

Personal Safety

Parents and care providers may want to take some extra safety measures when preparing for a community outing or traveling. There are simple and easy things you can do to help protect your family. Become proactive in your safety routine.

Develop an informational handout about autism and be person-specific. The sheet should be clearly labeled and can include information like:

- name of person
- a current photograph
- physical description
(height, weight, eye and hair color, scars or any identifiable marks)
- emergency contact information
- medical, dietary, and other important issues and requirements
- method of communication, if non-verbal
(e.g., uses sign language, picture exchange, or written word)

Carry copies of the sheet with you at all times. Leave additional copies in your car, purse, suitcase, and at home. These informational sheets can also aid in opening up dialog with your neighbors. Decide what information you would like to share and plan a brief visit to their home or invite them over to yours to offer this helpful safety information.

To help increase awareness and understanding, some parents/caregivers also carry business cards that contain a message about autism and contact information for a local or national autism advocacy group. These are some examples of the messages that you can use on your card:

Example A (parent/caregiver):

I apologize if my child's behavior has disturbed you. My child has an autism spectrum disorder.

- Autism is a neurobiological disorder that occurs in approximately 1 out of every 68 children.
- Symptoms Include:
 - delayed language development
 - reduced social skills, reduced eye contact, repetitive behavior
 - difficulty coping with change which might cause unusual behavior or tantrums

Link to the autism advocacy group of choice

Example B (adult with autism):

I have autism.

- Autism is a developmental disability that may affect my ability to communicate and how I interact with others. It might affect how I perceive things, which may cause me to act in ways that seem inappropriate.
- I apologize if my behavior has disturbed you. Please realize that our differences are not as great as the things we have in common.
- *Link to the autism advocacy group of choice*

Many online sites feature business card templates that you can use.

Self identification is also important.

Print a small ID card for the person to carry or wear.

Everyone's preference is different.

Some might like an ID bracelet, key tag or a temporary tattoo.

If those are not options for the individual, label clothing tags with a permanent marker.

Some of the characteristics of ASD can pose a potential danger to self, others, and/or property. Some other safety considerations might be needed. A person with autism might:

- Have a tendency to wander
- Lack fear or sense of danger
- Be unaware or unresponsive to others they do not know
- Have unpredictable reactions to an unfamiliar environment
- Misinterpret words, signs, gestures
- Be unaware of pain
- Repeat words or phrases

If the person with autism has a tendency to wander or if you're new to the town, contact the local law enforcement agency. Take extra precautions by alerting first responders about the person's special circumstances. Many local emergency offices maintain a database that helps first responders identify individuals with special needs. When contacting your emergency office, inquire about receiving a form for such a database. For a list of state offices and agencies visit:

<http://www.fema.gov/about/contact/statedr.shtm>

It's important to familiarize a person with autism with emergency response professionals. This can be done with visual aids or through personal interactions. Most police departments and other emergency response professionals make frequent visits to organizations or schools to talk about safety. It's an effective way for a person to get to know these important people in your neighborhood, while building community relationships. Or, if you prefer, set up an appointment to visit the facility.

www.childrens-specialized.org/KohlsAutismAwareness

For more information about this program contact: KohlsAutismAwareness@childrens-specialized.org



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