Community Safety Issues for Individuals with ASD:
Common Concerns and Strategies for Building Independence

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Importance of Community Access

- Community = our world and the people, things and opportunities in it

- Better, larger community = better quality of life, stronger and more relationships

- Safety issues shrink the world of individuals with ASD!!!
How big is their world?
“The issue of wandering/eloement is critical to many families and must be addressed in a manner that protects health and safety for individuals who wander,” Dr. Geraldine Dawson
Wandering and Elopement

• ~50% of parents of children with ASD report their child elopes, with a peak at age 4.
  • Nearly 50% of these families had a child missing long enough to cause significant concern about safety. Interactive Autism Network Research survey (April 20, 2011)

• Children with ASD are 8 X more likely to elope at age 7-10 than typically-developing siblings
Related Dangers

• More than 1/3 lost children can’t convey their name, address, or phone number

• 2 of 3 parents report their missing children had a “close call” with a traffic injury

• 1 of 3 parents report a “close call” with a possible drowning
Stress and Protection

- 40% of parents had suffered sleep disruption due to fear of elopement

- 62% of families of children who elope restricted attending or couldn’t enjoy activities outside the home due to fear
A 2-pronged approach

- **Monitoring and recovery**
  - Personal supervision
  - Electronic monitoring
  - Organized recovery systems

- **Targeted skill-building**
  - Responding when lost
  - Stranger safety
  - Pedestrian safety
  - Water safety
Monitoring and Recovery

• Systems for detecting exit:
  • Wander Guard Products

Bodyguard Speakerphone Console

Waterproof pendant or bracelet
(smaller than a pack of matches)
Monitoring and Recovery

• **Project LifeSaver (www.projectlifesaver.org)**
  - Locator worn on wrist or ankle, emits signal every 24 seconds that can be used to locate missing individual
  - Search has been reduced to 30 minutes in most cases. This is about a 95% time reduction over standard operations.
  - Currently used in 45 states at no cost to the user.

• **Personal GPS Tracking Systems ~ $200-250**
• **Sound-based alerts ~ $30**
Responding when lost

- **Critical components to responding when you are lost:**
  - don’t panic
  - find someone safe to help you
  - be able to tell them how to reach your family

- **Taber et al (2003, 2004) taught teenagers with mild cognitive disabilities to**
  - recognize when they were lost
  - use a cell phone to call for help
  - describe their surroundings or state location
Taylor et al (2004) taught teenagers with autism and moderate disabilities to:
- respond to pager by approaching an adult and handing them a card

Hoch, Taylor & Rodriguez (2009) taught teenagers with autism and moderate disabilities to:
- answer their cell phone when it rang
- approach store staff with the phone and a card
Community Safety

DON'T TALK TO STRANGERS. DON'T TAKE THEIR GIFTS AND
NEVER GET IN A CAR WITH THEM

11/30/2006
TEACHING ABDUCTION-PREVENTION SKILLS TO CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

Kristin V. Gunby
CENTRAL EAST AUTISM PROGRAM, KINARK

AND

James E. Carr and Linda A. LeBlanc
AUBURN UNIVERSITY
Stranger Safety

- Abduction by strangers is rare but happens.
- Children with autism may be particularly susceptible to stranger persuasion and may not respond differentially to strangers.
- Teach children to:
  - Don’t go, say “no” loudly and firmly, run, find an adult and tell them.
- Have to ensure USE in natural settings and when it has been a long time since training.
Abduction Prevention

- 3 boys with autism about to transition into general education

- Probes:
  - an unknown adult (confederate) approached the child when he was alone in natural setting
  - adult presented 1 of 4 known lures (i.e., simple, incentive, authority, and assistance request)
Teaching Procedures

- Behavioral Skills Training:
  - Verbal instructions
  - Video and live modeling
  - Practice with a stranger and familiar adults
  - Praise and coaching

- ALWAYS have natural “in situ” probes and training if needed
Teaching Street Crossing with VR-BST

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<tr>
<th>Move forward</th>
<th>Turn left</th>
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<td>Move backward</td>
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Teaching Street Crossing with VR-BST
2-pronged approach

- **For today:**
  - monitoring and protection

- **For the rest of their lives:**
  - skill-building and functional independence
A few final thoughts

• Dream about your family’s future as a rich and fruitful one without boundaries

• Find partners to make those dreams a reality

• Face your biggest fears about their future and start finding tomorrow’s solutions today
Linda A LeBlanc, PhD

Executive Director of Research and Clinical Services

Trumpet Behavioral Health