPS devices on retail market – caregiver implemented



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Personal Locating Technologies:

Radio Frequency	GPS
Pros: Run by Trained Law Enforcement Personnel Waterproof Long Battery Life/No Charging	Pros: Geo-fencing alerts Available in most areas
Cons: No geo-fencing alert capability Not available in all areas	Cons: Not waterproof Child frequently unprotected while unit is charging Caregivers are primary search team Subscription/Monthly Fees

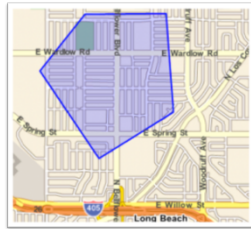
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What is Geofencing?

- Customizable parameters
- Electronic notifications via cell call, text or email
- Multiple geofences are possible for home, school, camp, etc.



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Talk to your neighbors:

Knowing your neighbors can help reduce the risks associated with wandering

- Introduce your child and/or provide a photograph
- Give simple handout with your name, address and phone number
- Ask them to call immediately if they see your child outside the home
- Alert them if your child is attracted to pools, nearby ponds, etc.
- Does your child respond to his/her name?
- Are there triggers our neighbors should know about? Fear of dogs, etc.

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Talk with local first responders:

Providing key information before an incident occurs may improve response

- Provide name of child, current photo, physical description
- Provide complete contact information for all caregivers
- List favorite places or attractions, include map with dangerous locations highlighted
- Note likes, dislikes fears, triggers and de-escalation techniques
- Explain your child's method of communication if non-verbal, ability to respond to his/her name
- Download a first responder alert form at AWAARE.org
- Provide info on *A Child Is Missing* and *Take Me Home* programs
- Additional tips can be found at AutismRiskManagement.com

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Prevention at school, camp, other external settings:

- Ask what protocols are in place to prevent and respond to wandering incidents and other emergencies
- Periodically ask teachers, aides, counselors, school administrators, residential caretaker, etc. if your child has wandered
- "Has my child ever wandered outside school building?"
- "Has my child ever fled from a teacher or been left unattended during transitions?"
- Take a tour of the school/facility and note possible areas of concern, ask for each area to be addressed
- Write a letter requesting that you immediately be informed of any wandering incident, prevention and response protocols – include this information in IEP

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Our child, Alyssa Fournier attends XXX School and has a diagnosis of autism. She is prone to wandering, elopement and fleeing incidents. **Aly's sense of danger is impaired and all measures must be taken to ensure her safety.**

Due to Aly's tendency to wander, **she requires constant one-on-one adult supervision and should never be allowed to independently transition to or from any school setting.**


Aly wears a Project Lifesaver bracelet that emits a unique radio signal once per second. Should Aly wander from adult supervision, the **Fire Department should be called IMMEDIATELY** to respond with receiving equipment that can locate Aly's wristband. School staff is not to delay in contacting the Fire Department in an attempt to locate Aly on their own.

We require immediate parental notification at [phone #] of ANY wandering incident, including incidents where Aly may have wandered unsupervised within the school building. All incidents **must be documented in writing** including when and how the occurrence took place so that appropriate prevention methods can be developed and implemented.

Please be advised that failure to address preventable escape patterns and security breaches puts our child at great risk, especially since there is no fencing on the school property. We ask for your cooperation in making sure the school has proper safety procedures in place, that **all staff members are aware of Aly's tendency to wander or flee and that our child is never left unattended, no matter the circumstance.**


Aly's team has been trained in de-escalation methods to prevent her from self-injurious behaviors or fleeing the premises. These **calming methods should be facilitated by the staff member most familiar with Aly's Functional Behavior Assessment and Plan.** Aversive methods including the use of restraint or seclusion are **not to be utilized** under any circumstances.

wandering | prevention




Personal Identification:

- Obtain a personalized medical ID bracelet or necklace for your child noting diagnosis, non-verbal, etc.
- Consider clothing/shoe ID tags for those who cannot tolerate a bracelet
- Include your emergency contact information
- Request a state photo ID so first responders will have quick access to your child's photo and basic personal information
- Temporary tattoos are a fun option for vacations and field trips



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Never Have a False Sense of Security:

- Monitor your child's abilities that may allow access to wandering incidents
- Is your child now able to reach a hook & eye lock, open a chain lock, open a window?
- Have your child's interests changed?
- Changes in school or day program settings?
- Keep your child's alert profile up to date
- Note changes in technology, new ways to keep your child safe
- New neighbors, pools, parks, other items of interest?
- Continue vigilant monitoring and reassessment


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response



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What to do in a wandering emergency:

Always call 911 immediately if your loved one is missing!

- Clearly state your child's name
- Provide radio frequency if child wears a locator bracelet
- State that the child is endangered, provide their diagnosis, stress that the child is unaware of danger, note communication challenges
- Provide child's age, height, weight, unique identifiers, clothing
- State the areas that should be searched first
- Request AMBER/Silver/Endangered Missing Alert
- Request National Crime Information Center Missing Person File
- Request implementation of *A Child Is Missing* program
- Activate your Family Wandering Emergency Plan (FWEP) Alert your emergency contacts while searching areas your child may likely be.

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wandering | alert systems




About Emergency Broadcast Alert Systems:

- Program oversight by US Department of Justice, run by states
- AMBER Alert Guidelines – 17 years or younger, abduction, descriptive information of child, captor or captor's vehicle required
- Silver Alert – Not established in all states, typically utilized for seniors with Alzheimer's/Dementia

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wandering prevention advocacy 


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wandering | you can help 

Be an Advocate for Wandering Awareness & Prevention:



- Join NAA’s mailing list at NationalAutismAssociation.org
- Support the establishment of new Emergency Broadcast Alert system for individuals with cognitive impairments or expansion of current criteria to include our loved ones who are at risk
- Ask your local police/fire/sheriff department to consider implementing locating technology in your area
- Provide educational materials to local Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA) and School Administrators
- Legislative efforts to fund training/resources for autism-related wandering similar to what’s currently available for Alzheimer’s/Dementia patients

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Be an Advocate for Wandering Awareness & Prevention:

- Tell your local law enforcement agency about *A Child is Missing* and *Take Me Home* programs
- Both are free programs available to LEAs
- *A Child is Missing* – when activated, automatically dials all telephones in a specified area encouraging the public to actively look for missing child
- *Take Me Home* – local database software storing information on individuals who are at risk. Families must provide information/photograph to participate
- Join our Facebook group at www.facebook.com/AutismWandering
- Follow us on Twitter: NationalAutism

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WORKING TO PREVENT WANDERING INCIDENTS AND DEATHS WITHIN THE AUTISM COMMUNITY

AWAARE
COLLABORATION

contact us | promote this initiative   

HOME :: AUTISM & WANDERING :: FAQs :: SAFETY MATERIALS :: ABOUT US :: RESOURCES

BECOME AWARE

With little public understanding about autism-related wandering, coupled with a lack of resources to combat occurrences, drowning deaths associated with autism etiologies remain a leading cause of fatalities among children and adults on the autism spectrum. Although no formal data exists about the number of wandering incidents per year, cases are becoming increasingly common and awareness alone can play a major role in reducing occurrences. To learn more, [click here](#).

RESEARCH

Autism is a diagnosis that represents many symptoms, some of which can lead to serious health and safety risks, including death. In 2008, Danish researchers found that the mortality rate among the autism population is twice as high as the general population. In 2001, a California research team attributed elevated death rates in large part to drowning, prolonged exposure, and other wandering-related factors remain among the top causes of death within the autism population. Currently, no estimates exist and no formal methods are in place to track how many children and adults wander per year, but in a 2007 online poll through the National Autism Association, 52% of parents reported that their child/ren with autism have a tendency to wander.

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE WANDERS

- Call 911
- Implement your [Family Wandering Emergency Plan \(FWEP\)](#)
- [Click here for more information](#)

QUICK LINKS


- [Autism Risk Management](#)
- [Project Lifesaver](#)
- [A Child Is Missing](#)
- [AWAARE Brochure](#)
- [Social Stories](#)

NEWS, ALERTS, BLOGS

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WHERE TO FIND SWIMMING LESSONS
PARENT STORIES
FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS
FOR PHYSICIANS AND THERAPISTS
FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

thank you! 

VISIT US ONLINE:
www.AWAARE.org
www.NationalAutism.org

CONTACT US:
e-mail: naa@nationalautism.org
phone: 877-622-2884

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