

# WATER SAFETY & ELOPEMENT

Many children with autism enjoy playing in water. While water play can be a fun activity, it can quickly turn dangerous. Drowning is a leading cause of death for individuals with autism. Many children with autism do not understand the dangers of water. Drowning often happens when a child is unsupervised after they elope or wander into a pool or body of water. Responding quickly and efficiently if your child elopes or wanders is critical, especially when water is nearby. Developing a plan of action in the event you cannot find your child can help prepare for an emergency.

## Here are some key steps in to include in your emergency plan:

1. Call 9-1-1 or notify emergency responders. Don't wait to call. Make sure to tell them your child has autism.
2. Check bodies of water. If your child elopes from home, immediately head to nearby pools, lakes, large puddles, streams, or other bodies of water as these are common destinations for children that elope. This still applies to winter months or inclement weather.
3. Alert the neighbors. The more people searching, the better.
4. Stay calm. Take a moment to think. This will help you respond more efficiently.
5. Have copies of a picture of your child. If you need support, have copies of your child's photo to share with individuals assisting in the search.

## Prevention activities:

- ✦ Tracking tags and GPS devices can help locate a child when they elope.
- ✦ Use alarms, locks, and out-of-reach latches on doors that lead outside.
- ✦ Consider swimming lessons. Search for an instructor that specializes in teaching children with autism.
- ✦ If you have a pool or fenced-in yard, make sure the gate is closed. Remove all toys from the pool area.
- ✦ Alert neighbors and local law enforcement about elopement potential.



Behavioral  
Framework™

