



# Autism Safety Handout



Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics

Boston Medical Center

## SAFETY

It is our responsibility as caregivers to do all we can to keep children safe. Children with autism may struggle with limitations in social communication, impulse control, and language. Safety considerations are important to keep in mind for children of all ages and levels of functioning.

This handout is designed to provide you with an overview of key topics and resources to help enhance your child's safety. It is important to consult regularly with your child's physicians, therapists and school teachers to target safety measures to your child's individual needs. Your pediatric clinician is a great place to start with any questions.



## SECURE YOUR HOME

You may find it is necessary to prevent your loved one from leaving the home unsupervised or unnoticed by:

- Installing secure dead bolt locks. These can be installed high enough to be out of a younger child's reach. There are also dead-bolts that require keys on both sides, but if these are used it is important to keep the key readily available near the door so that the door can be opened readily in case of an emergency where you must leave the house quickly.
- Installing inexpensive battery operated alarms on doors and windows to alert you when opened (available at stores like Wal-Mart and Radio Shack).
- Placing hook and eye locks on all doors, above your child's reach.
- Adhering printable STOP SIGNS to doors, windows and other exits, such as gates.
- Installing a home security alarm system
- Fencing your yard.
- Consider contacting a professional locksmith, security company or home improvement professional to promote safety and prevention in your home.

## Where to start

Young children may need to be taught to stay with their caregivers when walking or in public places. To teach safety compliance start with the "Come here" instruction. You can play the "Come Here" game with your child by having him/her sit in a chair or stand with one parent just behind him/her and one parent a few feet in front of him/her. The parent in front invitingly says "come here" with arms outstretched and the parent behind him/her gives a gentle physical prompt to stand up and move to the beckoning parent. When the child reaches the parent who is calling him/her, he/she should immediately be rewarded, such as by picking him/her up and playfully swinging him around. This should be repeated several times per game, and the game should be played often, while gradually increasing the distance between the child and the parent who is calling him/her. Eventually, the physical prompts should be faded as she/he learns to comply with only the spoken instruction.

To teach attention and cooperation with regards to bolting in public, practice the "Walk with Me/Stop" game. A parent takes the child's hand as the parent says "walk with me" and they walk together. At unpredictable moments the parent should then say "Stop" while holding onto the child to encourage him/her to stop. As he/she learns to stop when his/her parent stops, he/she should be immediately rewarded (picked up, tickled, primary reinforcer if need be, etc.). You do this several times throughout the course of your walk, practice a little bit every day in safe environments (backyard, down a hall, etc.). Overtime and with success responding to the cues "walk with me" and "stop", you will start to fade your hand-hold to where your child is walking along side you with the goal of him/her stopping when you say stop.

## CONSIDER FORMS OF IDENTIFICATION (ID)

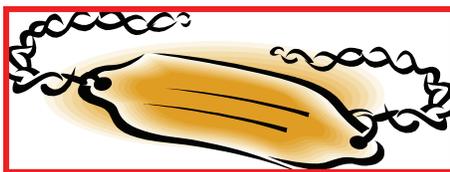
Medical ID—bracelets, necklaces, shoelaces- are designed to be worn by your child and will include your name, telephone number and other important information. They may also state that your child has autism and is non-verbal if applicable. If your child will not wear one of these, consider making a laminated card with this information that can be put in their pocket, backpack or other personal belongings.

## CONSIDER A LOCATING DEVICE

Locating devices, worn on the child's wrist or ankle, can help locate individuals who have wandered. These programs, such as Project Lifesavers or LoJack Safety Net (see Additional Resources), have a monthly service fee. They may not be available in all areas, so check with your local law enforcement to inquire about your city or town.

## WATER SAFETY

*Constant, careful supervision of children around water and pools is essential. Life vests and barriers such as pool fencing are necessary even when children have completed swimming classes. Teaching your child how to swim DOES NOT mean your child is safe around water.*



## SAFETY IN THE COMMUNITY

If your child's level of safety awareness impacts walking in parking lots or distances, s/he may qualify for a handicapped placard from the MA Registry of Motor Vehicles.

"My Child Has Autism" cards are available and can help educate others in the community by being distributed when there are questions or concerns about your child's behavior. See attached page for sample cards.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Project Lifesavers:  
877-580-LIFE (5433)  
[www.projectlifesaver.org](http://www.projectlifesaver.org)
- LoJack Safety Net:  
1.877.434.6384  
[www.SafetyNetByLoJack.com](http://www.SafetyNetByLoJack.com)
- MedicalAlert (ID Bracelets):  
1.800.432.5378  
[www.medicalert.org](http://www.medicalert.org)
- Windows Guards:  
1.800.445.2370  
[www.angelguards.com](http://www.angelguards.com)
- Autism Speaks Safety Links:  
[www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/autism-safety-project/resources](http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/autism-safety-project/resources)
- National Autism Association:  
[www.autismsafety.org](http://www.autismsafety.org)
- Disabled placard:  
[www.mass.gov/rmv/forms/disabled.htm](http://www.mass.gov/rmv/forms/disabled.htm)

## Safety with our bodies

Children with autism may have trouble deciphering what others are thinking and feeling and have difficulty distinguishing inappropriate adult behavior from appropriate. If abuse occurs, communication impairments may also hamper their ability to tell someone.

From a young age, it is important for children to learn about personal and body safety. Areas to focus on can include closing and locking the bathroom door, knowing who can and can't help with personal hygiene, and understanding the difference between good touching and bad touching. Teens need to know when and where it's okay to touch themselves, and they need to understand the absolute need for privacy.

Things parent can do:

- Think ahead - be proactive ("pre-teach")
- Be concrete (talk about body parts by name, i.e. the penis or vagina, not the birds and bees)
- Be consistent and repeat messages about body safety often
- Teach the basics of safety and hygiene
- Strongly reinforce for all appropriate behavior
- Redirect inappropriate behaviors. For example, if a child is likely to masturbate in class or in public, give him something to carry or hold, etc.
- Keep an eye out for strange marks on their bodies and for dramatic changes in behaviors, such as reluctance to be left alone with a particular person or people.
- Be familiar with your child's caregivers and routines.
- Do background checks of your child caregiver

