

1. Secure Your Home

Consider contacting a professional locksmith, security company or home improvement professional to promote safety and prevention in your home. You may find it is necessary to prevent your loved one from slipping away unnoticed by installing secure dead bolt locks that require keys on both sides, a home security alarm system, inexpensive battery-operated alarms on doors, hook and eye locks on all doors above your child's reach, a fence around your yard, printable STOP SIGNS on doors, windows and other exits, etc.

2. Consider a Locating Device

Check with local law enforcement for Project Lifesaver or Lo Jack SafetyNet services. These locating devices are worn on the wrist or ankle and locate the individual through radio frequency. Various GPS systems are also available.

3. Consider an ID Bracelet

Medical ID bracelets will include your name, telephone number and other important information. They may also state that your child has autism and is nonverbal if applicable. If your child will not wear a bracelet or necklace, consider a temporary tattoo with your contact information.

4. Teach Your Child to Swim

The leading cause of death of individuals with autism who wander is drowning. It is critical to teach your child both to swim and to understand the importance of water safety. Swimming lessons for children with special needs are available at many YMCA locations. The final lesson should be with clothes on. Remember that teaching your child how to swim does not mean your child is safe in water. If you own a pool, fence it. If neighbors have pools, let them know of these safety precautions and your child's tendency to wander. Remove all toys or items of interest from the pool when not in use.

Autism Speaks has a grant program that awards funding to organizations providing scholarships for swimming and water safety lessons for financially disadvantaged individuals with autism. Learn more at autismspeaks.org/family-services/grants/swimming.

5. Alert Your Neighbors

It is recommended that caregivers plan a brief visit with neighbors to introduce their loved one or provide a photograph. Knowing your neighbors can help reduce the risks associated with wandering.

6. Alert First Responders

Providing first responders with key information before an incident occurs may improve response. Informational handouts should include all pertinent information and be copied and carried with caregivers at all times. Circulate the handout to family, neighbors, friends and co-workers, as well as first responders. Always make sure to work with your child's team to express any concerns about safety issues, so that you can work together on a safety plan best suited for your loved one. More information about safety and wandering can be found at: awaare.org, autismspeaks.org/safety and autismspeaks.org/wandering-resources.

