



VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Safety at Home

Families living with autism spectrum disorder often look for tips on how to handle the many different challenges that may arise. “Real Life Tips for Kids with Autism” is a series of practical videos and resources presented by the experts at Children’s Specialized Hospital.

Many children with autism often lack a fear of danger. We always think of danger usually going out and about in the community. But, very often, there are dangers right inside our own homes. Many children don’t understand safety rules or don’t understand typical discipline like when you say “no” or “stop doing something.” So, it’s going to be a little challenging to help them either be aware of safety or put some tools in place to protect them and your family.

Within the home, a child may break things, throw things, tear things and we never know what they might do. We have to pay attention to what things they may be attracted to or what things they may react to in case of a stressful situation.

There are many devices that are commonly available – typically the ones that you’d get for a toddler to help protect them from danger. But now, as a child gets older, a child with autism, they may have different strength or different knowledge or they may have different fine motor skills that they’re able to get through things that the toddlers might not have been able to get into. So, we may have to get a little strategic and think a little differently. We may be able to create helpful visuals either by drawing them or doing them on the computer, such as items like this where it can say, “stop” or “no.” But we want to make sure we’re using some universal signs that we can take anywhere and other people would know what they are as well.

There are many protective locks available. Some are an item like this. There are also alarms available that are magnetic that you can purchase at any hardware store that can alarm you to when a cabinet is opened or a door is opened.

Some families even have to protect the opening of their windows with bars or wood. They may have to replace the glass with Plexiglass®, all for safety purposes. Make sure you let first responders know what may prevent them from getting into your house in an emergency. As much as these items can prevent your child from getting out, we want to make sure that first responders can get into your house quickly.

Some children may eat things that are not made for human consumption. We have to be very careful about things like cat litter or detergents – laundry detergents or dishwasher detergents – mouthwashes, and aftershave lotions. All of these can be potentially harmful and even fatal in many situations. So try to secure these items and/or keep them out of reach.

Beware of common household detergents, particularly powder detergents or laundry detergents that can be mistaken for something else like grated cheese. We don’t want them to get confused, particularly if they can’t read and ingest something that can be potentially dangerous.

Common everyday tools, scissors, knives may also need to be protected and secured in a safe location. These items are often in very easily accessible areas and when you are distracted with a phone call or with the door bell, your child may grab one of these items and potentially harm himself inadvertently.

Children with autism may not always know that a fire can burn them or that a small fire can grow into a bigger fire. So we really have to learn to educate our children all the time and teach them not only at home, but in their schools – potentially in their IEPs – to learn how to really be safe with fire. Please work with your child’s school to make sure there are safety elements, particularly those around fire, so they know what things can be dangerous and what things they should stay away from.

Fire safety and other safety skills can be taught using social stories®, visual schedules, charts, and other technology. Many of these resources are available and can be very helpful. But be aware that what might be taught at home or at school, is not usually transferrable to other locations. So the child may have a hard time generalizing this skill. So teach it often. Teach it in different places. And teach it with different people.

When teaching fire safety and teaching a child a safe place to go, try not to use the words “safe place” because children with autism often have a safe place where they feel comfortable and secure and we don’t want them to get confused with a safe place during a fire and a safe place where they go just to feel secure. You can use a term such as “emergency zone” instead of “the safe place.”

Children with autism may not understand what 911 means or what a true emergency means. So you might have to think about really teaching a skill to see if the child has that skill or understanding. If they do, please make sure they understand what a true emergency is and when to call 911 and when not to.

There are many children who have the tendency to escape from the house and wander into the community. We have to be careful and secure the house as best we can with locks and other restrictive devices. But again, make sure the first responders are aware of these locks and will be able to get in in case of an emergency.

Take care when you are dressing your child each and every day that you are aware that there is some form of identification on the child. We don’t want them to be wandering out particularly if they are non verbal and have no way of being identified.

Be aware, if you have a pool or your neighbors have a pool, to make sure they are as secure as possible. Put fences around your pool and notify your neighbors and let them know that you have a child with autism and that he or she is attracted to water. We want to make sure that all eyes are out and open in case there could be a potential danger.

Children with autism are often climbers and they may climb up on furniture, even shelving. We want to make sure all the furniture is secured to walls and any other dangerous areas in your house are protected. Many families may even remove breakable items throughout the house just to avoid those breaking and an injury from occurring.

Get to know your local emergency responders – the police, fire, and rescue. Let your child get to know them and be aware of their uniforms and what they’re there to do, particularly to protect them and your family.

Talk to your child’s teachers and doctors about safety. It’s really important to have the safety skills your child needs to protect your family, your home, and especially your child.

Children’s Specialized Hospital and other organizations have lots of safety-related resources available for you. So go out. Find these resources and keep your family safe.



Through a partnership with Kohl's Cares, Children's Specialized Hospital is improving access to care for children with special health care needs.



RWJBH.org/CSH