

ASD and Wandering: Facts, Recommendations, Recovery, and Resources

Adapted from Wandering and
the Role of Occupational
Therapists by Jeannie Kunz,
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Facts:

- **Approximately 49% of children with ASD wander (National Autism Society, 2011)**
- Children with ASD wander from home (74%), the store (40%), and school (29%)
- It occurs because of attention challenges, visual interests, and escape behaviors
- Complicating factors include limited expressive/receptive language, poor safety awareness, learning difficulties
- 79.4% of deaths with children with ASD are related to wandering and accidental occurrences, including drowning, suffocation
- Specific cases of drowning issues resulted in litigation and/or passage of federal laws: Avonte Oquendo, Kevin Willis, Omarion Humphrey

Recommendations:

- Develop a site-specific wandering/elopement plan with all involved team members including principal, teachers, support staff, behavior team, specials staff
 - Identify elopement team members
 - Create a clear, systematic responsibility designation system for elopement plan
- Use environmental supports, such as barriers (ie closed doors, screened in windows, fences)
- When a student is identified as missing:
 - Enact the elopement plan immediately
 - CALL 911
 - Alert parents/guardians
- Recovery Process
 - Remain calm and matter of fact when interacting with the student
 - Limit talking/touching, and **DO NOT** provide preferred items (ie screens, toys, food)
 - Verbally discuss FACTS the student will understand:
 - “You were at . . . “
 - “You go to school at . . . “
 - “You stay in room . . . “
 - “Your teacher is . . . “

Resources:

- National Autism Association’s Big Red Safety Box® for families and teachers
- Project Lifesaver®
- Autism Alliance of Michigan® GPS Program

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