



THE ABLG QUICK-START GUIDE TO

SAFETY

FOR LEARNERS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Above and Beyond Learning Group

—
THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION AGENCY

230 Braen Ave • Suite D • Wyckoff, NJ 07481



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Safety Quick Start

A Step-By-Step Guide to Safety for Learners with Developmental Disabilities

When ABLG Clinical Managers go into a home for an initial intake, one of the first questions we ask is, “How much does your child know about safety?” Can s/he cross a street or stop at a curb? Phone home? Tell strangers from family? What’s the plan if s/he becomes lost?

Safety is a crucial and often overlooked part of designing individualized programs. Some of the areas we look at include:

- Elopement/Wandering:** What is the plan if a child should elope/ wander from the home? Nearly half of all children with Autism engage in wandering behavior (Kennedy Krieger, 2001).
- Home Safety:** For all children, the home is filled with potential dangers such as sharp knives, hot ovens + irons, outlets, and more. We work to arm our learners with safety knowledge for areas in the home.
- Community Safety:** Many parents have had the heart-stopping experience of losing their child in a store. We teach our learners to stay with and reunite with their caregivers in the community.

While this is not a comprehensive guide to safety, we hope it will help parents + professionals get started with safety planning. Additional resources are provided throughout this pamphlet.

SAFETY TOPIC #1: ELOPEMENT AND WANDERING

Register with your local police department

[Project Lifesaver](#) is a rapid response and recover system which is in effect in all 21 counties in the state of NJ. Project Lifesaver partners with police departments to provide tracking devices and specially trained recovery teams in the event of elopement.

One common issue that comes up with tracking bracelets is that learners often have difficulty tolerating the devices at first. Your ABA provider can help your child learn to wear the bracelet or tracking device - just ask!

Remember, even if the learner is able to report his/her name and identifying information, it may be difficult for him/her to do so under scary circumstances, such as being approached by police.

More Resources for Elopement and Wandering:

[WWW.AWAARE.ORG'S](http://WWW.AWAARE.ORG) mission is to “prevent wandering incidents and deaths within the Autism Community”. Their website offers free Caregiver and First Responder Toolkits.

For more information about addressing elopement as part of an IEP, call AutismNJ.org at 800-4-AUTISM.

[The Big Red Safety Toolbox](#) is a comprehensive guide that teaching prevention and reaction strategies for elopement and wandering.

If your learner has an iPhone, use the Find My Friends app to keep track of him/her.

ELOPEMENT AND WANDERING

Secure Your Home

We often recommend this simple checklist for securing one's home from the inside-out!

_____ Install deadbolts on all doors

_____ Install a home security system that sounds an alert when someone leaves

_____ Install simple home-alert devices on windows and doors, such as those available from [Radio Shack](#).

_____ Post bright, visible "STOP" signs on all access doors, and ask your home therapy team to teach your child the "STOP" system.

_____ If you have a yard, be sure it is fenced in.

_____ If a child cannot yet tolerate an ID bracelet, consider purchasing temporary tattoos at www.safetytat.org, or using a shoe ID tag like the ones available at www.roadid.com.

More Resources for Securing Your Home

WWW.RADIOHACK.COM carries inexpensive alarms that sound when someone comes or goes.

WWW.NATIONALAUTISMASSOCIATION.ORG carries laminated stop sign visual aids in the Big Red Safety Shop, available for purchase. At the NAA, you can also find the Big Red Safety ToolKit.

This Guardian Security Lock is portable and affordable, to help prevent wandering while traveling. Found at www.assurancelockingsystem.com

ELOPEMENT AND WANDERING

Engage the Neighborhood

The best allies you have during a wandering emergency are the people you trust in your neighborhood.

___ Be sure you have a **detailed informational handout**, including a recent photo of your child, ready to distribute.

___ Use Google Earth to see an aerial view of your neighborhood. Keep it handy so that you **know exactly where all bodies of water are** - pools, ponds, streams, rivers, lakes, and bodies of water can be attractive to people with Autism who have wandered. In the event of wandering, be sure you have the numbers of neighbors with pools.

___ Teach your trusted neighbors how to approach your child in the event of an emergency, and be sure your child is familiar with them.

More Resources for Engaging Your Community

An emergency handout should include at least:

- Name of child or adult
 - Current photograph and physical description
 - Names of guardians, both home and cell phone numbers, address of parents, and emergency contacts
 - Sensory, medical, or dietary issues, and requirements
 - Favorite attractions or locations where person may be found
 - Likes, dislikes, and approach and de-escalation techniques
 - Method of communication
 - ID wear jewelry
-

SAFETY TOPIC #2: HOUSEHOLD SAFETY

Secure the home

At ABLG, we prioritize in-home safety and often supply our families with a checklist that includes:

Child safety locks on all cabinets that contain dangerous items

Window guards

Fridge guards

Outlet covers

TV + Furniture anchors

“STOP” signs on cabinets containing sharp or poisonous items. Your home-based team can help you teach your child to respond to the “STOP” signs.

More Resources for Securing the Home

WWW.MYPRECIOUSKID.COM has a comprehensive list of safety latches, anchors, guards, and more ~ at affordable costs.

WWW.READYSETBLOOM.COM AND THESAFETYSLEEPER.COM offer safe sleeping solutions for children who get out of their beds at night, when the house may not be supervised.

For car safety, there are many seatbelt locks that can be purchased for children who are likely to unbuckle on the ride, such as Angel Guard.

HOUSEHOLD SAFETY

Individualized Programming

Taking steps to secure the home can buy us time to intervene when a child is engaging in unsafe behavior. It's also critical to teach our kids to discriminate safe behavior from unsafe behavior, and what to do when faced with danger. We often promote implementation of programs such as:

_____ THE STOP PROGRAM. The child is taught to “stop” the unsafe behavior, such as opening a cabinet or going outside, when they see a sign, like a stop sign or photo of a caregiver. Alternatively, sometimes a child is taught to go and get an adult that is represented on the STOP sign before leaving the home.

_____ HOME SAFETY. Knives are sharp, stoves are hot, chemicals are poisonous... First, we teach children the discrimination between “safe” and “unsafe” household items... then we teach in the natural environment!

_____ STRANGER DANGER. Kids need to know who they can open the door for. Create a household policy, and ask your team to help you teach kids strangers from trusted relatives when the doorbell rings! [Provide this study to your team](#) so they can replicate it at home.

More Resources for Teaching Household Safety

Even if you don't have a pool, teach your child to swim!! See the NAA's website for a listing of swim instructors at www.nationalautismassociation.org.

SAFETY TOPIC #3: COMMUNITY SAFETY

What should I teach my learner?

Individualized programming can also be put in place in the community. At ABLG, we encourage community safety skills as soon as we've established rapport with the child. Our Community Skills Safety Checklist includes:

___ CROSSING THE STREET. (or stopping at a curb)

___ STAYING WITH AN ADULT. We teach our clients to keep an eye on their caregiver!

___ STRANGER DANGER. Teach kids to respond to approaches by a stranger - how to assert themselves, and get help! Yes, this means recruiting people s/he doesn't know to help.

___ USING A PHONE. Children can be taught to call home in the event of becoming lost. Emergency cell phones on the market are simple to learn to use, like [this one from GreatCall](#).

___ SEEKING HELP. How does a child know if they're in trouble, and what should they do?

___ PRODUCE ID. Under duress, even verbal children may not be able to articulate their identifying information. Learning to carry and produce an ID card can help.

More Resources for Teaching Community Safety

Autism Speaks has curated a list of tips for community safety at www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/autism-safety-project/community They've included topics such as handling money, using public restrooms, and interacting with law officers.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Secure the Community

Just like other areas of safety, there are a few layers of safety involved in Community Safety. Teaching skills to the learner is important, and securing the community is critical as well. Here are some steps you can take to make some of your frequently visited community places more secure.

____ Approach your district's Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC) to help start a community Safe Haven program. This program would identify local shops as safe for learners with autism who are lost, having behavioral difficulties, etc.

____ Approach local politicians such as a city councilman, about posting safety signs on the roads, stating that a child with Autism lives in the area.

____ Introduce your child - and consider disclosing his/her diagnosis - to local shop owners & staff. Building acceptance at frequented stores and community locations can smooth the way for generalizing community skills, increasing the learner's independence, and handling behavioral crises.

____ [Order decals](#) to alert First Responders to the fact that your child is non-verbal (if applicable)

____ Point your local police department toward [these training modules](#) to help them understand the people with Developmental Disabilities in their community.

Studies on Teaching Safety to Children with Autism

[Teaching Teenagers with Autism to Seek Assistance When Lost](#)
[Teaching Abduction-Prevention Skills to Children with Autism](#)



Our mission at Above and Beyond Learning Group is to use best practice in **Applied Behavior Analysis** and **Speech Therapy** to help individuals with **Developmental Disabilities** learn to communicate, play, socialize, work, and gain independence.

We do this by providing high quality therapy in homes, schools, and communities; by providing school districts with dedicated, professional consultation; and by upholding our 360' Care Standards. Above and Beyond Learning Group is also committed to educating communities, caregivers, and professionals about **Autism** and **Applied Behavior Analysis**.

You can reach us at
973-423-2254
or find us on the web at
www.ablg.org

Big lessons.
Little Steps.

This guide is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to safety in your home and community. Please be thorough and consult with your child's providers such as doctors, behavioral team, school team, and other important persons who can help you create an individualized safety plan. ABLG assumes no responsibility for outcomes that occur as a result of utilizing resources in the guide.