



National
Autism Safety
Council™



Autism & Travel Safety

Tips and Tools for Caregivers

Featuring
**SAFETRAVELS**
FOR AUTISM™

About This Guide

This guide was created in collaboration with families, clinicians, educators, first responders, and service professionals.

It integrates knowledge from:

- **Current research**
- **Field expertise**
- **Lived experience**

The content reflects proven practices and the most up-to-date knowledge available at the time of publication.

This guide is for informational and educational purposes only. It is not intended to serve as medical or legal advice and should not replace consultation with qualified healthcare providers, behavioral specialists, or legal professionals.

Every child, individual, and family is unique, and decisions about safety planning and intervention should be made in collaboration with trusted professionals familiar with your individual needs.



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*Advancing Autism Safety Through
Science, Expertise & Collaboration*



Autism Safety and Travel Overview

Travel can open the door to new experiences and meaningful memories, but for many autism families, it also requires extra planning to keep everyone safe, regulated, and comfortable. Preparing ahead helps reduce stress, prevent emergencies, and make the journey more enjoyable for everyone involved.

This toolkit highlights the most important safety areas to think about before you leave:

Wandering & Elopement Prevention

New environments, busy transitions, fatigue, and excitement can increase the risk of wandering/elopement. Planning ahead helps you stay one step ahead.

Sensory & Anxiety Supports

Airports, rest stops, hotels, and attractions can be loud, crowded, and unpredictable. Preparing sensory supports can make unfamiliar environments feel safer and more manageable.

Medications, Diet, & Health

Travel often disrupts routines. Keeping medications, food preferences, and health needs consistent helps prevent stress and medical concerns.

Transportation Safety

Whether you're flying, driving, or using public transportation, thoughtful planning keeps travelers engaged, supported, and safe along the way.

Flexibility & Expectations

Even the best plans may need to change. Building in flexibility helps families respond calmly and confidently when the unexpected happens.



Did You Know?

*Transitions are often the hardest part of travel. Airports, rest stops, hotel check-ins, and boarding are peak stress moments for many autistic travelers. **The good news: many airports offer disability assistance services.***

Families can contact TSA Cares at least 72 hours before travel to ask questions and request help at the airport. Airlines are also required to provide assistance when requested, and many hotels are now autism-friendly or certified.

Checking and arranging supports ahead of time can make these transitions much smoother.

TSA Cares Contact Center

(855) 787-2227

Weekdays:

8 a.m. to 11 p.m. ET

Weekends/Holidays:

9 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET

tsa.gov/contact-center/form/cares



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Plan Before You Pack

Travel safety starts long before you leave home. Thoughtful preparation helps reduce risks, support regulation, and create a more predictable experience for everyone. New environments bring excitement and opportunity, but they also introduce unfamiliar layouts, disrupted routines, sensory overload, and increased elopement risk. By planning ahead, caregivers can anticipate challenges, reduce hazards, and put supportive strategies in place before stress levels rise.

The goal isn't to eliminate every challenge. It's to build a safety-first travel plan that supports regulation, reduces uncertainty, and makes space for flexibility when the unexpected happens.



Did You Know?

Inclusive Destinations Still Require Vigilance

Heading to an autism-certified destination or inclusive park can feel reassuring, and it should. These spaces are designed with neurodivergent families in mind, and that's something to celebrate. At the same time, it's important not to let your guard down. Wandering and drowning risks do not take vacations, even in sensory-friendly or inclusive environments.

Staying proactive and prepared is one of the most powerful ways to protect your child while traveling.

Autism Safety and Travel Overview



Strengthen supervision and home-base safety.

Install temporary door and window alarms in rentals or hotel rooms, and consider using portable baby monitors for overnight supervision. Establish a clear one-door entry and exit policy in vacation lodging while keeping all other doors locked.



Use visual and wearable safety tools.

Visual aids such as stop signs, boundary markers, and social stories help reinforce safety expectations in new environments. Wearable identification, such as an ID bracelet or shoe tag with contact information, is essential, and GPS tracking devices can help locate a child quickly if they wander.

Treat water as a constant risk.

Pack U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jackets for trips near pools, lakes, beaches, or water features, even if swimming is not planned. When booking lodging, avoid properties located near ponds, canals, or other murky bodies of water, especially if they are visible from your unit.



Research the environment before arrival.

Use satellite or map views through Google Maps to identify nearby pools, ponds, canals, or beaches before you travel. Make note of these locations and prioritize checking the closest water first if a child or dependent is missing.

Assign supervision roles in public spaces.

At inclusive parks, beaches, or water attractions, assign one adult per child whenever possible and rotate supervision so no child is ever unsupervised. Even fenced parks may have gaps or unlatched gates, so continuous visual supervision remains essential.



Alert staff and community members.

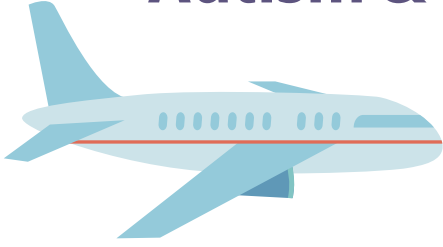
Introduce your child or dependent to lifeguards, park staff, or attendants and briefly share any relevant safety concerns, triggers, or bolting behaviors. Creating awareness adds another layer of protection.

Act immediately in an emergency.

If your or dependent child goes missing, call 911 right away and always search nearby water first. Every second counts.



Autism & Travel Safety



The **SafeTravels for Autism** framework offers a simple, quick-reference guide to help caregivers prepare, prevent common safety risks, and support regulation throughout the journey. Use TRAVELS as a reminder of the key steps that can make trips safer, smoother, and more enjoyable for everyone.

T — Think Ahead

Start planning early so you can anticipate safety needs before leaving home. Research your destination, lodging, and nearby medical care, identify potential water hazards or high-risk areas, and share your travel plans and emergency contacts with trusted supports.

R — Reduce Wandering Risk

New environments can increase the risk of wandering. Maintain close supervision in unfamiliar spaces, use door alarms, locative technology, wearable ID, baby monitors, stop signs, and other safeguards, and establish clear supervision roles so every caregiver knows who is responsible at all times. Use a one-door policy and keep all other doors locked. Avoid rentals with murky water like ponds nearby. Search water first if a child or dependent with autism is missing.

A — Arrange Assistance

Take advantage of available disability supports. Contact TSA Cares before flying to request airport assistance, ask airlines about accommodations such as early boarding, and check with hotels about autism-friendly or accessibility supports ahead of arrival.

V — Visualize the Journey

Preparation helps make travel more predictable and less stressful. Use visual schedules and social stories to explain each step of the trip, preview photos or videos of destinations and transportation, and practice routines whenever possible.

E — Equip for Sensory Needs

Travel environments can be loud and overwhelming, so plan sensory supports in advance. Pack headphones, comfort items, and sensory tools, build in quiet breaks and downtime, and choose travel times or seating that help reduce overload.

L — Load Health Essentials

Consistency supports safety and regulation while away from home. Pack medications in carry-on bags with extra doses, bring safe foods and preferred snacks, and keep medical documents and prescriptions easily accessible throughout the trip.

S — Stay Flexible

Even the best plans may change, and flexibility is key. Build extra time into schedules, prepare backup plans for activities, and focus on safety, connection, and positive moments rather than completing a perfect itinerary.



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Autism & Travel Safety Checklist



Before You Go

- Research the destination (sensory load, crowds, noise, layout.)
- Google address to identify nearby water hazards (ponds, lakes, canals.)
- Choose lodging away from murky or unfenced water when possible.
- Research medical care, pharmacies, and emergency services nearby.
- Review TSA accommodations or enroll in Wings for Autism if flying.
- Prepare visual schedules and social stories for travel days and activities.
- Set clear supervision rules for all caregivers.
- Establish a one-door entry/exit policy for lodging.

Wandering & Elopement Prevention

- Assign constant supervision, especially during transitions, use Wander Watcher Tag.
- Use door alarms, baby monitors, and stop signs in rentals/hotels.
- Do a safety sweep of lodging upon arrival.
- Review emergency response steps with all adults.
- Prioritize checking nearby water if a child or dependent goes missing.

Sensory & Anxiety Supports

- Bring preferred foods, snacks, and comfort items.
- Plan quiet breaks and downtime each day.
- Allow flexibility, adjust plans based on regulation, not schedules.
- Identify quiet spaces at attractions or airports.
- Prepare calming strategies for travel delays or disruptions.

Transportation Safety

- Download entertainment in advance (no Wi-Fi needed.)
- Choose seating/timing that minimizes overload when possible.
- Plan movement breaks for car travel.
- Keep essential items accessible (not packed away.)





Autism Travel Packing List



Safety & Elopement Prevention

- Temporary door alarms
- Baby monitor or motion sensor
- Identification tools (shoe/wrist ID, tracking device)
- Recent photo of your child

Sensory & Regulation Supports

- Noise-canceling headphones or ear defenders
- Comfort items (blanket, stuffed animal, favorite toy)
- Fidgets or sensory tools
- Sunglasses or hat (light sensitivity)

Visual & Communication Supports

- Visual schedule (printed or digital)
- Social stories
- AAC device or communication tools
- Paper and markers/whiteboard

Medications & Health

- Medications (carry-on only if flying)
- Extra doses for delays
- Original prescription containers
- Medical documentation if needed
- First-aid essentials

Food & Dietary Needs

- Safe foods and preferred snacks
- Drinks or cups your child uses regularly
- Utensils or feeding tools if needed
- Backup food options

Travel Entertainment

- Tablet or device with chargers
- Downloaded movies, shows, games
- Books, puzzles, or activity kits
- Car or plane-friendly games

Clothing & Comfort

- Comfortable, familiar clothing
- Backup outfits
- Pajamas
- Swimwear

Other

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



Social Story: *Stay Safe Near Water*

Customize with your own images.

My Name Is: _____



Water is fun to play in,
like pools and splashpads



But water can hurt me
if I am alone.



If I go near water without
mom or dad, I could get
very sick or hurt.



Water that is brown or
dirty can make me sick.

Picture of child with parents.

If I want to play near water,
I will get my mom, dad, or teacher first.

*Picture of child at pool
with happy parents.*

Mom & dad will be
happy that I am safe.

Tool: *Wander Watcher Tag*

Cut, laminate or cover in plastic, and use a hole punch for the opening. This can be worn around the neck.



I'm the
**WANDER
WATCHER**

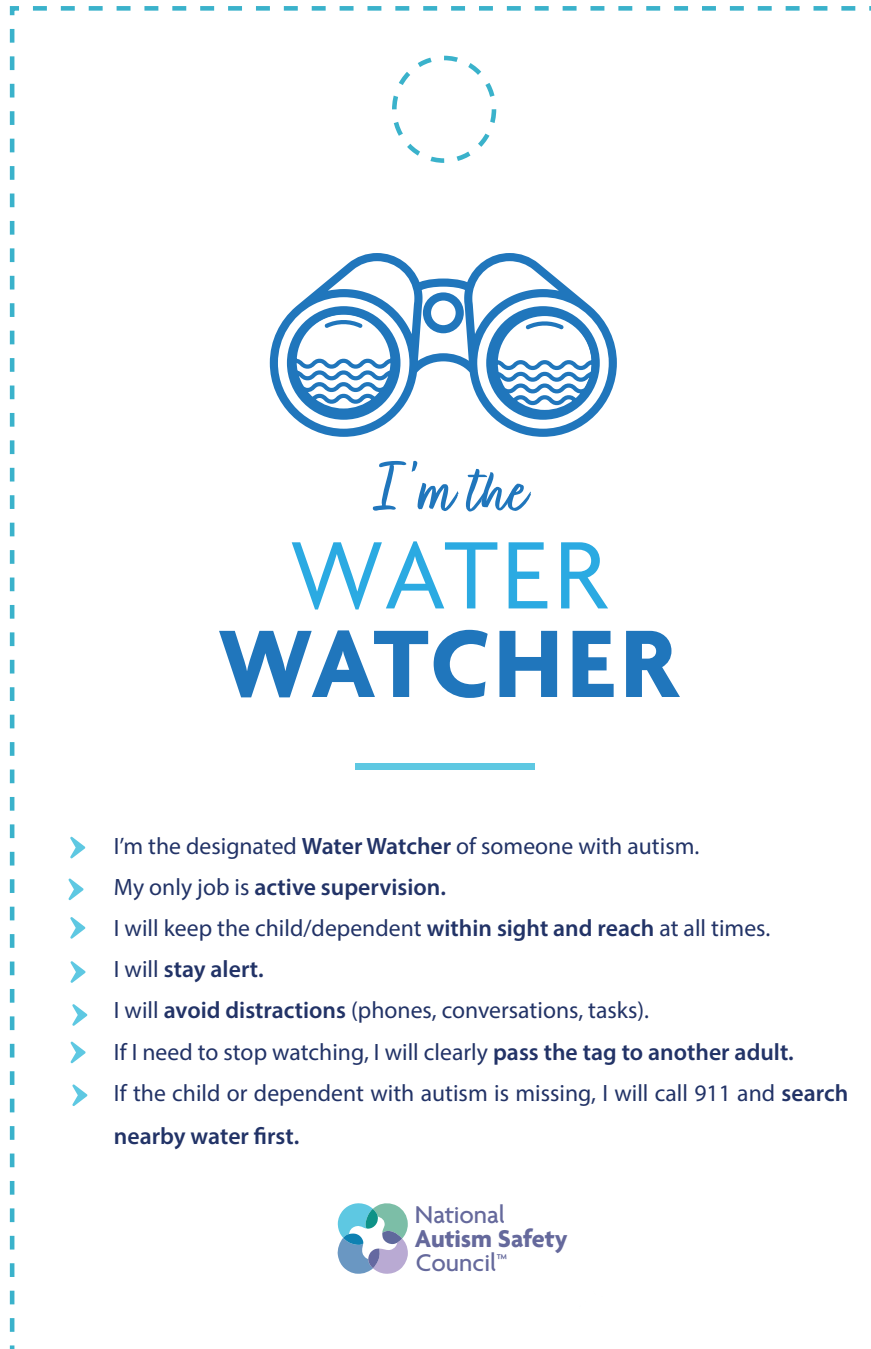
- I'm the designated **Wander Watcher** of a child/dependent with autism.
- My only job is **active supervision to prevent wandering/elopement**.
- I will keep the individual **within sight and reach** at all times.
- I will **stay alert**.
- I will **avoid distractions** (phones, conversations, tasks).
- If I need to stop watching, I will clearly **pass the tag to another adult**.
- If the individual is missing, I will call 911 and **search nearby water first**.



Use this when visiting parks, during family gatherings, transitions, or high-sensory activities.

Tool: *Water Watcher Tag*

Cut, laminate or cover in plastic, and use a hole punch for the opening. This is a larger size that can be worn around the neck.



**Use this for times around water play,
pool time, or the beach.**



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Tool: *Stop Sign*

Print and cut out stop signs and place them on exterior doors and windows. Use blank space for additional custom instruction that would resonate with your child, such as "Bluey Says Wait."



+ Autism Emergency Profile Date: _____

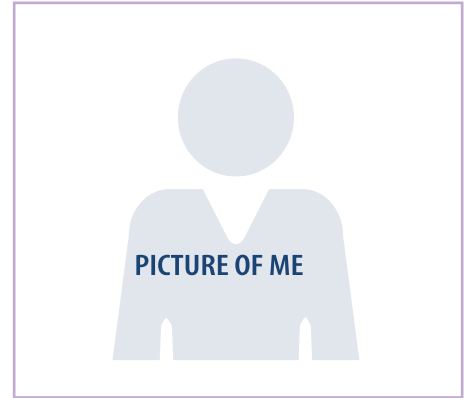
 Name: _____  Age/DOB: _____

 Caregiver: _____

 Phone: _____ Alt Phone: _____

 Address: _____

Radio Frequency Tracking Number (if applicable) _____



Height: _____ Weight: _____

Hair Color: _____

Eye Color: _____

Birthmarks / Scars: _____

My Style of Communication

- Nonspeaking Speak verbally Short phrases
 AAC device Spelling through keyboard or other
 Gestures/visuals Selective/Minimal

Best way to talk to me: _____

What Calms Me Down

- Fidget Phone / tablet Music/Show _____
 Snack (_____) Water bottle/other _____
 Noise-canceling Headphones Weighted Blanket

Other: _____

What Escalates Me

- Loud noise Crowds Being rushed Strong smells
 Touch Bright lights Changes Being startled

Other: _____

My Medical and Safety Information

- Seizures Asthma Diabetes Pica Panic Disorder
 Self-Injurious Behaviors Allergies: _____
 Wanders/elopes Other: _____
Medications and/or Restrictions: _____

Medical Contacts:

My Doctor: _____

Preferred Hospital: _____

How to Help Me

- Stay calm and relaxed Give me time and space if safe
 Contact my caregiver Hold out a cookie, water, phone or fidget
 Use simple phrases Use first/then "First _____, then _____."
 I may try to leave again — please watch me



**Immediately call 911
and search nearby
water if a child or
dependent with
autism is missing**

TSA Notification Card

Print this sheet or download it directly from TSA's website at www.tsa.gov/sites/default/files/disability_notification_card_508.pdf

TSA Notification Card: Individuals with Disabilities and Medical Conditions

I have the following health condition, disability or medical device that may affect my screening:

I understand that alternate procedures providing an equivalent level of security screening are available and can be done in private. I also understand that presenting this card does not exempt me from screening.

[Information](#) • [Assistance Requests](#) • [Compliments](#) • [Complaints](#)

TSA Cares

1-855-787-2227

Weekdays: 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. ET

TSA-ContactCenter@tsa.dhs.gov

Weekends/Holidays: 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET

Hablamos Español

Automated information offered in 12 languages

Call 72 hours prior to traveling to request the assistance of a Passenger Support Specialist (PSS) at the checkpoint. If a PSS is not available, you may ask for a Supervisory TSA Officer at the checkpoint.

Sample Physician Letter for Travel Accommodations

Date: _____

To Whom It May Concern (TSA, Airlines, Hotels, and Travel Providers):

I am writing on behalf of my patient, [Traveler's Name], who has been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). I am a licensed [physician/psychologist/clinician] involved in their care. This letter is provided to support reasonable accommodations that help ensure safe and successful travel.

Autism can affect communication, sensory processing, anxiety regulation, and safety awareness. Busy travel environments such as airports, airplanes, hotels, and crowded public spaces can be overwhelming and may increase distress or wandering risk. With preparation and appropriate supports, individuals with autism can travel safely and successfully. Recommended accommodations include:

Airport & Security Screening

- Allow caregivers to remain with the traveler throughout screening whenever possible
- Provide extra time and use clear, simple explanations before procedures or physical contact
- Permit sensory tools, comfort items, electronics, medications, and medically necessary foods/liquids
- Consider alternative screening methods if the traveler cannot tolerate standard procedures

Airline & Boarding

- Offer early or pre-boarding to reduce crowd exposure
- Seat the traveler with caregivers
- Allow access to headphones, tablets, and comfort items during boarding and taxi
- Provide patience and flexibility if additional time or support is needed

Hotel & Lodging

- Provide a quiet room away from elevators or high-traffic areas
- Allow monitoring devices, door alarms, and safety equipment in the room
- Provide flexibility during check-in/check-out if extra time is needed

General Support

- Allow caregivers to communicate on the traveler's behalf when needed
- Use calm communication and allow additional processing time
- Recognize that distress behaviors may reflect anxiety or sensory overload, not noncompliance

Thank you for supporting accessibility, safety, and dignity for this traveler and their family. Please contact my office if further information is needed.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Physician Name, Credentials] [Practice Name]

[Phone Number] [Email Address]

Sample Travel Schedule



Wake Up



Eat Breakfast



Get Dressed,
Brush Teeth



Pack My Bag



Plane Ride
or Car Ride



Headphones
Ready



Watch, Play,
or Listen



Stay With My
Grown-Ups



Eat Lunch or
Snack



Arrive at Hotel



Unpack My Bag



Stay in Room
With Adult



Have Quiet Time



Eat Dinner



Take a Bath



Pajamas On,
Brush Teeth



Go to Sleep





Travel Safety Resource Guide

Autism Travel

<https://autismtravel.com>

Accessibility Card

<https://www.accessibilitycard.org>

TSA Card:

https://www.tsa.gov/sites/default/files/disability_notification_card_508.pdf

TSA Cares:

<https://www.tsa.gov/contact-center/form/cares>

Wings for Autism

<https://thearc.org/our-initiatives/travel/>

Autism on the Seas

www.autismontheseas.com

Universal Orlando

www.universalorlando.com/webdata/k2/en/us/files/Documents/UOR_Cognitive_Disability_Guide.pdf

Disney

<https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/guest-services/neurodivergent/>