

Autism and Safety

“Every child needs to be kept safe.
Children with autism need twice the
protection.”

-Christina Adams

Autism and Safety

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Special Needs and Safety

- 9 million children (under 18 years) in U.S. have special needs
- 13% of U.S. Children
- Children with developmental disabilities (both physical and psychological) have higher rates of injury
- Children with cognitive, emotional, or social limitations have significantly higher rates of injury

» SafeKids Worldwide

Johns Hopkins Hospital

B.K. Lee, L.C. Lee, J.J.Chang, C.J. Newschaffer

Increased Risk of Injury and Accident in Children with Autism

Results:

The 12 month study of injury in the autism group and in the ADD/ADHD group was approximately twice that of the unaffected controls.

Children with autism were not significantly different from children with ADD/ADHD in reported injuries.

Compared with unaffected controls, children with autism were 2.2 times more likely to have a reported injury.

A previous report documented elevated death rates in individuals with autism for accident related deaths such as suffocation and drowning. (Shavelle et al., 2001)

ADHD and Safety

- Get hurt more often
- Highly active
- Impulsive
- More likely to be admitted to a hospital for inpatient, outpatient, and emergency care
- Medical bills during study period:
 - Children with ADHD \$4,306
 - Children without ADHD \$1,944

Why are children with autism more prone to unintentional injuries?

- Lack of impulse control
- Little understanding of danger
- Seek stimulation (vestibular)
- Altered sensory perception (high pain tolerance)



Safety in the Home

- Unsafe behaviors exhibited by individuals with autism:
 - Climbing
 - Breaking
 - Jumping
 - Peeling
 - Cutting
 - Pulling down
 - Throwing – utensil, plates, cups
 - Dumping drawers
 - Climbing out of or breaking windows
 - Putting things in mouth - pica

Curiosity could lead to:

- Putting items in appliances
- Flushing things
- Touching hot surfaces
- Turning hot faucets
- Inserting items into electrical sockets
- Chewing on wires
- Crawling in the washing machine
- Playing with matches, lighters, or fire

Provide a Safe Home Environment

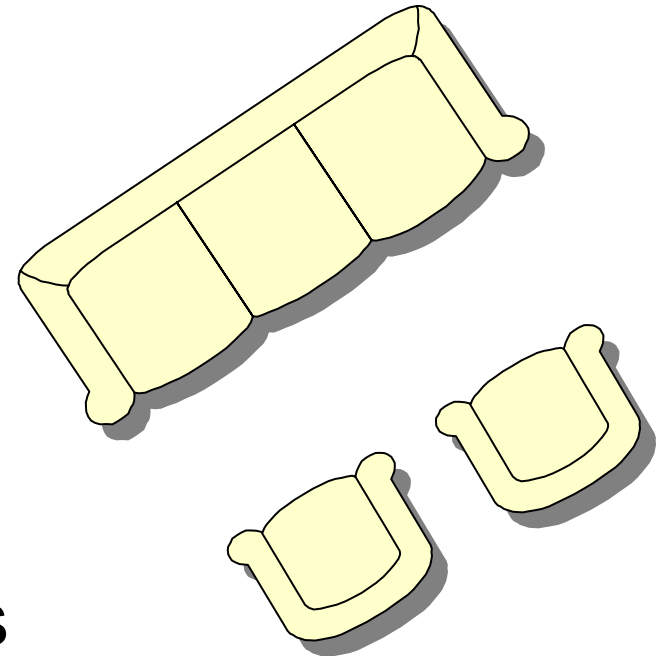


1. Establish priority area for modification

- Modify most used areas
- Modify dangerous areas

2. Arrange Furniture Appropriately

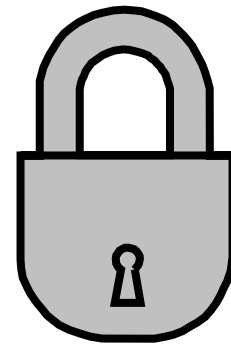
- Move furniture away from shelves or places a child can climb
- Place items out of reach on shelves
- Gates and barriers to provide safety from falling down stairs and limiting access to other areas of the house



3. Use Locks Where Appropriate

- Place locks on interior doors where individuals should not have free access
- Some parents feel more secure at night with a locking mechanism in place to prevent “nighttime wandering”.

- Use a lock with keyhole/key
- Use a hook and eye lock
- Use a slide bolt



*make sure you always have immediate access

4. Safeguard Your Windows

- Window locks
- Replace glass windows with Plexiglas

5. Make Electrical Outlets and Appliances Safe

- Cover or remove electrical outlets
- Use knob covers for faucets, ovens, and stove burner
- Use locks or door knob covers to limit access to areas with washer/dryer, appliances, and power tools
- Conceal wiring for electronics and appliances

6. Lock Dangerous Items Away

- Detergents
- Cleaning supplies
- Pesticides
- Medications
- Mouthwash
- Small items
- Scissors
 - use child safety scissors
 - provide supervision during cutting activities
- Knives
- Razors

*Keep Poison Control # on
Refrigerator
1-800-222-1222



7. Label Everyday Items

- Visual labels on functional items (anything that has relevance to the child)
- By labeling the environment:
 - Child may better understand what is expected
 - Child may be less likely to engage in undesirable behavior

8. Organize Everyday Items

- Organize functional items in labeled see-through plastic bins
- Place items in places child can see and easily access

More Organization = Less Frustration

9. Provide Appropriate Seating

- Sturdy and stable chair
- Away from curtains and furniture
- Seat with belt (if needed)
- Booster seat

10. Use Visual Signs

- Use visual signs for setting expectations and rules
 - Dividers
 - Tape boundaries
 - Signs

11. Secure eating utensils and place settings by using:

- String
- Velcro
- Plastic or rubber plates, bowls, and cups
- Plastic utensils

12. Safeguard Bath Items/Toys

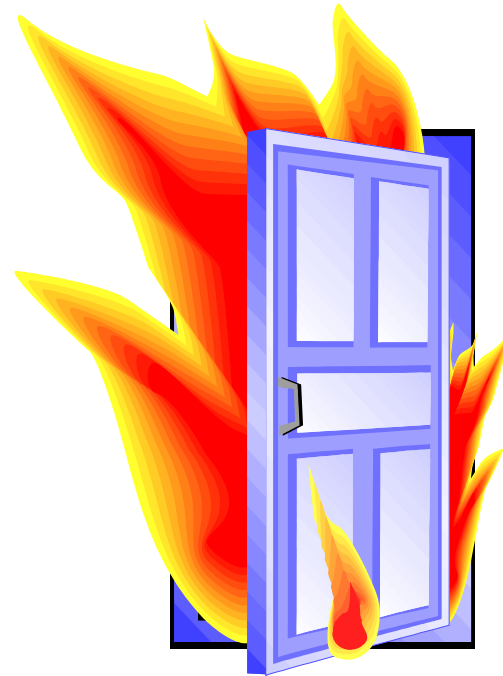
- Store bath toys in a plastic bag or bin away from tub (save these items for after washing)
- Store bath items in plastic bag or bin
- Replace open-lip bottles with pump to prevent emptying or ingesting contents

Specific Safety Considerations and Strategies for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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Fire and Burn Prevention

- Teach basic concepts of hot and cold
- Working smoke detectors
- Create visual signs (as needed) to depict escape route and dangerous areas
- Practice escape routes regularly
- Assign one family member the specific duty to get the child with autism out of the house and stay with them to make sure they do not re-enter or wander
- Take child to fire station so that they can see what a fireman looks like with all their gear on (this includes: oxygen mask, bulky coats, and helmet)
- Develop social stories about smoke detectors, fire alarms, and the dangers of touching hot objects and fire.



Passenger Safety

- May be non-verbal or have limited verbal skills
- Fill out safety ID Card and place with insurance information in glove box
- Use sticker identification on car, car seat, or seat belt

Pedestrian Safety

- May wander or run away from adult
- May have delayed processing of external dangers
- May dart into busy parking lot or street
- Use handicap parking permit (if needed)
- Caregiver walk on outside part of sidewalk
- Consider child harness or leash
- Active and constant supervision

Playground Safety

- Active parental supervision
- Perimeter fencing
- Teach appropriate use of slides, swings, etc.
- Check child thoroughly after falls
- Teach stranger danger

Poison Control



- Teach basic concepts of safe and poison
- Use visual cues to identify poisonous items (Mr. Yuk stickers or STOP sign)
- Keep poisonous items locked away (for older children, a more advanced locking mechanism may be needed)
- Children with pica need to be actively supervised at all times to prevent ingestion of natural poisons in the environment

Water Safety

Drowning is the #1 preventable injury for children with autism.

Children with autism:

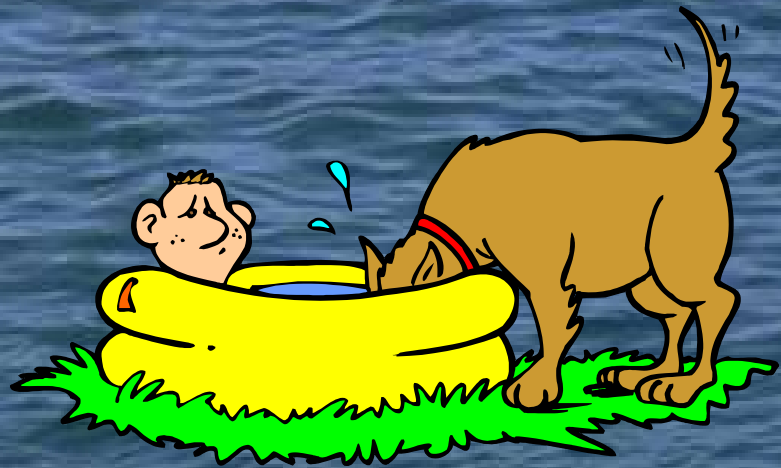
May have no fear of water

May be drawn to water

May jump into water without knowing how to swim

Drowning Statistics

- Children drown without a sound
- 1 inch of water
- Nearly 9 in 10 drowning-related deaths occurred while a child was being supervised



Water Safety (cont.)

- Active parental supervision
- Water Watcher Program
- Perimeter fencing
- Door alarm
- Door locks
- Social stories
- Visual cues on gates to pools
- Visual schedule for getting in and out of pool
- Swim lessons
- Coast Guard approved life jackets

Community Involvement

- Identification
 - MedicAlert bracelet, necklace, or shoe tag
 - Wristband
 - Label garments
 - Identification card
- Autism t-shirt
- Information Form for First Responders
- Autism information cards

Introduce Intervention Techniques to Teach Safety

- Social stories
- Activity schedules
- Visual rules
- Signs/charts
- Peer and adult modeling
- Reinforcement for safe and appropriate behaviors
- Consistent consequences for unsafe and inappropriate behaviors

Social Stories

- Photographs, pictures, and words
- Safety topics
 - Smoke detectors
 - Fire drills
 - Staying away from fire
 - Strangers

Personalize stories

Read Frequently

Explain subtle cues in social situations

Break down situations into easy-to-follow steps

Topics for Safety Social Stories

- Who Is a Stranger?
- Joshua Hears the Fire Alarm
- Joshua Swims Safely
- Joshua Knows the Safety Signs
- Safety Checklist for the Football Game
- Joshua Wears a Helmet

Visual Rules

- Photos and pictures
- Can assist in understanding
 1. What they are not supposed to do
 2. What they are expected to do.

Prepare for an Emergency

- Get informed
 - Community hazards
 - Community disaster plans
 - Community warning systems

Make a plan

Provide Identification for individual with autism

Choose out-of-town contact

Decide where to meet

Complete a communication plan

Safe places

Checklist

- Fire Extinguisher
- Smoke Alarms
- Insurance Coverage
- First Aid/CPR
- Inventory Home Possessions
- Vital Records and Documents
- Reduce Home Hazards

Assemble a Disaster Supply Kit

- Food
- Water
- First Aid Supplies and Manuals
- Flashlight and radio
- Batteries
- Medications
- Contact numbers
- Sanitation and hygiene products
- Augmentive communication devices
- Calming tools
- Clothes, shoes, jacket, and blanket
- Ear plugs
- Favorite toys

Topics for Social Stories Related to Disasters

Tornado Warning

The Electricity Goes Out

Joshua is Lost

Joshua's Phonebook

Individuals must be able to demonstrate the following skills to live independently:

- Safety
- Good judgment
- Competence
- Understanding

*Environmental modifications should be faded out over time.

Safety Goals

- Keep your child and others out of harms way
- Ensure your child is ready and able to learn
- Being able to reach his/her full potential

Resources

- www.safekids.org
- www.redcross.org
- www.aap.org
- www.drowningpreventionalliance.com
- www.medicalert.org
- www.autismriskmanagement.com