

AUTISM AND ELOPEMENT

A common stress or fear for parents of autistic children is elopement. Elopement is running away, or when a child leaves a caregiver/safe place without permission or telling anyone. It is common for autistic children. Elopement can be dangerous if the child goes somewhere dangerous or encounters things they aren't prepared for.

HOW AND WHERE DO CHILDREN ELOPE?

- Run away from caregivers in public.
- Leave classroom, school, or daycare.
- Climb out a window.
- Run out a door when caregivers are doing something else or when they're looking away.

WHY DO CHILDREN ELOPE?

- May want to get to a place, person, or thing they love.
 - Many autistic kids love water: this is a common place they try to reach.
- May want to get some sensory input like wind, water, or snow.
- To get away from overwhelming situations or sensory inputs.
- Because they enjoy being chased.

HOW DO WE PREVENT ELOPEMENT?

Every child is different. Not every one of these suggestions will work for your child, however these are common ways to keep a child from eloping that may help you:

- Put locks, safety chains, etc. on windows and doors. Make sure your child can't open or remove them.
- Install alarms on windows and doors that make noise when the window or door is opened.
- Install cameras in your home.
- Give your child a tracking device to wear.
- Have your child wear an ID bracelet so if they do elope there will be info that lets other contact you.
- Check on your child often. You can set a timer to help remind you.
- If your child can speak, teach them their name, address, and phone number.
- Speak to your neighbors so they know your child may elope. They can keep an eye out.
 - This can be hard or feel shameful but there is no reason to be ashamed: your child deserves a community that supports them.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CHILD ELOPES? WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

- Be prepared. Make a plan before your child elopes.
- Call 911. Let them know your child is autistic and share any specific communication needs your child has.
- Give the police information about your child:
 - What they like to do.
 - How to calm them.
 - Where you think they might have gone.
 - If they have eloped in the past, and where they went if they did.
- Ask family, friends, and neighbors to help with the search.
- Use social media to spread the word.
- Search the immediate surroundings and act quickly.

HAVING A PLAN IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN DO.

