



General Awareness Letter

This is a resource to provide to your loved one's school, IEP team, local aquatics facility, homeowners association, etc., as needed.

To Whom It May Concern,

Children and dependents with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are at increased risk of wandering or bolting from safe environments, which can lead to tragic outcomes. Many experience challenges with sensory processing, impulse control, movement disorders, and awareness of danger, making it essential for communities to understand how to help keep them safe.

Research shows that nearly half of children with autism wander or elope,¹ and that, on average, eight children with autism die per month in the U.S. after wandering or bolting from various settings.² This behavior is not a result of poor parenting, but a serious safety concern requiring education and vigilance. NASC's longitudinal surveillance data on autism-related elopement fatalities, spanning 1974 to the present, show that approximately 82% of deaths are due to drowning.³ Many may not recognize danger or respond when called, increasing the risks of drowning, traffic accidents, falls, and hyper/hypothermia.

Most wandering/elopement incidents are driven by the need for regulation (reducing stress or discomfort), stimulation (seeking sensory input or preferred activities/topics), or both. Most often it occurs when a person is attempting to escape overwhelming sensory stimuli such as loud noises, bright lights, or crowded spaces. The behavior is common enough to have its own medical diagnosis code (Z91.83).

Because of the critical nature of this issue, we respectfully ask for your support in providing resources and safeguards that protect individuals with autism. These may include:

- **Modifying the classroom** to be sensory-friendly, as well as practicing co-regulation.
- **Providing access** to swimming lessons and protective or adaptive equipment.
- **Allowing special locks** in apartments, as well as fencing.
- **Allowing fencing** around homes, pools, and playgrounds.
- **Allowing locator** technology to assist in tracking.
- **Maintaining close and constant supervision** at school.
- **Installing simple door chimes** at school.

By increasing education and implementing these protections, we can help prevent tragedies and create safer environments for individuals with autism, their families, and communities.

Sincerely,

Founder, President
National Autism Safety Council

1. Anderson, C., Law, J. K., Daniels, A., Rice, C., Mandell, D. S., Hagopian, L., & Law, P. A. (2012). Occurrence and family impact of elopement in children with autism spectrum disorders. *Pediatrics*, 130(5), 870–877. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2012-0762>

2. McIlwain, L., Hudgins, C., Heaps, J. Autism-Related Elopement Fatalities in the United States 2025 REVIEW. National Autism Safety Council. February 2026.

3. McIlwain, L. Longitudinal surveillance and analysis of autism-related elopement fatalities, 1974 to present, maintained through the National Autism Safety Council.