

## Staying 2 Steps Ahead:

### Considering Safety for Individuals with Special Needs

Presented by Jan Combs, Autism Resource Specialist



#### Overview

- Why are safety considerations different for individuals with special needs?
- Consider specific safety risks for children and adults with special needs
- Discuss prevention and intervention strategies for home, school and the community
- Review emergency or safety plans
- Resources



#### Why are Safety Risks Different for Individuals with Special Needs?

- Verbal / Non-verbal Communication Deficits
- Sensory Issues
- Medical issues – seizures, low-muscle tone, etc.
- Transition difficulties
- Learning differences
- Disorganization or Multi-step task
- Social interactions deficits
- Anxiety
- Motivation
- Difficulty with problem solving
- Decreased sense of fear or danger

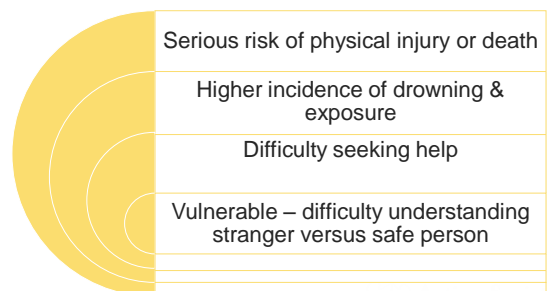


#### Things to Consider:

- Behavior may be misunderstood
- Be aware of child's triggers
- May not communicate clearly or respond appropriately
- Even if independent – when anxious or overwhelmed – may not respond, or respond appropriately
- Internet risks
- Poor social skills and social judgment
- Time is of the essence



#### Bolting/Running/Wandering/Elopement



## Securing Your Home

- Consider implications of mobility impairments
- Safeguard windows and doors –
  - Locks/chimes/alarms/security features
- Consider child's bedroom
- Consider furniture placement
- Label/organize everyday items
- Place visual aids on exterior doors, windows and exit points, etc.
- Secure dangerous materials and items
- Fencing with self-closing and self-latching gates
- Visitors



## Safety First – Plan Ahead

- Out of routine events – family reunions/ holidays/ vacations – who will be aware/responsible for keeping track of your child with ASD?
- Scope out environments ahead of time for potential safety issues – Google Earth  
<http://www.google.com/earth/>
- Avoid or cut short activities that might be difficult – or engage respite care
- Plan ahead – call parks for accommodations; “check-in” ahead of time

Safety is as simple as ABC –  
Always Be Careful.  
– Author unknown

## Safety Concerns at School

- Visit child's school and classroom.
- Speak to teacher and administration at school and discuss safety concerns.
- Share information on triggers, methods that calm child, any tracking system or devices used
- Include safety goals in child's IEP
- Create child's schedule that will address need for supervision during transition periods

## Elopement / Wandering from School

- If child has wandering/elopement tendencies, then educate school staff – or any temporary caregivers – as to unique risks for individuals w/ASD.
- Discuss prevention plans w/school staff and make sure plans are posted and implemented.
- Share information with SRO – Security Resource Officer.

## Elopement/Wandering from School - continued

- Insist all staff follow written response protocol that involves calling 911 immediately – staff should not waste time conducting search before calling law enforcement.
- Request in writing that the school response protocol should include immediate notification of the parent/primary caregiver of any wandering related incidents. Make sure to add this information in the student's IEP.

## Suggested Actions to Take

- Contact local first responders
- Flag your information in the 911 system
- Child ID Card or Personal ID Record
- Consider fingerprinting your child – for your records only
- Apps: FBI child ID app, ICE4Autism app
- Identification aides – bracelet, necklace, shoe tags, clothing labels, temporary tattoo, ID cards
- Service Animal
- Consider asking your doctor about wandering diagnosis code **Z91.83** (Wandering in Diseases Classified Elsewhere).
- Tracking devices



## Do Your Research

Before buying a tracking device, consider:

- Initial costs, monthly/maintenance fees
- Battery life
- Ease of use, any special instructions
- Any resistance to wearing item
- Water resistance, shatterproof, tamper proof
- Real-time positioning
- Network coverage in your local area
- How accurate or reliable is device? How secure?
- Casual coverage or high service needed?



## Tracking Devices

- GPS / Global Positioning System
- A-GPS / Assisted-GPS (provides possible in-door coverage)
- RF / Radio Frequency
- U-TDOA /Uplink Time Difference of Arrival Tracking (mobile phone location technology)



- Systems
  - ProCare Trak System
  - Project Lifesaver – Sheriff's office
  - LoJack Safety Net



## Who to Call If Your Child is Missing?

- First call 911 and report to law enforcement
- Call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
  - 1-800-The Lost or 1-800- 843-5678.
- Project Lifesaver –If already enrolled in program
  - Alert 911 operator that client of Project Lifesaver is missing
- Amber Alert (NC) – for missing children under age 17
- Silver Alert – for missing older adults



## More Safety Concerns at School

- Cyberbullying/Bullying – School related
- Transportation - Bus Safety
- Restraints
- Add safety and behavior goals on school plans IEP/ BIP/ITP/ PCP – consider sharing information w/SRO officers at school



Don't learn safety by accident.

- Author Unknown



## 911



- Able to call 911 without assistance?
- Does the person know when and when not to call 911?
- Does the person know his/her address?
- Does the individual know to stay on the line and not hang up until help arrives?
- Consider Enhanced 911



## Fire Safety

- Visit first responders – take opportunities to expose individual to equipment, gear, tools, personnel, sounds, lights, etc.
- Practice building tolerance to smoke alarm sounds
  - Or consider Smoke alarm with voice recorder
- Teach what to do in case of fire- then practice
- Call 911 after you are out of home
- Drop, Stop and Roll
  - Does your child know how? Able to demonstrate this skill?
- Is your child able to use a fire extinguisher?
- Secure hazardous items away
- Designate where family will gather and meet
- Aware that individual may run from rescuer, once out of harm's way
  - may try to reenter burning building or run off



## Be Aware



- Safety signs
- Train Safety
- Highways/Traffic Safety
- Construction Site Safety
- Gun Safety



## Teach Rules If Possible



- What can your child learn?
- Able to learn to follow written rules?
- Safety behaviors and rules – practice across general settings
- Add safety goals in student's Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) and Personal Care Plan (PCP)



## Safety First is Safety Always.

- Charles M. Hayes



## Social Skills

- Bathroom etiquette
- Friendships
- Dating and Relationships
- Self Disclosure
- How to respond appropriately to police officers



## Law Enforcement



- Family may delay calling during episode of wandering/elopement for fear of arrest.
- Behaviors may seem suspicious
- Lack of sense of danger and lack of “street smarts” may lead to encounter w/law enforcement.
- Interaction w/police, first responder, individuals associated with court may be misunderstood.



## Before an encounter with law enforcement:

- Discuss the possible risks with people you trust
- Discuss and practice what to do if stopped by law enforcement.
- Develop a disclosure handout
- Develop a personal plan how to use that handout
- Do you understand your rights?
- Different situations will require different level of assistance and follow-up
- Remember law enforcement officials follow rigid guidelines and protocol
- The judicial system is flexible – although mandatory sentencing may apply in some cases.



## When engaging law enforcement:

- Keep calm
- Do not attempt to flee or escape
- Keep hands in view
- Do not make any sudden movements
- Do not pass behind officer
- Do not touch an officer, his badge or his equipment
- Obtain permission first before reaching into pocket, wallet, car glove box for handout/ID card about disability – practice how to safely retrieve card for officer
- Ask officer to contact an advocate/family member/friend to help you get through interview process – if you are the victim or trying to report a crime.



## Internet Safety

- Monitor online activities and behavior.
- Have clear, visual internet safety rules that you have agreed to – then post near the computer .
- Revisit rules – what’s allowed online, rules about sharing personal information or photos.
- Negotiate an internet use contract
- Check with your ISP on safeguards



## Social Media Outlets and Issues

- Cyberbullying
- Pornography web sites
- Facebook
- IM –Instant Messaging
- Twitter
- Chat Rooms
- Blogs
- Texting



## Chat Lingo Examples:

- |          |                       |
|----------|-----------------------|
| • A/S/L? | Age, Sex, Location    |
| • AG     | Anything Goes         |
| • PAL    | Parents Are Listening |
| • LOL    | Laughing Out Loud     |
| • PAW    | Parents Are Watching  |
| • RU     | Are You?              |
| • WTGP   | Want to Go Private?   |
| • TTYL   | Talk to You Later     |
| • W/E    | Whatever              |
| • H&K    | Hug and Kiss          |
| • ILY    | I Love You            |
| • GAL    | Get a Life            |



Do the simplest things that will work.

- Anonymous



## Sexuality and Safety

Understands appropriate /inappropriate behavior or good touch vs. bad touch

Does he/she understand who to tell if abused?

Does he/she understand it's okay to say no?

## Sexuality and Safety Issues/Risks

Display of inappropriate behaviors by individuals with disabilities

- Age
- Lack of education and awareness
- Does individual understand when/where/whom – appropriate to share or ask about personal information.
- Lack of understanding of what is considered appropriate sexual behavior, boundaries, etc.
- Lack of opportunity for appropriate sexual expression
- Lack of opportunities for privacy
- Lack of awareness of what is bullying/abusive behaviors – may not recognize perpetrator's behaviors as such at time of incidents



## Water Safety



- Hot water
  - Model safe behavior
  - Pool alarms or covers
- Beach
  - Rip currents
- Boat Safety
  - Wear life jackets secured



## Weather or Other Natural Disasters

- Does your child understand warning signs for severe weather?
- Alerts
- Plan for possible disasters in your geographical area.
- Do you have an evacuation plan?
- Communicate plan to family/friends
- Disaster kit
- Shelters? Which ones are available and accessible? For special needs individuals, for pets, etc.



A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for.

- John A. Shedd



## Be Proactive:

- Be Prepared! Have a Plan!
- Anticipate potential issues or situations that might present challenge or danger.
- Can you explain how the disability affects your child? What if you are panicking?
- Don't be isolated; decide what to tell *trusted* neighbors and share



## Build Awareness - Education

### Educate Community When Possible:

- Decide who to inform and how much to disclose
- Consider visit w/child or take photo
- Refer to ASNC for training specific to autism.

### Consider Visiting:

- Neighbors
- Owners of businesses you frequent w/child
- School, Day care, Camp site personnel
- Providers of local law enforcement, fire, and emergency service



## Emergency Plan



- Do you have a written emergency plan? Is the plan accessible?
- Keep up-to-date records/data/phone contacts
- During a crisis who will you call on for support?
- Have you reviewed your emergency plan?
- Have you shared your plan with others?



## Emergency Plan

- Consider how someone else will identify your child
- How will you effectively communicate to those assisting you in an emergency how the disability/ specific needs affects your individual?
  - Consider Language – verbal or non-verbal
  - Sensory issues
  - Medical issues
  - Describe possible distractions – objects of interest or anxiety
  - What are favorite toys, songs, foods
  - Do they RF tracking device number?



## Prevention - Prepare Your Child

- Social stories
- Visual rules posted
- Attempt new skills/activity when individual is calm
- Teach resiliency
- Teach self advocacy skills
- Teach it's okay to react – say no – make noise, yell or scream if in danger
- Teach who to self disclose to, when and how
- Teach calming strategies



## Strategies for Safety

- Develop and maintain routines
- Model good communication.
- Encourage and practice communication across different settings.
- ICE your Phone – In Case of Emergency
  - ICE4Autism – available app
- Establish safety zones
- Consider placing decal on car window, information in car glove box or wallet
- Consider having child fingerprinted – for your records only
- Visit with First Responders – Build relationship with local Police/Fire/EMS
- Swim lessons – last lesson with clothes on





Autism Society  
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