10 WAYS TO HELP PROTECT YOUR CHILD FROM THE DANGERS OF WANDERING

Keeping a loved one safe is a parent’s top priority. Safety is an even greater concern for parents who have children with cognitive conditions such as autism or Down syndrome, as they may be prone to wandering. These tips may help keep your child from getting separated or lost, and prepare you to spring into action if your child does wander.

1. Advise local first responders: Fill out a 9-1-1 disability indicator form and submit it to your local law enforcement agency. The information provided on the form enables a special code to appear on the 9-1-1 dispatcher’s screen, alerting law enforcement that a person residing at that address may require special assistance during an emergency. In addition to this form, complete a more detailed handout with information about your child that you can provide to first responders. Keep copies of your handout in printed and electronic formats so you can readily provide it to search and rescue personnel in the event of an incident. Download the 9-1-1 disability indicator form and first responder handout at www.lojacksafetynet.com/safety.

NOTE: We recommend that you update these forms annually.

2. Inform your neighbors: Give them a handout with a picture of your child, physical characteristics and emergency contact information. You may also want to describe your child’s fears and effective ways to approach, communicate with and calm your child. Ask them to contact you immediately if they see your child outside your home or property. A printable form is available at www.lojacksafetynet.com/safety.

3. Place STOP or DO NOT ENTER signs on all doors opening to the outside: These can be powerful visual cues and reminders not to wander. You may also want to place these signs on your child’s classroom door. Because some children have an intense response to these types of signs, you should work with a professional to decide if this is appropriate for your child.

4. Secure your home: Use deadbolt locks, keep doors and windows locked and install an alarm system>alert chimes on doors. Motion detectors and window bars may also be appropriate. Some individuals on the autism spectrum have exceptionally good visual-motor skills and are able to quickly debilitate locks.

5. Teach swimming at an early age: Because people with autism are drawn to water sources such as pools, ponds and lakes, swimming lessons can be invaluable. If your child has difficulty learning conventional swimming strokes, teach him drownproofing, a water survival technique that will help him stay afloat until help arrives.

6. Eliminate triggers for wandering: If your child has a fixation on certain sounds or objects that draw him to investigate and wander, you may be able to eliminate these distractions.

7. Get an ID bracelet or necklace and tag personal items: List your emergency contact information on personal IDs and on tags for shoes, clothes and backpacks. If your child has sensory issues and will not wear an accessory, use temporary tattoos with your contact information.

8. Use a baby monitor/camera for bedtime: A sound or video monitor provides constant surveillance, even when you are in a different room.

9. Install a fence around your property: Set latches on the outside of gates and ensure that they are high enough that your child cannot release them.

10. Consider a personal tracking device: A Radio Frequency (RF) device is ideal for people at risk of wandering, because it has strong signals that can penetrate any physical obstruction. With an RF device, your child can be found in places that a GPS or cellular product cannot reach, such as in a wooded area or concrete building.