

# Autism and Safety

“Every child needs to be kept safe.  
Children with autism need twice the  
protection.”

-Christina Adams

# Autism and Safety

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# Special Needs and Safety

- 9 million children (under 18 years) in U.S. have special needs
- 13% of U.S. Children
- Children with developmental disabilities (both physical and psychological) have higher rates of injury
- Children with cognitive, emotional, or social limitations have significantly higher rates of injury

» SafeKids Worldwide

# Johns Hopkins Hospital

B.K. Lee, L.C. Lee, J.J.Chang, C.J. Newschaffer

## **Increased Risk of Injury and Accident in Children with Autism**

### Results:

The 12 month study of injury in the autism group and in the ADD/ADHD group was approximately twice that of the unaffected controls.

Children with autism were not significantly different from children with ADD/ADHD in reported injuries.

Compared with unaffected controls, children with autism were 2.2 times more likely to have a reported injury.

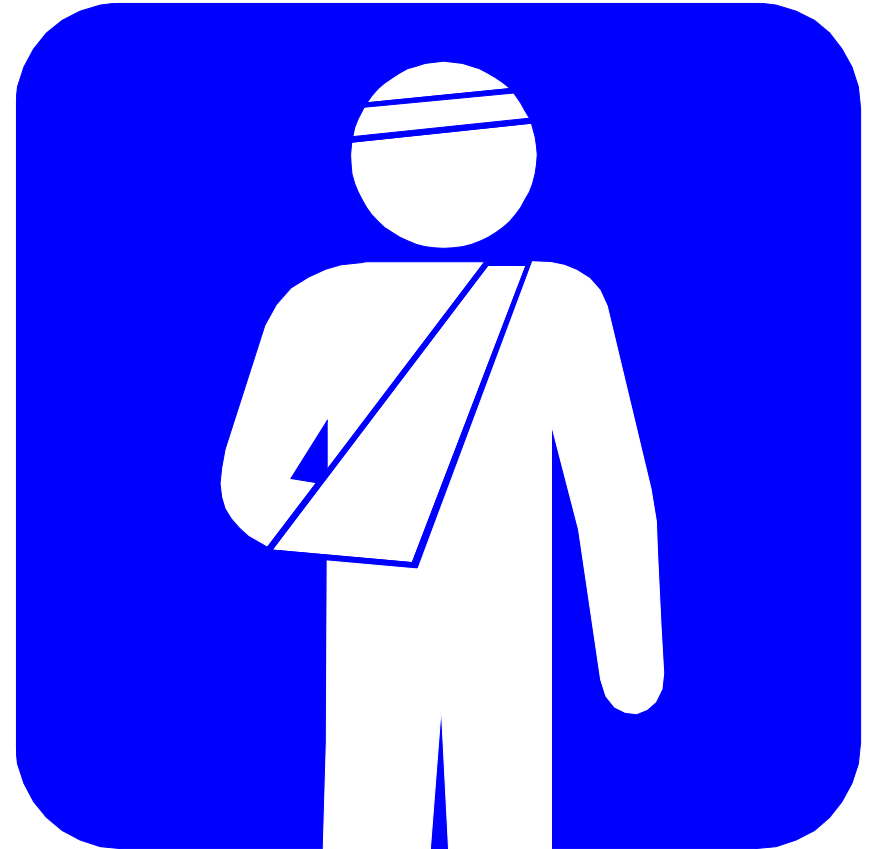
A previous report documented elevated death rates in individuals with autism for accident related deaths such as suffocation and drowning. (Shavelle et al., 2001)

# ADHD and Safety

- Get hurt more often
- Highly active
- Impulsive
- More likely to be admitted to a hospital for inpatient, outpatient, and emergency care
- Medical bills during study period:
  - Children with ADHD           \$4,306
  - Children without ADHD       \$1,944

# Why are children with autism more prone to unintentional injuries?

- Lack of impulse control
- Little understanding of danger
- Seek stimulation (vestibular)
- Altered sensory perception (high pain tolerance)



# Safety in the Home

- Unsafe behaviors exhibited by individuals with autism:
  - Climbing
  - Breaking
  - Jumping
  - Peeling
  - Cutting
  - Pulling down
  - Throwing – utensil, plates, cups
  - Dumping drawers
  - Climbing out of or breaking windows
  - Putting things in mouth - pica

# Curiosity could lead to:

- Putting items in appliances
- Flushing things
- Touching hot surfaces
- Turning hot faucets
- Inserting items into electrical sockets
- Chewing on wires
- Crawling in the washing machine
- Playing with matches, lighters, or fire



# Provide a Safe Home Environment

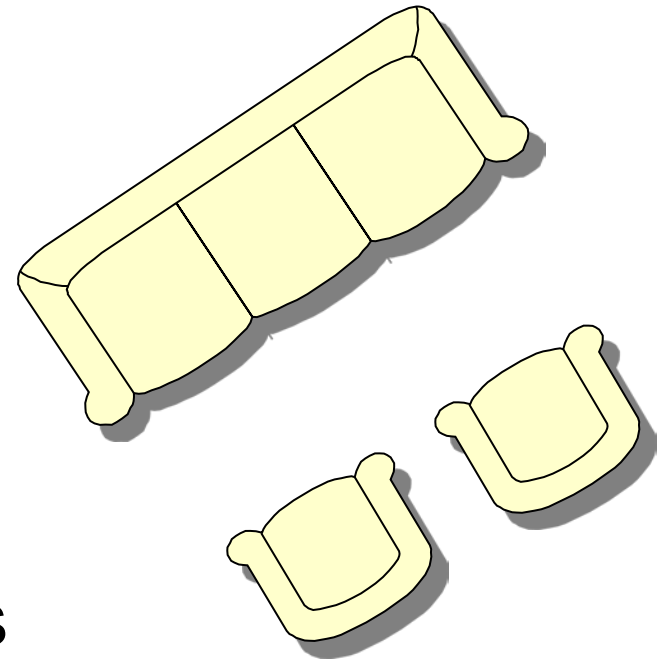


# 1. Establish priority area for modification

- Modify most used areas
- Modify dangerous areas

## 2. Arrange Furniture Appropriately

- Move furniture away from shelves or places a child can climb
- Place items out of reach on shelves
- Gates and barriers to provide safety from falling down stairs and limiting access to other areas of the house



### 3. Use Locks Where Appropriate

- Place locks on interior doors where individuals should not have free access
  - Some parents feel more secure at night with a locking mechanism in place to prevent “nighttime wandering”.
    - Use a lock with keyhole/key
    - Use a hook and eye lock
    - Use a slide bolt
- \*make sure you always have immediate access



# 4. Safeguard Your Windows

- Window locks
- Replace glass windows with Plexiglas

## 5. Make Electrical Outlets and Appliances Safe

- Cover or remove electrical outlets
- Use knob covers for faucets, ovens, and stove burner
- Use locks or door knob covers to limit access to areas with washer/dryer, appliances, and power tools
- Conceal wiring for electronics and appliances

# 6. Lock Dangerous Items Away

- Detergents
- Cleaning supplies
- Pesticides
- Medications
- Mouthwash
- Small items
- Scissors
  - use child safety scissors
  - provide supervision during cutting activities
- Knives
- Razors

\*Keep Poison Control # on  
Refrigerator  
1-800-222-1222



# 7. Label Everyday Items

- Visual labels on functional items (anything that has relevance to the child)
- By labeling the environment:
  - Child may better understand what is expected
  - Child may be less likely to engage in undesirable behavior



# 8. Organize Everyday Items

- Organize functional items in labeled see-through plastic bins
- Place items in places child can see and easily access

More Organization = Less Frustration

# 9. Provide Appropriate Seating

- Sturdy and stable chair
- Away from curtains and furniture
- Seat with belt (if needed)
- Booster seat

# 10. Use Visual Signs

- Use visual signs for setting expectations and rules
  - Dividers
  - Tape boundaries
  - Signs

# 11. Secure eating utensils and place settings by using:

- String
- Velcro
- Plastic or rubber plates, bowls, and cups
- Plastic utensils

# 12. Safeguard Bath Items/Toys

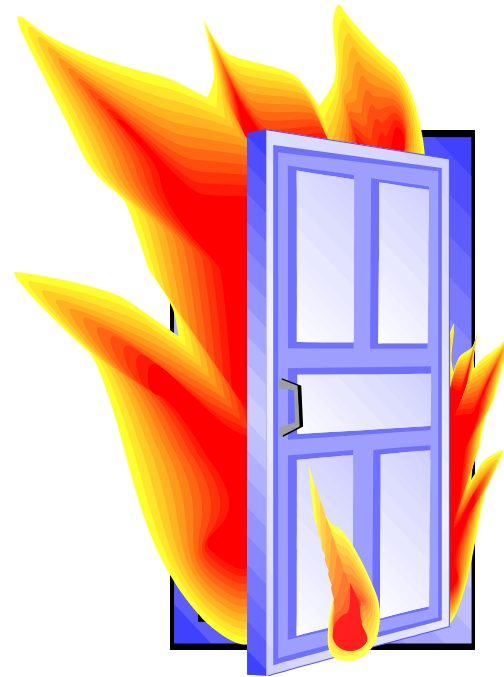
- Store bath toys in a plastic bag or bin away from tub (save these items for after washing)
- Store bath items in plastic bag or bin
- Replace open-lip bottles with pump to prevent emptying or ingesting contents

# **Specific Safety Considerations and Strategies for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders**

**2007 Tulsa Autism Foundation**

# Fire and Burn Prevention

- Teach basic concepts of hot and cold
- Working smoke detectors
- Create visual signs (as needed) to depict escape route and dangerous areas
- Practice escape routes regularly
- Assign one family member the specific duty to get the child with autism out of the house and stay with them to make sure they do not re-enter or wander
- Take child to fire station so that they can see what a fireman looks like with all their gear on (this includes: oxygen mask, bulky coats, and helmet)
- Develop social stories about smoke detectors, fire alarms, and the dangers of touching hot objects and fire.



# Passenger Safety

- May be non-verbal or have limited verbal skills
- Fill out safety ID Card and place with insurance information in glove box
- Use sticker identification on car, car seat, or seat belt



# Pedestrian Safety

- May wander or run away from adult
- May have delayed processing of external dangers
- May dart into busy parking lot or street
- Use handicap parking permit (if needed)
- Caregiver walk on outside part of sidewalk
- Consider child harness or leash
- Active and constant supervision

# Playground Safety

- Active parental supervision
- Perimeter fencing
- Teach appropriate use of slides, swings, etc.
- Check child thoroughly after falls
- Teach stranger danger

# Poison Control



- Teach basic concepts of safe and poison
- Use visual cues to identify poisonous items (Mr. Yuk stickers or STOP sign)
- Keep poisonous items locked away (for older children, a more advanced locking mechanism may be needed)
- Children with pica need to be actively supervised at all times to prevent ingestion of natural poisons in the environment

# Water Safety

Drowning is the #1 preventable injury for children with autism.

Children with autism:

May have no fear of water

May be drawn to water

May jump into water without knowing how to swim

# Drowning Statistics

- Children drown without a sound
- 1 inch of water
- Nearly 9 in 10 drowning-related deaths occurred while a child was being supervised



# Water Safety (cont.)

- Active parental supervision
- Water Watcher Program
- Perimeter fencing
- Door alarm
- Door locks
- Social stories
- Visual cues on gates to pools
- Visual schedule for getting in and out of pool
- Swim lessons
- Coast Guard approved life jackets

# Community Involvement

- Identification
  - MedicAlert bracelet, necklace, or shoe tag
  - Wristband
  - Label garments
  - Identification card
- Autism t-shirt
- Information Form for First Responders
- Autism information cards

# Introduce Intervention Techniques to Teach Safety

- Social stories
- Activity schedules
- Visual rules
- Signs/charts
- Peer and adult modeling
- Reinforcement for safe and appropriate behaviors
- Consistent consequences for unsafe and inappropriate behaviors



# Social Stories

- Photographs, pictures, and words
- Safety topics
  - Smoke detectors
  - Fire drills
  - Staying away from fire
  - Strangers

Personalize stories

Read Frequently

Explain subtle cues in social situations

Break down situations into easy-to-follow steps

# Topics for Safety Social Stories

- Who Is a Stranger?
- Joshua Hears the Fire Alarm
- Joshua Swims Safely
- Joshua Knows the Safety Signs
- Safety Checklist for the Football Game
- Joshua Wears a Helmet

# Visual Rules

- Photos and pictures
- Can assist in understanding
  1. What they are not supposed to do
  2. What they are expected to do.

# Prepare for an Emergency

- Get informed
  - Community hazards
  - Community disaster plans
  - Community warning systems

## Make a plan

Provide Identification for individual with autism

Choose out-of-town contact

Decide where to meet

Complete a communication plan

Safe places

# Checklist

- Fire Extinguisher
- Smoke Alarms
- Insurance Coverage
- First Aid/CPR
- Inventory Home Possessions
- Vital Records and Documents
- Reduce Home Hazards

# Assemble a Disaster Supply Kit

- Food
- Water
- First Aid Supplies and Manuals
- Flashlight and radio
- Batteries
- Medications
- Contact numbers
- Sanitation and hygiene products
- Augmentive communication devices
- Calming tools
- Clothes, shoes, jacket, and blanket
- Ear plugs
- Favorite toys

# Topics for Social Stories Related to Disasters

Tornado Warning

The Electricity Goes Out

Joshua is Lost

Joshua's Phonebook

Individuals must be able to demonstrate the following skills to live independently:

- Safety
- Good judgment
- Competence
- Understanding

\*Environmental modifications should be faded out over time.



# Safety Goals

- Keep your child and others out of harms way
- Ensure your child is ready and able to learn
- Being able to reach his/her full potential

# Resources

- [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org)
- [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)
- [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)
- [www.drowningpreventionalliance.com](http://www.drowningpreventionalliance.com)
- [www.medicalert.org](http://www.medicalert.org)
- [www.autismriskmanagement.com](http://www.autismriskmanagement.com)