



Understanding the Autism/Water Connection

Key Takeaways

- *Missing children with autism are most often found in quiet settings, particularly in or near water.*
- *Water provides quiet comfort (regulation) but also sensory appeal (stimulation.)*
- *Even children who demonstrated fear or discomfort around water were found in water.*
- *Swimming lessons help, but do not eliminate risk.*
- *Hypervigilant supervision & water safety skills are essential.*
- *Always search nearby water first if a child or dependent with autism is missing.*

Why Are Children with Autism Attracted to Water?

Research shows that missing autistic children are often found in quiet and calm places that feel soothing (regulation.) Water can be especially soothing because it quiets overwhelming sensory input, but also provides sensory appeal (stimulation) with predictable sights, sounds, and movement.

Even if a child dislikes baths or swimming, this does not mean they will avoid water outdoors. Many children described as afraid of water have still been found in ponds, lakes, or pools. Always search nearby water first, regardless of type or temperature.



Keep Water Safety in Mind

- Ensure swimming competence and maintain hypervigilant supervision.
- Remember that swimming skills can greatly reduce risk but do not eliminate it.
- Secure pools and spas with self-closing, self-latching gates that your child cannot reach.
- Remove toys or objects that might attract attention when pools aren't in use.
- Inform trusted neighbors about your child's wandering/elopement tendencies and water safety needs.

