

AUTISM SPEAKS™

Autism Safety Project

*A tool kit about communicating with individuals
with autism in emergency situations*

Autism Speaks does not provide medical or legal advice or services. Rather, Autism Speaks provides general information about autism as a service to the community. The information provided in this kit is not a recommendation, referral or endorsement of any resource, therapeutic method, or service provider and does not replace the advice of medical, legal or educational professionals. This kit is not intended as a tool for verifying the credentials, qualifications, or abilities of any organization, product or professional. Autism Speaks has not validated and is not responsible for any information or services provided by third parties. You are urged to use independent judgment and request references when considering any resource associated with the provision of services related to autism





Autism Alliance for Local Emergency Responder Training - www.AutismAlert.org

- This website includes areas for professionals to blog, a calendar of events, training sessions, news and links for both parents and professionals.

The Autism and Law Enforcement Education Coalition - www.sncarc.org/alec.htm

- The ALEC program provides training to First Responders so that they are able to recognize situations involving children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

Autism Risk and Safety Management - www.autismriskmanagement.com

- This website provides information and resources for law enforcement, first responders, parents, educators and care providers.

Autism Spectrum Disorders from A to Z - www.asdatoz.com/info.html

- This website provides links to books, resources and information about Autism Spectrum Disorders. There are also articles and speaking dates by the authors.

Caretrak Systems – www.caretrak.com

- Caretrak aims to protect children with special needs with home monitoring systems and tracking units. These are used by hundreds of parents across the country and abroad. Their devices alert parents when their child leaves a certain area and the tracking unit can find a child within a mile radius.

Community and Law Enforcement Aware Response – www.clearscv.org

- The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the Autism Society of America- Los Angeles Chapter (ASA-LA) have partnered to develop an Autism Awareness Roll Call Training Program targeted to LAPD officers. Volunteers from the Los Angeles area autism community will present key information about Autism Spectrum Disorders during roll call briefings

Disability, Abuse & Personal Rights Project – www.disability-abuse.com

- This website is dedicated to the personal rights of children and adults with disabilities, with a mission to prevent abuse of these individuals.

Inclusive Preparedness Center - www.inclusivepreparedness.org

- The Inclusive Preparedness Center works to ensure that all individuals are included in the development and implementation of plans for protection from natural and man-made emergencies.

The Law Enforcement Awareness Network – www.leanonus.org

- It is the mission of L.E.A.N. On Us to provide first responders with information and resources that will allow them to better serve individuals within their communities affected by disabilities and mental illness.

National Autism Association – www.nationalautismassociation.org/found.php

- Autism presents a unique set of safety concerns for parents. Unlocking Autism and the NAA have teamed up to provide safety information for parents and families.

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children – www.missingkids.com

- NCMC's mission is to help prevent child abduction and sexual exploitation, help find missing children and assist victims of child abduction and sexual exploitation, their families, and the professionals who serve them.



Pacer Center – www.pacer.org

- The mission of the PACER Center (Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights) is to expand opportunities and enhance the quality of life of children and young adults with disabilities and their families, based on the concept of parents helping parents.

Project Lifesaver – www.projectlifesaver.org

- Project Lifesaver's primary mission is to locate and rescue missing persons. They have established many partnerships with local law enforcement to help save money and time for taxpayers. They also have many partnerships that help to strengthen the awareness and provide information about their technologies and services.

Safe and Sound – www.autism-society.org

- The Safe and Sound initiative provides much-needed information to the autism community on topics such as general safety, emergency preparedness, prevention, and risk management. Safe and Sound works to develop information and strategies that are beneficial to individuals on the spectrum, their families and the professionals who work with them. Another significant goal of Safe and Sound is to provide information and training to those who are first on the scene in an emergency situation.

Select Autism Merchandise – www.SelectAutismMerchandise.com

- This website allows for both parents and professionals to buy merchandise to help keep individuals on the spectrum safe. Additionally, this website provides a forum for people to discuss their concerns and ask for products that they might need.

Additional Readings

- Autism and Law Enforcement Education Coalition www.sncarc.org/images/brochurealec.pdf
- Debbaudt, D. "Avoiding Unfortunate Situations: Autism & Law Enforcement Handouts" - PDF Format: [Debbaudt AUS Handout.pdf](#) & Word Format: [Debbaudt AUS Handout.doc](#)
- Debbaudt, D. and D. Rothman. "Contact with Individuals with Autism" : FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, April 2001 at www.findarticles.com
- Doyle, B. "And Justice for All: Unless You Have Autism: What the Legal System Needs to Know About People with Autism Spectrum Disorders" www.barbaradoyle.com
- Gerald Hasselbrink Law Offices "Autism Safety Techniques: Assessing and Approaching Individuals With Autism" Information Sheet at www.hasselbrink.com/autsafety.html
- National Organization on Disability, "Prepare Yourself: [Disaster Readiness Tips for People with Disabilities](#)"





Autism Basics

What does autism look like?

Autism is a term commonly used for a group of neuro-developmental disorders also known as Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD) or Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The core symptoms of autism are challenges related to:

- *communication*
- *social interaction*
- *restrictive or repetitive behaviors and interests*

Individuals with autism can also experience other difficulties, including medical issues, differences in coordination and muscle tone, sleep disturbances, altered eating habits, anxiety or disordered sensory perceptions. The features, abilities and severity of symptoms vary considerably among individuals with autism.

An individual with autism may display some or all of the following characteristics:

- Difficulty understanding language, gestures and/or social cues
- Limited or no speech, or verbalizations that repeat or maintain a particular topic
- Limited or no eye contact
- Difficulty relating or participating in a back-and-forth conversation or interaction
- Social awkwardness
- Repetitive behaviors, such as pacing or lining things up, spinning, hand flapping, or rocking
- More or less sensitivity to light, sound, smell, taste or touch than usual
- Abnormal fears and/or lack of appropriate fear of real dangers
- Understanding and retention of concrete concepts, patterns, rules

Where does it come from?

There is no known cause of most cases of autism, though the best scientific evidence points toward a combination of genetic and environmental influences. Autism is a neurological/biological disorder, not a psychological/emotional condition. Autism is found in all social, racial and ethnic groups, and is 3-4 times more prevalent in boys than in girls. Autism occurs in 1 out of 150 children, up from 1 in 10,000 in 1980.

What do I need to keep in mind?

- Communication challenges can encompass a broad range, both in terms of understanding and speaking (understanding gestures or spoken language, delays in processing, inability to form sounds or full sentences, word retrieval difficulties, misunderstanding idioms or sarcasm, timing of body movements or conversational exchanges, remaining on topic, etc.)
- Most are concrete thinkers and literally interpret jokes, idioms or sarcasm
- Social skills are underdeveloped, but interest in friendships and social interaction is often present
- Anxiety and frustration are common



In case of emergency: Call 911

Poison Control Center: 800-222-1222

PERSONAL INFORMATION	
Family Name	
Address	
City	
State	
Zip	
Home Phone	
Work Phone	
Mobile Phone	
Pager Number	
Individual's Name	
Diagnosis	
Medical Diagnosis	
LOCAL EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION	
Name	
Phone	
Name	
Phone	
Name	
Phone	
PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN	
Name	
Phone	
INSURANCE	
Policy	
Group #	
ACTIVITY SCHEDULE SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS	
OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION	

*Display this form in a handy place for caregivers and others who may need emergency information.

Autism Safety Project

www.autismsafetyproject.org

PERSONAL INFORMATION	
Legal Name	
Nickname	
Sibling(s) Names	
Parent/Guardian	
Signature Consent*	
Address	
City	
State	
Zip	
Home Phone	
Mobile Phone	
Work Phone	
Pager Number	
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION	
Date of Birth/Age/Gender	
Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>	
Height	
Weight	
Eye Color	
Hair Color	
Scars: Identifying Marks	
Photo Date (attach to back)	
MEDICAL INFORMATION	
Diagnosis	
Medical Diagnosis	
Special Diet Diet Restrictions	
Medications (list) Name Dose When	
Medication Allergies Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Allergies Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Food <input type="checkbox"/>	
Health Insurance Plan	
Policy	
Pharmacy Name Phone	

*Consent for release of this form to Emergency Responders

PHYSICIANS	
Primary Care Physician	
Primary Care Physician Phone	
Specialist	
Specialist Phone	
EMERGENCY CONTACTS	
1. Name	
Address	
City State Zip	
Home Phone	
Mobile Phone	
Work Phone	
Relationship	
2. Name	
Address	
City State Zip	
Home phone	
Mobile phone	
Work phone	
Relationship	
3. Name	
Address	
City State Zip	
Home Phone	
Mobile Phone	
Work Phone	
Relationship	
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE INDIVIDUAL	
Common Presenting Problems	Photo
Things to Avoid	
Favorite Places	

Date form completed:
By Whom:
Relationship:

*Consent for release of this form to Emergency Responders



Creating Safety Plans For Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders

When it comes to identifying safety risks and preventing emergencies for an individual with autism, you and your family are the best advocates and the most likely people to take the necessary steps to develop a Safety Plan.

A Safety Plan should include key participants - school personnel, daycare providers, neighbors, caretakers, and extended family, anyone involved in your network that has daily contact with the individual at risk.

It is critical to take the time to evaluate what your family member needs to be safe and protected at home, school and in his or her community. Preventative measures help ensure the wellbeing of individuals with autism.

Be Prepared with Emergency Information at your Fingertips!

[Emergency Information at a Glance](#) (PDF)

Create an Informational Handout for First Responders!

[Emergency Information for Individuals with the Autism Spectrum Disorder](#) (PDF)

Top Safety Risks for Individuals with ASD:

- Wandering
- Pica
- Drowning
- Household toxings

Safety Plan Checklist:

- Does the individual with autism wander, run away or get lost in a crowd?
- Are your home, school and community activities evaluated for safety? Are preventative measures put in place?
- Does the individual ALWAYS wear identification with a contact number listed?
- Have you let your neighbors/community know about your child with special needs?
- Are safety skills included in the Individual Education Program in your school district?
- Have you contacted your local 911 call centers?

Research Publication:

Parents and caregivers should be aware that their loved ones with Autism Spectrum Disorders are at increased risk of accidental deaths due to drowning and suffocation, particularly younger individuals. Increased understanding of the most common causes of death can help parents and professionals focus on reducing associated risks and ultimately the rate of mortality among individuals with autism.

Mortality and Causes of Death in Autism Spectrum Disorders: An Update. Mouridsen SE, et al. Autism. 2008 Jul;12(4):403-14.



Resources

- American Red Cross - www.redcross.org (includes advice in mp3 audio format)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - emergency.cdc.gov
- Federal Interagency Coordinating Council on Emergency Preparedness and People with Disabilities - disabilitypreparedness.gov
- Get Pandemic Ready - getpandemicready.org
- Kind Find: Keeping Spectrum Kids Safe - www.kind-find.com
- National Organization on Disability, Emergency Preparedness Initiative - nod.org
- pandemicflu.gov
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Ready America - www.ready.gov
- ReadyMoms Alliance - readymoms.org

Fire Safety Book Designed for Kids with Autism: [I Know My Fire Safety Plan: A Children's Book](#)

[Tots in Mind: Leaders in Child Safety Products](#)

Products for Identification

[Medical ID Store](#)

[My Precious Child ID Bracelet](#)

[Temporary Tattoos with a Purpose](#)

[Lean on Us Child Safety ID Card](#)

[SafetyTats](#)

Personal Tracking Devices

[Gemini GPS Tracking Unit](#)

[Ion Kid's Tracking Wristband](#)

[Project Lifesaver Tracking Systems](#)

[Care Trak Transmitters](#)

[MyContact411](#)

Additional Resources

[Social Story Book - PPT](#)

[Protecting Loved one with Autism - PDF](#)

[Keeping Children and Adults with Autism Safe - PDF](#)

[National Autism Association – Safety Tool Kit](#)

[Unlocking Autism – Safety Tool Kit](#)





Law Enforcement

On a daily basis police officers encounter a multitude of individuals in emergency situations. Just as each emergency differs from the next, so does the individual involved, especially in regards to individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Police are trained to respond to a crisis situation with a certain protocol, but this protocol may not always be the best way to interact with individuals with ASD. Because police are usually the first to respond to an emergency, it is critical that these officers have a working knowledge of ASD, and the wide variety of behaviors individuals with ASD can exhibit in emergency situations.

Quick Facts for Law Enforcement

- Interacting with a child or adult who has an autism spectrum disorder will challenge your experience and training.
- You will hear terms such as low functioning/high-functioning autism and Asperger's Disorder to identify the level of their condition. In most cases, the person will have difficulties following verbal commands, reading your body language, and have deficits in social understanding.
- Law enforcement agencies should proactively train their sworn workforce, especially trainers, patrol supervisors, and school resource officers, to recognize the behavioral symptoms and characteristics of a child or adult who has autism, and learn basic response techniques.
- A training program should be designed to allow officers to better protect and serve the public and make the best use of your valuable time, and avoid mistakes that can lead to lawsuits and negative media scrutiny, loss of confidence from the community, morale problems, and lifelong trauma for all involved.
- A good autism recognition and response workshop is designed to inform law enforcement professionals about the risks associated with autism, and offers suggestions and options about how to address those risks.

Debbaudt, D. (2003 second edition) *Managing Autism Safety*, Advocate p.29

The Law Enforcement Awareness Network – www.leanonus.org

Autism Alliance for Local Emergency Responder Training - www.AutismAlert.org

The Autism and Law Enforcement Education Coalition - www.sncarc.org/alec.htm

Autism Risk and Safety Management - www.autismriskmanagement.com

Community and Law Enforcement Aware Response - www.clearscv.org

Avoiding Unfortunate Situations - policeandautism.cjb.net

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children – www.missingkids.com

Project Lifesaver – www.projectlifesaver.org

Caretrak Systems – www.caretrak.com

Autism Society of America - [Information for Law Enforcement and Other First Responders](#) (PDF)

The Autism Program of Illinois - www.theautismprogram.org

[ASA LAPD Autism Awareness Project](#) - (Document)

[Disaster Prep](#) - (PDF)

[And Justice for All: Unless you have Autism](#) - (Document)

[ALEC Brochure](#) - (PDF)





Fire Fighters

When a team of fire fighters responds to a call, there is usually a dangerous situation at hand. Upon reaching the scene it is critical for these first responders to immediately get to work in order to keep the people in these situations safe. When encountering a person with an autism spectrum disorder, the fire fighters may need to adjust their emergency response accordingly. In situations where the individual may be at risk, it is vital that the fire fighters be able to identify certain signs that may indicate that the person has ASD. The proper training and knowledge of autism spectrum disorders will help the fire fighters to deal with the emergency in the most successful way. With the correct information and preparation regarding autism spectrum disorders, these fire fighters will be more equipped to rescue these individuals and ensure their safety.

Quick Facts for Fire Fighters

- Individuals with autism can't be identified by appearance. They look the same as anyone else. They're identified by their behavior.
- Some individuals with autism do not have a normal range of sensations and may not feel the cold, heat, or pain in a typical manner. In fact they may fail to acknowledge pain in spite of significant pathology being present. They may show an unusual pain response that could include laughter, humming, singing and removing of clothing.
- Speak in short clear phrases "Get in." "Sit Down." "Wait here." An individual with autism may take longer to respond to directives, and that can be because they don't understand what's being demanded of them, or even just because they're scared, they may not be able to process the language and understand a directive when fearful.
- When restraint is necessary, be aware that many individuals with autism have a poorly developed upper trunk area. Positional asphyxiation could occur if steps are not taken to prevent it: frequent change of position, not keeping them face down. Individuals with autism may continue to resist restraint.
- Adults with autism are just as likely to hide, like children, in a fire situation. Closets, under bed and behind furniture checks need to be done during search and rescue.
- These individuals are a bolt risk after rescue. Firefighter must stay with the individual with autism.

Cannata, W. (2007). *Autism 101 for Fire and Rescue*, from SPEAK Web site: www.papremisealert.com

Resources for Fire Fighters

Autism Alliance for Local Emergency Responder Training - www.AutismAlert.org

Avoiding Unfortunate Situations - policeandautism.cjb.net

Select Autism Merchandise - www.SelectAutismMerchandise.com

The Law Enforcement Awareness Network – www.leanonus.org

The Autism and Law Enforcement Education Coalition - www.sncarc.org/alec.htm

Autism Risk and Safety Management - www.autismriskmanagement.com

Project Lifesaver - www.projectlifesaver.org

Community and Law Enforcement Aware Response - www.clearscv.org

Autism 101 for Fire and Rescue - www.autismlink.com/pages/emergency_firerescue

Caretrak Systems – www.caretrak.com

Autism Society of America - [Information for Law Enforcement and Other First Responders](#) (PDF)

[Disaster Prep](#) - (PDF)

[ALEC Brochure](#) - (PDF)





EMS (Emergency Medical Services)

In response to an emergency, EMS workers are often the first people at the scene. As they attend to the person or people involved in the crisis, they may not be aware that the individual has an autism spectrum disorder. If this is the case, the EMS worker will need to respond in a different way, while providing the quickest and most efficient care possible. Sometimes the ability of these EMS workers to respond in an effective timely manner will save the individual's life. Since individuals with autism spectrum disorders may respond differently to certain stimuli and medical examinations, it is crucial for EMS workers to be able to recognize certain signs that may indicate the individual is on the spectrum and alter their method of treatment accordingly.

Quick Facts for EMS

- Some individuals with autism do not have a normal range of sensations and may not feel the cold, heat, or pain in a typical manner. In fact they may fail to acknowledge pain in spite of significant pathology being present. They may show an unusual pain response that could include laughter, humming, singing and removing of clothing.
- Individuals with autism often have tactile sensory issues. Band-aids or other adhesive products could increase anxiety and aggression.
- Move slowly, performing exams distal to proximal. Explain what you plan to do in advance and as you do it. Explain where you are going and what they may see and who might be there. This may avert unnecessary anxiety and/or outbursts or aggressions from the patient. Individuals who appear not to understand may have better receptive language, which is not entirely evident.
- Expect the unexpected. Children with autism may ingest something or get into something without their parents realizing it. Look for less obvious causality and inspect carefully for other injuries.
- If possible ask a caregiver what the functional level of the individual with autism is, then treat accordingly. Stickers, stuffed animals and such which are used to calm young children may be helpful even in older patients.
- Attempt to perform exams in a quiet spot if at all possible, depending on the severity of injury and safety of the scene. Demonstrating what the exam will consist of on another person first may help the person with autism have a visual knowledge of what your intentions are.

Rzucidlo, S.F. (2007). *Autism 101 for EMS*, from SPEAK Web site: www.papremisealert.com

Resources for EMS

Autism Alliance for Local Emergency Responder Training - www.AutismAlert.org

Avoiding Unfortunate Situations - policeandautism.cjb.net

Select Autism Merchandise - www.SelectAutismMerchandise.com

The Law Enforcement Awareness Network – www.leanonus.org

The Autism and Law Enforcement Education Coalition - www.sncarc.org/alec.htm

Autism Risk and Safety Management - www.autismriskmanagement.com

Community and Law Enforcement Aware Response - www.clearscv.org

Project Lifesaver – www.projectlifesaver.org

Autism 101 for Fire and Rescue - www.autismlink.com/pages/emergency_firerescue

Caretrak Systems – www.caretrak.com

Autism Society of America - [Information for Paramedics and Emergency Room Staff](#) (PDF)

Autism 101 for EMS - www.autismlink.com/pages/emergency_ems

[Disaster Prep](#) - (PDF)

[ALEC Brochure](#) - (PDF)





Hospital Emergency Staff

Hospital emergency staff deals directly with the individual in crisis. This personal interaction makes it essential that these doctors, nurses and hospital staff have the proper knowledge about autism spectrum disorders and are trained to deal with these situations effectively. Everyone from the intake coordinator to the doctors treating the patient will have an impact on the crisis at hand, making their skills critical to the successful and safe resolution of the medical situation. Since each person on a hospital staff is trained to respond to an emergency in a certain way, the additional knowledge about autism spectrum disorders will help them to adjust their responses to best treat the individual at hand.

Quick Facts for Hospital Emergency Staff

- During instances of heightened anxiety or when they do not know what is expected of them, individuals with ASD may also lose some of their abilities more readily. Providing reassurance will assist in alleviating the individual's anxiety and discomfort; however, the characteristics of autism may pose challenges to providing medical care.
- Medical professionals should be aware that most individuals on the autism spectrum have sensory issues that could affect their ability to be treated.
- Many individuals with autism also have either a hyper or hypo tolerance of pain and may not feel typical sensations to heat or cold.
- When providing emergency services to individuals with ASD it is important to establish what is typical behavior and communication for the individual. This is vital and will assist you in monitoring levels of anxiety or stress.
- If there is a need to move or transport persons with ASD , explain what will be happening and use gestures so individuals can follow where they will need to go.
- Presume the person's competence. If they cannot speak, this does not mean they will not understand you and comprehend what you say. Adjust your language level as necessary. If unable to speak, make sure individuals have a method of communication familiar to them, such as a communication device, paper and pen, picture symbols, etc.

Autism Society of America, *Safe and Sound* (2007): www.autism-society.org

Resources for Hospital Emergency Room Staff

Autism Alliance for Local Emergency Responder Training - www.AutismAlert.org

Autism Spectrum Disorders from A to Z - www.asdatoz.com

Autism Risk and Safety Management - www.autismriskmanagement.com

Autism Society of America - [Information for Paramedics and Emergency Room Staff](#) (PDF)

[Disaster Prep](#) - (PDF)





Judicial System

If an individual involved in a crime is on the autism spectrum, the way in which the people involved in the judicial system communicate with them must be altered accordingly. Ensuring that these individuals understand the judicial system, the situation at hand and the court process is essential. Enlisting an autism expert to help guide the process is also helpful to both those in the judicial system and the individual involved. If an attorney, judge, or victims rights advocate is assigned a case involving someone on the autism spectrum, it is critical that these professionals have basic knowledge about autism spectrum disorders. Understanding these individuals strengths and the most effective ways to communicate with them will help ensure that those on the spectrum get fair and appropriate treatment while involved in the court system.

Quick Facts for the Judicial System

- The diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder (autism, autism spectrum disorder, pervasive developmental disorders, Asperger Syndrome and related disorders) is ALWAYS relevant and needs to be explained to police and legal personnel.
- If an individual has been assessed to be “autistic like” or to have “autistic tendencies,” providers and families need to explain the features of ASD that the person does have. It is safest to do the same type of explaining as you would if the person carried an official diagnosis of an ASD.
- A diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder is as relevant to police and legal proceedings as a diagnosis of mental retardation or mental illness would be, no matter how bright, high functioning, and/or verbal the individual may be.
- A diagnosis of an ASD means that the person does have a developmental disability if criteria for developmental disability are met, even if there is no cognitive impairment.
- If a person with an ASD is involved in legal or police matters, others who know the individual well need to quickly provide information about how the individual thinks, communicates, interacts and understands others. Always provide that information in writing AND in person to all involved authorities.
- Each person with an autism spectrum disorder is unique. However, they share some common features. Assess to determine impact of autism on the individual.
- The individual will usually be responding to the best of her or his neurological ability at that time and in that place. Responses to others may be driven by internal state, material from various media, sensory input, and previous learning.
- People with an ASD respond and perform neurologically inconsistently depending on emotional state, familiarity with the people and situation and various sensory experiences. For example, they may be very talkative in one setting at a particular time and later be UNABLE to speak well in the same setting.

Doyle, B.T. (2009) *And Justice for All: Unless You Have Autism - What the Legal System Needs to Know About People With Autism Spectrum Disorders* www.asdatoz.com (Document)

Resources for the Judicial System

Autism Spectrum Disorders from A to Z - www.asdatoz.com

Avoiding Unfortunate Situations - policeandautism.cjb.net

Pacer Center - www.pacer.org/publications/daap.asp

The Autism Program of Illinois - www.theautismprogram.org

The Autism Society of America - [Information for Advocates, Attorneys and Judges](#) - (PDF)





Search and Rescue

When an individual has gone missing, it is the Search and Rescue team that will be out trying to bring them to safety. If this search team is looking for and finds an individual on the autism spectrum, they will need to approach the individual using different skills and tactics than the ones they may use in ordinary situations. If these teams are armed with information and skills, both from consultation with the missing persons family and from professional trainings, they will be able to better ensure the safety of the individual. Additionally, knowing how this individual may respond, or where they may have gone will ensure the timely and safe return of this person to their family.

Quick Facts for Search and Rescue

- Make sure you understand the degree of Autism you are dealing with. It will make a difference in dealing with the person when located.
- Find out if there has been anything that has attracted the attention of the person within the past 24 hrs. Have they been obsessed with a location or object, at a location, within that time.
- Do not expect the person to reply if you are calling their name. You'll most likely have to make visual contact to locate them.
- On many of the searches we have had, the person has hidden from us.
- Check any location that has water, such as, pools, ponds, lakes, rivers, et al. immediately. These are points of attraction for those with Autism.
- Remember that someone with Autism will, most likely, not experience fear, as we do. Don't discount searching any location because you feel a reasonable person would not go there.

Saunders, G. (2009). From Project Lifesaver Website: www.projectlifesaver.org

Resources for Search and Rescue Professionals

The Autism and Law Enforcement Education Coalition - www.sncarc.org/alec.htm

Autism 101 for Fire and Rescue - www.autismlink.com/pages/emergency_firerescue

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children – www.missingkids.com

Caretrak Systems – www.caretrak.com

Autism Society of America - [Information for Law Enforcement and Other First Responders](#) (PDF)

[Disaster Prep](#) - (PDF)





Teachers and Administrators

Teachers and administrators may not typically be thought of as “First Responders”, but when a situation arises at school, they will in fact be the first ones to respond to a crisis or escalated situation involving an individual with Autism Spectrum Disorder. With this in mind, it is essential that school personnel understand the basics of autism spectrum disorders and the best ways to respond to an individual on the spectrum. With proper training and information, teachers and administrators will not only have the ability to de-escalate a situation but also to respond to crises in a more safe and effective way. Equipping teachers and administrators with the proper knowledge base and skill set will allow them to ensure the safest learning environment for children on the autism spectrum.

Quick Facts for Teachers and Administrators

- *Step 1: Educate Yourself*
You must have a working understanding of autism and what that means for your particular student(s). Your education about autism will evolve as your relationship with the family and the student develops and your knowledge about the disorder and skills in dealing with its impact on the classroom grows.
- *Step 2: Reach Out to the Parents*
Parents are your first and best source of information about their child. Establish a working partnership with your student’s parents. Building trust with the parents is essential. After that, establishing mutually agreed modes and patterns of communication with the family throughout the school year is critical.
- *Step 3: Prepare the Classroom*
There are ways you can accommodate some of the needs of children with autism in your classroom that will enhance their opportunity to learn without sacrificing your plans for the class in general. Of course, there are practical limitations on how much you can modify the physical characteristics of your classroom, but even a few accommodations to support a child with autism may have remarkable results.
- *Step 4: Educate Peers and Promote Social Goals*
You must make every effort to promote acceptance of the child with autism as a full member and integral part of the class, even if that student only attends class for a few hours a week. As the teacher of a child with autism, you must create a social environment that encourages positive interactions between the child with autism and his or her typically developing peers throughout the day.
- *Step 5: Collaborate on the Implementation of an Educational Plan*
Since your student with autism has special needs beyond academics, his or her educational plan is defined by an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is a blueprint for everything that will happen to a child in the next school year.
- *Step 6: Manage Behavioral Challenges*
For students with autism, problem behaviors may be triggered for a variety of reasons. Such behaviors may include temper tantrums, running about the room, loud vocalizations, self-injurious activities, or other disruptive or distracting behaviors. The key is to be consistent with how you react to the behaviors over time and to use as many positive strategies to promote pro-social behaviors as possible.

Organization for Autism Research, adapted from *6 Steps Success for Autism (2009)*
www.researchautism.org/educators/autismsteps



Resources for Teachers and Administrators

Autism Speaks School Community Toolkit : www.autismspeaks.org/community/family_services/school_kit.php

Organization for Autism Research : www.researchautism.org

Select Autism Merchandise : www.SelectAutismMerchandise.com

Autism Spectrum Disorders from A to Z : www.asdatoz.com

Caretrak Systems : www.caretrak.com

PACER Center : www.pacercenter.org

Schools with Open Arms : www.schoolswithopenarms.com

The Autism Program of Illinois : www.theautismprogram.org

Autism Risk and Safety Management - www.autismriskmanagement.com

