

## Autism & Safety Issues

Individuals with autism are at a much higher risk of placing themselves in a dangerous or even potentially life-threatening situation, such as wandering or becoming a victim of a crime. They do not develop a natural sense of danger, and as a result, often place themselves in harms way. They can meltdown when experiencing sensory overload, or when forced to process information, questions or instructions too quickly. These characteristics can create dangerous situations when interacting with first responders, particularly police, who often have little training in this area.

For all of these reasons, families and caregivers of persons affected by autism spectrum disorder (ASD) should be proactive when it comes to ensuring their loved one's safety at home, in school or in the community. The following is a summary of safety issues in each of those three environments, as well as a list of some crucial action items you can implement immediately.

### Home Safety

- Deadbolts doors & lock windows.
- Secure all poisonous substances & keep medications in a lock box.
- Keep all firearms properly secured and store ammunition in a separate location.
- Identify water sources & other dangers near your dwelling & within your community (including pools) should the individual with ASD wander from the home.
- Be extra vigilant during summer months regarding wandering. This is a great resource for wandering information. <http://www.awaare.org/>
- Inform neighbors, caregivers, family members and local first responders of potential safety issues & needs.
- Prepare a home escape plan in the event of fire, and practice often. Additional fire safety tips can be found at [http://www.asmonline.org/programs\\_law\\_fire.asp](http://www.asmonline.org/programs_law_fire.asp).
- Be aware that in an emergency situation, such as fire in the home, a person with ASD may retreat to their favorite hiding spot. Report these potential hiding spots to first responders in the event of an actual emergency.
- Identify specific behaviors related to the individual with ASD that may lead them to harm within your home.
- Prepare and post a “911 Script” in the event of an emergency (see attached template). <http://aset911.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/911-script-for-parents.pdf>

## Community safety

- Ensure the individual with ASD has some form of identification since they may be unable to ask for help.
- Have your child meet local first responders in a stress free setting. They should explore equipment & see them in uniform.
- Be aware that individuals with ASD may show aggression or self-injurious behavior. Traveling and any non-routine situations may induce this behavior.
- Be aware that individuals with ASD may have a distorted sense of danger and may not understand the consequences of their actions. Identify specific behaviors that may cause injury while out in the community.
- Be aware that individuals with ASD may be able to tolerate significant pain or other sensations such as extreme temperatures. Ensure that the individual is appropriately dressed for the weather when out in the community.
- Designate one person that is responsible for the individual's safety while out in the community.

## School Safety

- Notify the school if the individual has a tendency to wander & places they might wander to (see attached template). <http://aset911.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Parent-to-school-safety-letter.docx>
- Have safety strategies specific to the individual's needs included in IEP.
- Advocate for your school to have a wandering response plan in place. <http://aset911.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/School-Safety-and-Autism-handout.pdf>
- Be proactive about bullying. Keep a close watch on social networking communication. <http://www.stopbullying.gov/>

## Teen safety

- Be aware that individuals with ASD are more likely to be bullied and victims of sexual abuse. Keep a close watch on internet activities to identify potential bullying and any inappropriate sexual behaviors.
- Consider monitoring software for the computer & handheld devices.
- Individuals with ASD can often be more susceptible to manipulation. They may not understand the devious motives of others, and as a result, can find themselves in legal trouble.
- Be aware that illegal drugs may be used to decrease social anxieties. Be watchful and consider random drug testing.

## Immediate Action Items for Parents/Caregivers

- Register your child with local law enforcement (see attached form). <http://aset911.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/autism-registration-form-shortened.pdf>
- Teach water safety at an early age and provide swim lessons.
- Be fully informed of all the various safety issues that impact individuals with ASD including dangers within the home/neighborhood/school.
- Inform your child's school of your specific safety concerns relative to individual with ASD, particularly wandering and meltdown behaviors (see attached form). <http://aset911.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Parent-to-school-safety-letter.docx>.
- Advocate for Autism Safety Training in your community <http://www.aset911.com>. (Bring the attached – “Why Your Community Needs this Training” to schools and first responder agencies).
- Consider GPS tracking devices if the individual has a tendency to wander. Some examples are provided at <http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2014/01/15/7-tracking-devices-to-find-a-lost-child-with-autism/>
- Promote RF technology within your community (such as Project Lifesaver International). <http://www.projectlifesaver.org/>

*\* This information was authored and provided by ASET - AUTISM SAFETY EDUCATION & TRAINING, <http://www.aset911.com>, located in Portland, ME. We encourage you to share this information with all those affected by ASD. Matt Brown, the owner and founder of ASET, has trained over 4,500 first responders and community members about Autism Safety over the past 10 years. He is a seasoned law enforcement officer and parent of a teenage son with ASD. We encourage you to contact us with any safety questions you may have regarding your loved with ASD. (207) 415-1392. In addition, you are encouraged to advocate for and to bring this life saving training to your community (see attached – “Why Your Community Needs this Training”).*