



Elopement

Strategies for Stressful Situations

Elopement is a term used to describe when a child with autism runs or wanders away from a safe, designated place. Elopement can occur slow or very fast and sudden, creating a stressful and scary situation for those involved.

Understanding Elopement

Figuring out why your child wants to elope will help you develop strategies to prevent it from happening in the future. Here are two common scenarios:

You may notice that your child elopes to their favorite place outside.

Make sure your child has a way to communicate where they want to go. Try having a button that makes noise or visuals next to the door so they can communicate what they want. If your child has a favorite place, try building it into their daily or weekly schedule so they know when to expect to go.

You may notice that your child elopes when there is something going on inside they want to get away from.

Try to identify a quiet space in your home where your child can go to get away. Having headphones or other sensory items in this space can help. Show your child where this place is and teach them how to get there. Make sure they have a way to communicate that something is bothering them or they don't want to do something.

Prevention & Management of Elopement

- ✚ Locks or alarms on exterior doors or windows may help to prevent elopement from the home. Place them out of reach, if possible.
- ✚ **Connect with neighbors and local law enforcement.** Show pictures or introduce them to your child so they may recognize them if elopement occurs.
- ✚ Tracking tags and GPS devices are useful items that help to identify and locate a child when they elope. Both GPS devices and tracking tags often use an app to track your child's location. Some apps will notify you if your child wanders beyond a boundary.
- ✚ **Identification bracelets and necklaces** are items that often have a child's name, the caregiver's name, address, and phone number.

- ✚ Develop a **plan of action** so that you know what to do if elopement occurs. Identify possible locations your child could elope to. Bodies of water, including pools, are common destinations.
- ✚ Place different highly preferred items into a bag and keep it near the door. This bag should be easy to grab and could be useful in getting your child to return safely to the home.
- ✚ Teach your child to recite their phone number, name, family member's names, and their address.
- ✚ If elopement happens, **stay calm.** Take a deep breath. Take a moment to think. Plan to check the locations your child may have gone. Hold your child's hand when returning home.

