

# Autism & Safety Facts

## National Autism Association

1877-622-2884

[naa@nationalautism.org](mailto:naa@nationalautism.org)

For in-depth information and safety tips, please visit [www.nationalautism.org](http://www.nationalautism.org).

Drowning is among the leading causes of death of individuals with autism. Please click here for a list of [special needs swimming lessons](#) that offer special needs swimming lessons, and be sure that your child's last lesson is with clothes and shoes on.

### Overall Mortality

- In 2008, Danish researchers found that the mortality risk among the autism population is twice as high as the general population
- In 2001, a California research team found elevated deaths in autism and attributed it to several causes, including seizures and accidents such as suffocation and drowning

### Wandering/Elopement

- Roughly half, or 48%, of children with an ASD attempt to elope from a safe environment, a rate nearly four times higher than their unaffected siblings
- In 2009, 2010, and 2011, accidental drowning accounted for 91% total U.S. deaths reported in children with an ASD ages 14 and younger subsequent to wandering/elopement.
- More than one third of ASD children who wander/elope are never or rarely able to communicate their name, address, or phone number
- Two in three parents of elopers reported their missing children had a "close call" with a traffic injury
- 32% of parents reported a "close call" with a possible drowning
- Wandering was ranked among the most stressful ASD behaviors by 58% of parents of elopers
- 62% of families of children who elope were prevented from attending/enjoying activities outside the home due to fear of wandering
- 40% of parents had suffered sleep disruption due to fear of elopement
- Children with ASD are eight times more likely to elope between the ages of 7 and 10 than their typically-developing siblings
- Half of families with elopers report they had never received advice or guidance about elopement from a professional
- Only 19% had received such support from a psychologist or mental health professional
- Only 14% had received guidance from their pediatrician or another physician

*Source: Interactive Autism Network Research Report: Elopement and Wandering (2011)*

*Source: National Autism Association, Lethal Outcomes in ASD Wandering (2012)*

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has recently published an important document for first responders and search and rescue personnel for cases involving an individual with special needs. Please visit [www.missingandexploited.org](http://www.missingandexploited.org) and contact your local police, sheriff and fire departments.

### **Restraint/Seclusion**

- It's estimated that over the last five years, more than 20 students, many with disabilities, have died due to seclusion and restraints being used in schools.
- A 2009 Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigation reported that thousands of students have been physically injured and emotionally traumatized as the result of restraint and seclusion
- Currently there is no federal law that prohibits the use of restraints that restrict breathing, and locked seclusion, in public and private schools.
- Dangers include: Death by asphyxiation; Bodily injury; Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; Heart, gastrointestinal and pulmonary complications; Decreased appetite and malnutrition; Dehydration; Urinary tract infections; Incontinence; Agitation; Depression/withdrawal; Loss of dignity; Sleeping problems; Humiliation; Anxiety; Increased phobias; Increased aggression, including SIB (self-injurious behavior)

*Source: United States Government Accountability Office, Selected Cases of Death and Abuse at Public and Private Schools and Treatment Center (2009)*

### **Bullying**

- 65% of parents reported that their children with Asperger's syndrome had been victimized by peers in some way within the past year
- 47% reported that their children had been hit by peers or siblings
- 50% reported them to be scared by their peers
- 9% were attacked by a gang and hurt in the private parts
- 12% indicated their child had never been invited to a birthday party
- 6% were almost always picked last for teams
- 3% ate alone at lunch every day

*Source: Issues in Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing (2009)*

### **Sexual Abuse**

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 1 in 6 boys and 1 in 4 girls suffer from sexual abuse before the age of 18.

- Additionally, the U.S. Department of Justice's National Crime Victimization Survey, the country's largest and most reliable crime study, reports that every two minutes a person is sexually victimized in the United States—and the numbers for individuals with disabilities are even higher.
- A study done in Nebraska of 55,000 children showed a child with any type of intellectual disability was four times more likely to be sexually abused than a child without disabilities (Sullivan & Knutson, 2000). While no specific numbers exist for individuals with autism, research suggests that this population is extremely vulnerable.

NAA has set up 3 specific Autism & Safety groups on Facebook. Join these pages for relevant news, action alerts and updates pertaining to these topics.