

The Elopement & Water Safety Toolkit

For families with kids who wander

Why this toolkit exists

Children with autism are far more likely to wander than their peers, and water is the single greatest danger. This toolkit gives you the three things every family needs: a prevention checklist, a 5-step plan if your child wanders, and water-safety actions you can take today.

4x

more likely to wander than peers

32%

of wanderers reached a busy road

24%

reached a body of water

SECTION 1 Before they wander · prevention checklist

- ☒ **Up-to-date photo on your phone**
Take a fresh photo every 90 days. Wandering kids change quickly.
- ☒ **Neighbor awareness plan**
Tell 3–5 nearby neighbors your child wanders, what they look like, and your number.
- ☒ **All doors secured**
Add chimes, top-of-door locks, or smart locks. Standard locks are not enough.
- ☒ **ID bracelet, tag, or sewn-in label**
Name, your phone, and "Autism: may not respond to name" if appropriate.
- ☒ **Water hazards mapped**
Walk a 1-mile radius; note pools, ponds, fountains, drainage. Check these first.
- ☒ **Personalized response plan written**
Triggers, soothing strategies, who to call, where they go. Share with caregivers.

SECTION 2 If they wander · 5-step response plan

- 1 Call 911 immediately.** Say "My child with autism has wandered." Note if they may be non-verbal or non-responsive. Police prioritize this differently.
- 2 Check water sources within 1 km first.** Drowning happens in minutes. Pool, pond, fountain, river, drainage culvert, before sidewalks.
- 3 Stay home with another adult.** Children often return home. Keep one person at home base at all times.
- 4 Notify your neighbor network.** Send the recent photo and last-seen description to your group chat. They become your search team.
- 5 Don't run in random directions.** Drive a slow grid pattern: dead-end streets, parks, yards. Panic-searching wastes the critical first 30 minutes.

SECTION 3 **Drowning prevention** · the stats & actions

Drowning is the leading cause of death for children with autism after wandering. Each statistic below has an action you can take.

THE STAT	TAKE ACTION
91% of accidental deaths in children with autism are from drowning	Swim lessons before age 5 with autism-trained instructors. Search "Autism Swim Lessons" in your area.
24% of wandering children with autism reach water within minutes	Pool fencing & door alarms. Required by code in most areas. Add alarms even if you don't own the pool.
 Drowning is silent. You will not hear it happen.	Name a "water watcher." One adult at parties, beaches, hotels: no phone, no conversation, eyes on the water.
4x increased drowning risk versus typically developing children	Flotation for all water exposure until swimming is mastered. Coast Guard-approved jackets in favorite colors boost compliance.

SECTION 4 **24/7 emergency resources**

 **911 (US / Canada)**
Always your first call in an emergency.

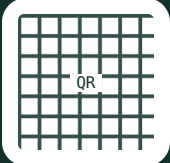
 **National Autism Association: Family Crisis Line**
Support and guidance from people who understand.

877-718-3382

 **Project Lifesaver**
Many counties offer free RFID tracking bracelets. Search "Project Lifesaver [your county]" to apply.

 **StepSafe Kids**
A GPS tracker for kids who wander. Learn more at stepsafekids.com.
Launching mid-2026 on Kickstarter.

[Scan to get notified at launch →](#)



This toolkit is not medical advice. Adapt these recommendations to your specific family situation in consultation with your child's care team.