



Safety at Home

- Common, everyday items in your own home could be dangerous for a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Some children with ASD may throw or break things. Your child may turn lights or stove pilots on and off repetitively. Self-stimulatory behaviors that could be dangerous could involve such things as opening and closing scissors or banging glass items. Work with your school or a behaviorist to help change these potentially dangerous behaviors.
- Ordinary household items like cat litter, detergents, mouth wash, aftershave, and watch batteries are dangerous if swallowed. People with ASD may not understand this danger or may mistaken these items for a similar edible item. Be sure to secure or hide these items as well as medications and ointments. If your child has eaten something and you are not sure if it is safe, you can call the poison control hotline any time to ask for help. If your child has a life-threatening emergency as a result of eating any item, call 911 immediately.
- You can make, print, or purchase visual supports that can be used to identify things that your child should not touch. These signs could be printed with the word “NO” or “STOP” or a picture of the circle-backslash symbol (circle with a diagonal line through it) to indicate when something is prohibited.
- Families could use inexpensive magnetic alarms on doors, cabinets, or windows. These devices will alarm those in the house when a person has opened something that was off-limits. Although some safety devices typically used for toddlers may be helpful, older children with ASD are often too strong and resourceful for these items to protect from dangers. Durable locks and other devices are often better options. Furniture and shelving may need to be bolted to walls or floors. Breakable and sharp items may have to be removed to prevent injuries.
- It is helpful for emergency responders to be aware of safety issues that may add additional challenges when responding to an emergency at your home. Identify the agency that dispatches local 911 calls near your home. Schedule a meeting to speak with a person and ask that a ‘911 identifier’ be associated with your home telephone number. Provide critical information such as when you have additional locks or window bars, where your child may run or hide, triggers for challenging behaviors, and alternate forms of communication used by your child. This information would display on the screen when an emergency call is placed and helps responders be better prepared to protect or rescue your child.
- Children with autism may not recognize fire dangers or comprehend the damage a fire can cause. In addition, a child may not understand fire drills and alarms. In fact, alarms may trigger unpredictable and potentially dangerous behaviors. The child may run to a place where he or she feels comfortable which may be unsafe. Visual tools such as picture cards, social stories, and video modeling can help a child learn fire safety skills and other safety skills in your home. Role playing can also help children practice ways to act safely. Ask your child’s educational team to include some safety goals as part of your child’s IEP. These skills should be practiced at home with different members of the family to increase understanding and to reinforce the skills in multiple environments.

- Before teaching your child to call 911 in an emergency, be sure he or she understands what a true emergency is. Help him or her with the skills needed to provide information and to answer questions during this call. In addition, the child needs to understand instructions and to follow the direction of the emergency dispatcher as well as first responders.
- People with ASD are often attracted to water and may not know how to swim. They may not understand the danger of drowning. If you have a pool, secure it appropriately with fences and locks. Discuss potential water dangers with your neighbors and relatives who have pools so that they are aware of your safety concerns. Work with community recreation providers to coordinate swimming lessons and water-safety skills for your child.
- Discuss your child's safety challenges with your family, friends, and neighbors. Safety skills learned in your home may not transfer to other locations. It is in your child's best interest to have as many people as possible understand information related to the safety of your child and the concerns of your family.

More autism and safety resources are available at:

www.childrens-specialized.org/KohlsAutismAwareness

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