

LAW ENFORCEMENT & MISSING PERSONS WITH AUTISM

If you work in law enforcement, chances are you will encounter a child or adult with autism, or be involved in searching for an individual with autism who has wandered away. An increase in autism cases (up from one in 10,000 in the 80's to one in 88 today) is likely the reason for more wandering cases and deaths, and first responders play a critical role in preventing these deaths.

Individuals with autism are often attracted to water, yet have little to no sense of danger. **Drowning is a leading cause of death in children with autism.**

There are four important tools that can be used to improve response time and prevent fatalities including: **1) Having readily available information about an individual with autism; 2) Technology, such as tracking technology or Reverse 911; 3) Alert Systems, such as Endangered Missing Advisories; 4) Training on how to properly interact with a person who has autism.**

GATHERING INFORMATION ABOUT A PERSON WITH AUTISM WHO MAY WANDER:

Having detailed information on file about someone with autism can be very effective in locating them quickly. If your agency does not have a program in place specific to autism wandering, consider distributing a First Responder Form through your web site or grassroots initiatives. Forms may also be found in multiple languages at autismriskmanagement.com. Having caregivers fill out this information **before** their child with autism wanders could give your agency a headstart in properly responding to an emergency situation. **A database software called "Take Me Home" is free and available to agencies.** To learn more about Take Me Home, contact **Officer Jimmy Donohoe at 850.436.5416 or jdonohoe@ci.pensacola.fl.us**.

TAKING A 5W "JUST ADD WATER" APPROACH TO PREVENTION & RESPONSE

When asking a caregiver questions about their child with autism, be sure to take a 5W approach: **Who, What, Where, When, Water.**

WHO: this would include the basic details about the child/adult, as well as the official diagnosis, cognitive age, and any identifiable mannerisms or unique behaviors.

WHAT: what are the child's likes or dislikes? For example, if the child likes Elmo's voice, this may be a valuable tool during search-and-rescue efforts, while understanding their dislikes may help prevent complications during a search.

WHERE: where does the caregiver think the child might go, or be? Listen to caregivers for clues, they know the child best.

WHEN: when has the child wandered before and how were they located?

WATER: ask about, and document, nearby water sources. **Always search water sources first.** Sixty-eight percent of children with autism who died between 2009 & 2011 were found in either a pond, creek, lake or river.

TRACKING TECHNOLOGY & REVERSE 911 FOR AGENCIES

There are various resources to help law enforcement agencies. The cost to implement tracking programs is extremely low compared to one search-and-rescue effort. To learn more about tracking programs, please visit ProjectLifesaver.org or LoJackSafetyNet.com. You can also enroll your agency into **A Child Is Missing Program**. This **Reverse 911 is FREE to agencies**, and will send an automated call to neighborhoods where a missing child was last seen. Visit achildissing.org or call **954.763.1288**.

ENDANGERED MISSING ADVISORIES

Because there have been numerous cases where a child with autism was found by a member of the public, it's important to review alert guidelines within your state and **issue an Endangered Missing Advisory (EMA)**. Many children with autism who appear old enough to walk alone are often at great risk, especially those that are nonverbal, cannot ask for help, or are unable to respond to their name. **For EMA GUIDELINES (Free Service) visit ncjrs.gov**

COMPREHENSIVE AUTISM TRAINING

To review these options, please visit: autismriskmanagement.com | sncarc.org/alec.htm | leanonus.org | AutismAlert.org. For information on wandering, please visit AWAARE.ORG. For specific questions, please contact the National Autism Association at **877-622-2884, or 877 NAA AUTISM.**