

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

Children's Rights

<https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/autism>

Campaign and Advocacy

Get the latest updates from NCMEC

According to [data](#) published by the American Academy of Pediatrics, nearly half of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) go missing from their environment, with a substantial number at risk for bodily harm or drowning. Children on the autism spectrum may seek out small or enclosed spaces, head toward water or places of special interest to them, or they may try to escape overwhelming stimuli such as sights, sounds, surroundings, or activities of others.

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children has free resources and training to help support caregivers, first responders, and search teams to help mitigate missing incidents for children on the autism spectrum.

Children on the autism spectrum may exhibit behavioral characteristics that threaten their safety such as:

In 2021, **286** children on the autism spectrum were reported missing to NCMEC. **67%** were recovered within one week.

Our latest 10-year analysis indicates a **98%** recovery rate for children on the autism spectrum when NCMEC is engaged.

Drowning deaths are a major concern for children on the autism spectrum. Our 10-year analysis showed that of accidental deaths, **84%** were drownings.

NCMEC compiles incidents of missing children on the autism spectrum who are reported to the Center. This data informs our programming and helps us increase public awareness about the endangerments for these children. Read or Download NCMEC's latest report.

NCMEC has resources to assist law enforcement, rescue services, and other community members in hosting [Sensory Friendly Events](#) to foster positive relationships and understanding in order to better support children on the autism spectrum. Additionally, NCMEC provides guidance on implementing [sound practices when handling missing child cases involving children on the autism spectrum](#).

Understanding Children on the Autism Spectrum: A Guide for First Responders

Search Protocols and Questionnaire for First Responders

Supporting Children on the Autism Spectrum: Tips for Caregivers

How to Host a Sensory Friendly First Responder Event

NetSmartz SymbolStix

Resources for Caregivers of Children on the Autism Spectrum

How Local Law Enforcement Can Build an Autism Outreach and Awareness Program

How to Search for and Protect Children on the Autism Spectrum (Law Enforcement Only)

Utilizing Enhanced Missing Child Alerts

[Click here](#) if you would like to request training around this issue for your community or law enforcement organization.

NCMEC has [resources](#) that can help victims and families feel less alone and get the mental health and peer support that's often needed when a child is missing.

For Law Enforcement & First Responders

Montgomery County, Maryland Police

[This model community outreach program](#) began in 2005, partly in response to the growing number of police calls for service involving missing residents who had autism/IDD, Alzheimers, and dementia. The program has continued to develop and today provides a total approach to issues that these residents and police face through education, outreach, follow-up, empowerment, and response.

Addison, Illinois Police Department

In 2017, the Addison Police Department created its [Crisis Intervention Team](#) where select officers receive training and education on ways to ensure informed, positive, and safe interactions between law enforcement and children on the autism spectrum and other communities.

San Bernardino, California

The [Safe Return Program](#) is a confidential public safety program designed to assist law enforcement agencies during contacts with members of the community who have disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder, or other developmental or intellectual disabilities. San Bernardino County Sheriffs Department allows officers to match registered data with lost individuals to reconnect them with their loved ones.

For Caregivers and Community Stakeholders

Time is of the essence in all missing child cases. [This model script](#) provides guidance for families and caregivers on how to effectively communicate with emergency operators in the event of an emergency involving their child. This is a proactive measure to help be prepared in the event your child goes missing.

Help neighbors better understand how to keep your child on the autism spectrum safe with [this sample letter](#).

The NAA hosts useful information and downloadable content for families such as "[Meet the Police](#)"- a tool to help enhance the quality of interactions between individuals on the autism spectrum and members of law enforcement. Similarly, the "[Big Red Safety Box](#)" is a toolkit donated to families as a way to educate, raise awareness, and provide simple tools that may assist them in preventing or responding to wandering-related emergencies.

Rings mission is to help make neighborhoods safer. NCMEC missing child posters are featured directly on the [Neighbors App by Ring](#) to reach millions of engaged community members who can help bring more children home.

[Click here](#) to read about how Rings Neighbors App can help when children on the autism spectrum go missing.

[Products](#) like "Alert Me" bands and ID cards can help keep your child safer by providing first responders and others with awareness that your child is on the autism spectrum.

The Y and The American Red Cross provide swim lessons to children and families. This is essential for families to consider in order to ensure [water safety](#) and [prevent drowning](#), particularly for families with children on the autism spectrum.

Growth Through Opportunity (GTO) Cadets is a 16-week training program pairing individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD) with first responders. GTO Cadets with IDD such as autism spectrum disorder learn job and life skills from local law enforcement agencies and in turn first responders gain a better understanding on how to enhance positive encounters with these children and mitigate negative outcomes.

What to do if you encounter a child who you suspect may be on the autism spectrum and appears to be lost.

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