

Preparing for an Autism Emergency

To help ensure safety and lower risk for a child or adult with autism to have an unfortunate encounter, parents and care providers will need to become proactive and prepare an informational handout.

Leading causes for concern are children and adults with autism who run away or wander from parents and care providers. Tragically, children and adults with autism are often attracted to water sources such as pools, ponds, and lakes. Drowning is a leading cause of death for a child or adult who has autism. Wandering can also lead to high risk field contacts with law enforcement or members of the general public.

Preparing for a wandering incident may seem extreme for some families. After all, their child or adult hasn't wandered or bolted. Yet, for many other families, addressing wandering the first time can be the worst time. These preparations will also be invaluable before, during and after a natural or manmade emergency situation. For example, when a parent or care provider has their own medical emergency and becomes quickly incapacitated.

Contacting 911 Call Centers

In the U.S., some law enforcement, fire rescue, and emergency 911 call centers are willing and able to proactively place this information into their data base. Although not every system or agency is able to provide this service, it is certainly a worthy effort to inquire.

If wandering is a concern, ask your local 911 call center to red flag this information in their 911 computer data base. When a call comes from families that participate in the red flag program, 911 operators can alert the first responder before they arrive with key information that can improve the response. When we provide law enforcement with information before an incident occurs, we can expect better responses.

When Wandering or an Emergency Occurs

When you are listed in a 911 special needs database, please be aware that the information is typically linked to your home to help assist during an emergency. The information may not automatically transfer to identify a person who has wandered away from home or is involved in an accident out in the community.

Before searching please remember to call 911 first. It will be your responsibility to inform them that a family member is missing and needs assistance in the community.

Be ready and willing to provide information about the person who is missing, either proactively to 911 operators or on the spot to first responders such as police, fire-rescue or other emergency medical responders. Your preparation and planning can be the positive critical difference to the field response.

The [Autism Emergency Contact Form](#) can be completed, copied and carried with you at all times. Keep one at home, in your car's sun visor or glove box, in your purse or wallet, or affixed to a child's car seat. An autism decal on your vehicle can alert first responders to search for the handout if you are incapacitated for any reason. The information in your [Autism Emergency Contact Form](#) can also be used with a 911 alert program. Also, circulate this handout to family members, trusted neighbors, friends and coworkers.

The [Autism Emergency Contact Form](#) will also come in handy if you are in an area other than your neighborhood and are approached by the police.

The Autism Society of America's [Safe and Sound initiative](#) features autism alert stickers for homes and vehicles.

Plan Your Response with the [Autism Emergency Checklist](#)

Identification Options

Some type of ID wear is essential for those with autism, especially if they are nonverbal or are unable or become unable to respond to questions about their identity if they are found.

- MedicAlert® or similar style bracelet or necklace
- Joggers shoe tags
- Laminated ID card
- State issued ID card
- Card on belt loops and belt,
- Card sewn into pants or jackets
- Hang from zippers
- Silk screened into undergarments
- Non permanent tattoos

Bracelets, anklets, necklaces, shoe or jacket tags, ID cards, clothing labels or permanent ink ID on t-shirts or undergarments are all good options.

Some ID options may be removed by the person with autism with sensory sensitivities. An innovative option is the use of prepared, washable, non permanent tattoos that bear ID information. These can be found by visiting tattooswithapurpose.com.

If ID wear is used, first responders may not know what autism is. More specific language should be included in addition to name, address and phone number, such as, non-verbal, sensitive to light, sound or touch, possible seizure activity, or may not seek help.

References:

Debbaudt, D. and Rothman, D. (2001) *Contact With Individuals With Autism: Effective Resolutions*. FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, 7, 4, 20-24.

Debbaudt, D. (2002) *Autism, Advocates and Law Enforcement Professionals: Recognizing and Reducing Risk Situations for People with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Debbaudt D., *Are You Prepared for an Autism Emergency?* 2004, Autism Risk & Safety Newsletter. Port St. Lucie, FL

Debbaudt D. and Legacy. D *Autism & Law Enforcement Video*. Appendix. 2004, Debbaudt Legacy Productions, LLC. Port St. Lucie, FL

For more information:

Contact this document's author Dennis Debbaudt via:

email: ddpi@flash.net

phone: (772) 398-975

fax: (772) 398-2428

Mailing Address:

Dennis Debbaudt

2338 SE Holland Street

Port St. Lucie FL 34952