

# Wandering and Water Safety



**Wandering: wandering, also called “elopement,” is a common challenge for many autism families. Here are some ways to help keep children safe:**



- **Teach clear safety rules** like “ask a grown-up before walking outside” and “hold hands in the parking lot.” Put pictures around your home (like a stop sign on a door) to remind your child of the rules. Praise your child for asking before going outside. Reward them by saying “yes” and going out with them when you can.



- **Use simple safety measures** like: put extra locks high up on doors; put an alarm or bell on the door to outside; use child locks on car doors; hold hands in public; dress the child in bright colors so they are easier to see; get child an **identification bracelet (like MedicAlert) or GPS trackers (like ProjectLifesaver).**



- **Build your safety net.** Alert neighbors to be on the lookout. Talk to your local police department and share a photo of your child and how to communicate with your child. Introduce your child to local police officers and teach them how to safely ask for help (for example by showing an identification bracelet).



- Spot the patterns. Notice the patterns in your child’s behavior to help develop a safety plan to prevent wandering. Talk to your child’s therapists, doctors, or teachers about making a safety plan. Check the National Autism Association’s resources on how to make a safety plan: <https://nationalautismassociation.org/resources/wandering/>.



- **Teach water safety.** The most common way that children are seriously injured or killed due to wandering is by drowning. **Contact your local recreation department to ask about adapted swimming classes for people with disabilities.**

Make rules about staying away from water unless an adult is present. Check that fences/gates to pools are locked (but fences alone are not enough protection). Remove toys from the pool. Assign adults to supervise the water, trading off every 15–30 minutes so they stay focused. Children can still drown in shallow water or with a life jacket on. Keep children who are not strong swimmers within “arm’s length.”



- More information: **Project Lifesaver**

