

# PARENT'S GUIDE TO ADDRESSING ELOPEMENT CHALLENGES

QUOTE FROM OFFICER TIM JONES: "FACES DON'T CHANGE BUT CLOTHES MAY. ALWAYS HAVE A PHOTO READY."



**BOBBI ROGERS**



**Proud  
Moments** ABA

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# WHEN YOUR CHILD WANDERS



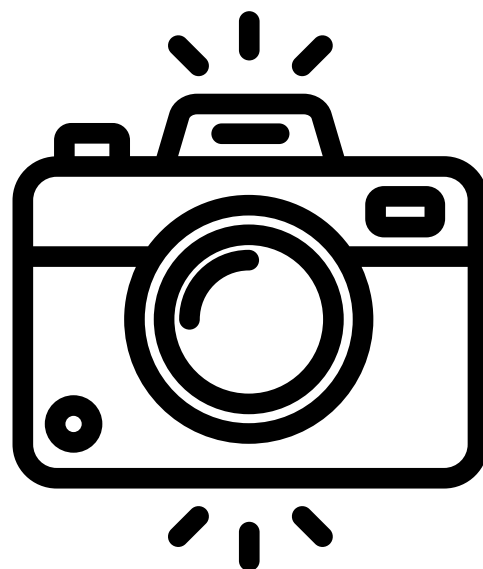
## WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD WANDERS OFF:

1. Call 911 and don't wait.
2. Message Neighbors and contacts on phone tree (pg. 8)
3. Call the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® (NCMEC) at 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678)

Did you know that you can call the NCMEC when your child is lost? Don't be afraid to use every resource at your disposal.

## REMINDER:

Take a picture of your child today. Keep an updated picture on your phone at all times. If your child elopes frequently, take one everyday so you will always have a picture of the clothing they are wearing.



# WHY IS THIS SO CHALLENGING TO TREAT?

It is scary! It is hard not to have an emotional reaction which could add an attention seeking component.

We can't ignore this behavior even if there is an attention seeking component. You can't let it happen even one time. You have to react.

Functional Communication is the most common program that is needed. Our kids can struggle with communication. It may take time to teach. We don't have time when there are such critical safety issues.

New skills take practice to master. Unlike practicing repeating a word or a copying a gross motor movement, the skill we may need to practice could be difficult to develop a practice situation for.

## SO, WHAT DO WE DO?

### PREVENTATIVE

Identify the function of the behavior and develop a plan to replace eloping (with the help of a behavior analyst).

Know that it may take time so be safe. Get alarms, locks, etc. to create a safe environment. Teach swim skills and traffic skills.

### REACTIVE

Put measures in place so that if your child does wander away, you have the best chance of finding your child quickly.

# ELOPEMENT INTERVENTION PLAN

We want the best proactive response plan in place to prepare for an emergency. We want safety measures in place before it happens. Then we want to figure out why this happening, so it doesn't keep happening.

## 1. Safety First

Prepare for an emergency and keep your child within arms length at all times.

## 2. Address the Cause

Why is it happening and what are we doing about it?

PREPARE FOR AN EMERGENCY	SAFETY MEASURES	FIND THE CAUSE	RESPONSE PLAN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- First Responder Sheet</li><li>- Inform your local Police Department</li><li>- Phone Tree and Google Maps</li><li>- Adult is within arms length all the time</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Water safety</li><li>- Traffic safety</li><li>- House and window alarms</li><li>- GPS trackers</li><li>- Phone skills</li></ul>	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Going <i>to</i> something</li><li>- Going <i>away</i> from something</li><li>- Attention</li><li>- Sensory Seeking</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Identify the function.</li><li>- Develop a response plan with a Behavior Analyst or other professional.</li></ul>

DON'T WAIT FOR IT TO HAPPEN. **PREPARE** FOR IT TO HAPPEN.

# SAFETY FIRST: 911 RESPONSE PLAN

The image shows a 'First Responder INFORMATION' form. At the top, it says 'First Responder INFORMATION'. Below this, there are fields for 'Name your child likes to be called', 'Name', 'Address', 'DOB', 'Medical Info', 'Caregiver Name and Phone', and 'Caregiver Name and Phone'. To the right of these fields is a yellow box with the text 'Add photo or physical description of your child'. Below the caregiver information is a section titled 'Places My Child May Wander To (include name and address of location)' which is circled in red. Below this is a section titled 'Additional Information' with a large text area. At the bottom right is the 'Proud Moments ABA' logo.

## OTHER PLACES YOU CAN FIND FIRST RESPONDER SHEETS:

There are additional resources that you may find helpful at these websites. If you use the first responder sheets from these sites, supplement with the information circled above (places your child might wander to and the addresses/contact info.) The information on these sites could be very helpful to you. We recommend that you review these websites.

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN

<https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/autism>

NATIONAL AUTISM ASSOCIATION

<https://nationalautismassociation.org/resources/wandering/>

1. Have this form prefilled and ready. Include a current photo. Keep copies at home, school, and in your car. You can take a picture of this form for your phone.

2. The circled area of this form is where you should put the places your child is most likely to go. Add addresses and contact information. List places like Grandma's, a store to buy a preferred item, beach or pools nearby, a park etc.

3. Underneath the circled form is a box for additional information. Use this area to write any hazards nearby (bodies of water, high traffic areas your child may cross etc.). Also include relevant information regarding your child's communication needs, behavioral and sensory needs etc., and any other information that might be relevant if your child is lost.

# First Responder

INFORMATION



Name your child likes to be called \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

Medical Info: \_\_\_\_\_

Caregiver Name and  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Caregiver Name and  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Add photo or physical  
description of your  
child

**Places My Child May Wander To (include addresses: )**


**Additional Information:**

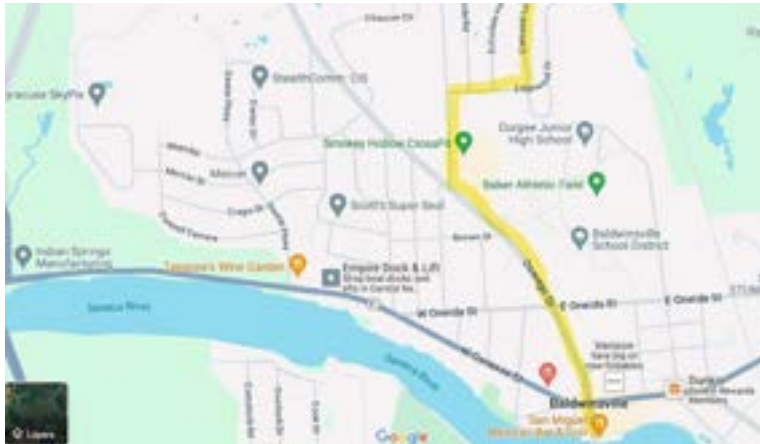
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# SAFETY FIRST: 911 RESPONSE PLAN



4. If you know where your child is most likely wandering to, download the neighborhood in google maps and highlight the route they will take? What route do you typically drive to get there?

NEIGHBORS TO GROUP MESSAGE	
NAME, PHONE NUMBER AND WHERE THEY WILL SEARCH	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	

CONTACTS FOR PREFERRED LOCATIONS	
NAME, PHONE NUMBER, AND ADDRESS	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	

5. Find neighbors to be part of a phone tree. Ask them in advance if you can message/call them if your child is missing so they can check their street/area. If there is a store or facility your child may go to, try to identify a contact at that location or near it. Keep the list of neighbors on this form with numbers so it is readily available. Take a picture of the completed form for your phone so it is easy to find.



# SAFETY FIRST: 911 RESPONSE PLAN

6 . Fill out SMART 911

7. Purchase safety equipment (alarms, trackers, safety tattoos etc.)

8. Read other websites for additional ideas and information.

9. Introduce yourself and your child to your local first responders.

National Autism  
Association



National Center for  
Missing and Exploited  
Children



eSpecial Needs  
Review of Safety  
Equipment



# **PART 1 OF YOUR PLAN IS IN PLACE!**

Well Done, Parents!

Pat yourself on the back and get a parent reinforcer. Part 1 of your preparation plan is in place.



911 Response Plan is ready to go!

# BEHAVIOR PROGRAM EXAMPLES FOR SAFETY

The programs below are separate from the ones that address the function of your child's wandering/eloping. They are proactive safety measures. Ask your Behavior Analysis team or Special Education team for help with these.

- Water Safety
- Traffic Safety
- Staying near a caregiver and coming back when called
- Social Boundaries: who to approach and not to approach for help
- Phone skills

Teach crossing the street and get swim lessons.

Teach your child how to answer their phone.

Teach them to carry their phone with them at all times so you can easily track where they are!



# ASSESSING THE REASON YOUR CHILD WANDERS



Tools: Functional  
Assessment and  
Reinforcer  
Assessment



Purpose: Why are  
they eloping and  
what maintains the  
behavior

## NEXT STEP IS ASSESSING THE BEHAVIOR

**IF YOUR CHILD COULD TELL YOU WHY  
THEY WERE WANDERING AWAY,  
WHAT WOULD THEY SAY?**

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**Possible reasons for  
wandering:**

**Sensory:** Does running away feel good

**Escape:** Are they running *from* something

**Attention:** Are they running for attention?

**Tangible:** Are they running *toward* something (place, item  
they want, or a person)

**Let's explore what your child  
might be thinking.**

# ESCAPE:

## GETTING AWAY FROM SOMETHING

I don't like school. I am going home.



I don't want to wait in this line. I am going to the car.



# ATTENTION:

**THEY MADE A GAME OUT OF CHASE BECAUSE IT IS FUN. BE WARY OF TEACHING YOUR CHILD THAT RUNNING AWAY FROM YOU IS FUN.**

Ready, Set, Chase...How fun!



# TANGIBLE:

**GOING TOWARD SOMETHING. I WANT SOMETHING,  
SOMEONE, OR TO BE SOMEPLACE.**

I am bored. I had more  
fun when I was at the  
beach. I want to be at  
the beach.



I am going back to the  
store to get that  
cookie.



I want to see those  
lights.



I am heading to  
Grandma's.



I want to go back to  
the park and swing.







# TIME FOR TRACKING

## How to track eloping:

- Is the Function **Escape**?
- To get away from something or somewhere

Does your child know how to use a break card or ask for a break?

Does the elopement occur when a task is presented?

Does the elopement occur when something new is presented?

Does the elopement occur during a transition?

Does your child appear to be avoiding certain sensory input?

Does the running away end when they have left the undesired setting/activity?

Write your thoughts here:



# TIME FOR TRACKING

## How to track eloping:

- Is the Function **Attention** or **Sensory**?

Does attention (words, chasing after the individual, body language change) reliably occur after the behavior?

Does the individual look at, smile or approach the caregiver before running away?

Would the individual engage in this behavior if they were alone? Does the individual seem to be enjoying this behavior?

Write your thoughts here:



# TIME FOR TRACKING

## How to track eloping:

- Is the Function **Tangible**?
- To get something or somewhere
- Running Toward something

Does the running away end at a particular spot or when an item is received?

Does the individual know how to ask for the item/place/activity that they want?

If you know the item/activity they want, what is most likely happening before they wander away?

- They are waiting for the desired item
- They see the item
- They are denied access to something/someplace they want

Write your thoughts here:

# SOME POSSIBLE THINGS TO TRY:

---

Many of these programs are big undertakings. So please ask for help from your child's team.

## ESCAPE

Provide scheduled breaks for unpreferred activities.

Decreasing the difficulty/input of the activity or increasing the fun factor.

Teach how to request a break.

## TANGIBLE

Teach an appropriate way to gain access to something.

Develop a schedule so your child knows when they will be receiving what they want or going to a preferred location.

Teach waiting skills.

## ATTENTION SEEKING

Avoid using words while respond to minimize attention.

Give an abundance of attention to your child when they are near you to reinforce staying nearby.

## ALL FUNCTIONS

Teach communication as a replacement for running away.

Teach boundaries and staying with a caregiver.

Teach how to stop when their name is called and return to caregiver.



## OTHER IDEAS



Do: Provide natural boundaries vs. an open layout that encourages bolting

Do: Stay close to your child. Catching them before they run is not only safer, but it also minimizes the response attention.

Do: Have a consistent daily structure or visual supports that show when they can access something or when the end of an unpreferred activity is.

Do: Have a highly preferred item ready for when they come back after you call them.

Do: Ensure there is enough access to the desired item/activity

Do: Provide attention all day when they are close.

### STAY VIGILANT ABOUT KNOWING WHERE YOUR CHILD IS

Don't: Yell at your child or lose your cool.

Don't: Make getting your child a fun game of chase.

Don't: Let others make you feel like you are too close. Hold your child's hand if necessary. You know best.

**Parent to Parent Tip:** One parent reached out to a dog training agency, and the agency trained their dog to recognize their child's scent and to look for their child.



# OTHER IDEAS

## Wandering Tracking Sheet

Child/Adult Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Observer: \_\_\_\_\_

Complete one row each time your child wanders away. The first row gives you examples.

Date Time	Starting Location	Antecedent (what happened right before)	Eloped to	Consequence	Notes
	At their desk Hallway Bathroom Playground Parking Lot Bedroom Bathroom Living room Kitchen Grocery store line Waiting room Grandma's backyard	Asked to do something Waiting for something Was told they can't have something Was told they couldn't go somewhere Preferred item/activity/person removed High Sensory environment Transition between activities/ locations Saw something or someone that they were interested in		Chased after Blocked by someone Redirected back to area Did not have to do unpreferred activity Received item they wanted Given attention Stayed in area eloped to Rules were explained Repeated the original demand	
Date Time	Starting Location	Antecedent	Eloped to	Consequence	Notes
Date Time	Starting Location	Antecedent	Eloped to	Consequence	Notes

### Antecedent Examples:

Asked to do something

Waiting for something

Was told they can't have something

Was told they couldn't go somewhere

Preferred item/activity/person removed

High sensory environment

Transition between activities/ locations

Saw something or someone that they were interested in

# ELOPEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

**To Gain Access to Something.** (Individual is going to something, somewhere, or someone.)

- Does the running away end at a particular spot or when an item is received?
- Does the individual know how to ask for the item/place/activity that they want?
- If you know the item/activity they want, what is most likely to cause elopement?
  - Waiting for the desired item
  - Seeing the item
  - Denied access to it

**Escape or Avoidance Based.** (Getting away from something.)

- Do they know how to use a break card or ask for a break?
- Does the elopement occur when a task is presented?
- Does the elopement occur when something new is presented?
- Does the elopement occur during a transition?
- Do they appear to be avoiding certain sensory input?
- Does the running away end when they have left the undesired setting/activity?

**Attention Seeking.**

- Does attention (words, chasing after the individual, body language change) reliably occur after the behavior?
- Does the individual look at, smile or approach the caregiver before running away?

**Sensory Seeking.**

- Would the individual engage in this behavior if they were alone?
- Does the individual seem to be enjoying this behavior?