

QUICK GUIDE



PREVENT
Wandering Related Tragedies
in Your Community

AngelSense

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Protecting Special Needs Children Who Wander: **THE ELOPEMENT EPIDEMIC**

Autism affects millions of children and young adults around the world. For many community agencies and organizations who are somehow involved in the care and protection of these children, one of the biggest challenges is dealing with wandering. Wandering or elopement is so common among children with autism spectrum disorders that it's estimated that more than half of children with the condition tend to wander off from safe places.



While this behavior tends to peak at age 4, almost **30% of children with autism** between the ages of 7 and 10 still wander



Half of children who wander go missing, even in safe, supervised places



91% of accidental drowning incidents are children with ASD

Unfortunately, the term “wandering” has a harmless connotation. To say that a child or young adult has simply wandered off does not elicit an emergency response. The assumption is that a child who has wandered will return home on their own, or will be located safely by another family member or friend. This is not the typical case for those with autism; it is crucial that the community understand that these children, immersed in regular activities, need an appropriate response to help guarantee their safety.

A damaging myth related to wandering is that children with autism are at risk because of inattentive or irresponsible parenting. Wandering is not that simple, and to say that the solution to wandering is better supervision denotes a lack of understanding regarding a complex problem. Research has narrowed the cause of wandering to goal-oriented and non-goal-oriented motivations, which means that these children are typically running to something of interest or away from something that causes anxiety. Once these children become fixated on something, they often become so distracted that they race off, regardless of whether a caregiver is calling their name, oblivious to the risk around them. This can happen in seconds, and a child with elopement issues could easily disappear into a crowd without trace of their direction. Children with autism also have an impaired sense of danger, and parents have admitted that their children have been found after wandering near bodies of water or high traffic areas. These “close calls” are an all too frequent reality for families facing the challenge of wandering.

The truth is, children with autism wander regardless of location and supervision. 54% of children wander simply because they love to explore, whereas others are driven by sensory experiences or overwhelm. What is most concerning, however, is that many families of children with autism receive no guidance on how to manage this rampant issue.

In the home, there are many things that can be done to prevent wandering. Parents can put alarms and additional locks on doors, as well as video monitoring systems in and around the house. Outdoor barriers like fences can be a great deterrent to wandering, and ID bracelets can be worn to help identify a non-verbal child. Neighbors can be alerted to inform the parents, or even call the police, if they see a special child wandering by themselves.

These are all necessary steps to take to protect a child with autism, but even with all of these precautions, there are still so many times that a child wanders away without anyone noticing. Often, the child slips away without triggering anyone's concern. Resources are limited. You can't place additional locks on a classroom door, nor can a parent be everywhere the child is. Children with autism are in the community every day, yet there are so few precautions in place to ensure their safety and reduce wandering. That is, unless public organizations and schools agree to be part of the solution.

Nonprofit and government agencies play a crucial role in preventing wandering tragedies. The elopement epidemic is a community problem, and public organizations such as schools should be the first in line to learn more about innovative solutions that save lives.



Why Community Agencies, Schools, and First Responders **SHOULD BE CONCERNED**

More children diagnosed with autism every year, and schools especially are expected to offer an inclusive and safe environment. Although wandering is always a cause of concern, it is even more concerning in the school environment, where children are surrounded by all sorts of stimuli that can act as triggers. It can be difficult to predict when a child may attempt to elope, and a lack of resources leaves parents frustrated, teachers and staff overwhelmed, and children in harm's way.

Not only can the typical school day trigger a child with autism, but daily activities that are seamless for most children can pose elevated risk for others. There have been numerous media reports about children with special needs being left behind at school or on field trips. In the case of non-verbal children, the end result can be tragic. Similar mistakes can happen at local organizations that partake in community events or field trips, where the number of children greatly outnumber staff. Having eyes always on a child that wanders is a near impossible task.

There are no solutions for caregivers, and this is problematic when **more than one-third of children who elope can't communicate basic information such as their name, address, or phone number.** This places the burden of finding a missing child solely on the organization they eloped from, and the assistance of parents and local law enforcement when available. However, when there are other children in care, a staff member can't just abandon their group to find a missing child. It is not unheard of for parents to sue a school for losing their child, frustrated that their expectations of keeping their child safe were not met.



Can't Communicate



Has Been Bullied



Of course, wandering is not the only issue that public organizations have to contend with. **65% of parents report that their child with autism has been bullied,** with no methods of prevention for teachers or parents suggested. A nonverbal child can't communicate distress, and verbal children with autism may not understand why they are a target or how to get help. The situation often spirals out of control and ends with lasting physical and emotional damage before anyone can intervene. Once again, nonprofit organizations such as schools can be left liable for damages.



Kevin and Avonte's Law Includes Funding for Community Agencies to **HELP PROTECT SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN WHO WANDER**

After years of bipartisan legislation, Kevin and Avonte's Law has finally passed. This law was named in honor of two young boys with autism that wandered from their homes and drowned in nearby bodies of water. For the growing population of children diagnosed with autism, this law is an incredible step forward in improving quality of life and level of safety. It offers peace of mind to parents nervous about their child's tendency to wander, and assurance that the community is doing what they can to prevent further tragedies.

What does this law do?

Kevin and Avonte's Law prompts the community to help carry the burden of protecting this vulnerable population and enforces a faster safety response for children with autism who have gone missing. This law **provides \$2 million in funding** for law enforcement, schools, and other organizations to receive training to prevent and address the issue of wandering. Health care and other public agencies will receive funding to help plan, design, and establish local programs that will prevent a child with autism from wandering, and assist in locating missing children.



Children Who Wander Are at **HIGH-RISK** OF BODILY INJURY

According to a study from the American Academy of Pediatrics conducted in 2012, nearly **half of children with ASD wander or engage in elopement behavior**, and of those who wander, an alarmingly high number are at risk of bodily harm. Traffic accidents and drowning incidents are common among children with special needs who wander. The study demonstrates the “urgent need to develop interventions to reduce the risk of elopement, to support families coping with this issue, and to train child care professionals, educators, and first responders who are often involved when elopements occur.”



Half of children with ASD wander or engage in elopement behavior

If you work with families and special needs children in your community, then you are already aware of the devastating consequences of wandering. Whether a child wanders away from school or home, it often requires enormous resources and time to find the child. While families can work with community support agencies, schools, and police to develop safety plans, nothing is more important than acting quickly. That's just what **AngelSense** does. It not only brings **peace of mind** to parents and has been **proven to save lives.** Unfortunately, not all parents have access to the insurance coverage necessary for obtaining and using the device; that's where your agency can help.

By helping families to access community resources, and by applying for grants for your agency, you can help bring technology to more families who have special needs children at risk of elopement. This is not something that only benefits the families; the entire community as a whole benefits when these children are kept safe. By reducing the risk of child wandering in your community, you can:

- ✔ **Help reduce the liability faced by schools and teachers**
- ✔ **Reduce the resources consumed by police and other first responders in efforts to find wandering children**
- ✔ **Empower parents to keep their children safe.**



Community Agencies Play a Significant Role in **PREVENTING WANDERING TRAGEDIES**

The truth is, most nonprofit agencies that work with parents of special needs students are on tight budgets, but they have access to funding through grants and community supporters that individual parents cannot access. Combine this with the fact that schools and other care organizations who serve special needs children don't currently have the capacity to meet the needs of children with autism, and it can be a recipe for disaster. While some parents have insurance coverage, many parents lack the funding necessary to obtain this life-saving, simple answer to the wandering epidemic: AngelSense. AngelSense is a unique and innovative solution that empowers parents and caretakers to protect their special needs children who wander or have a tendency to hide. It is proven to save lives. AngelSense is designed to help parents know where their child is at all times. Utilization of life-saving tools is beneficial to all who engage with children with autism, as we work together to protect every child.

AngelSense Features Are Uniquely Designed to Protect Wandering Children:

1. AngelSense securely attaches to child's clothing



The AngelSense device is only removable with a parent key (including options for children that remove clothing) and can only be powered off by the parent, making it uniquely suited to protecting vulnerable children if they wander.

Parents can't keep their children safe if they can't keep the device on, but AngelSense was designed to provide a variety of attachment options to meet the child's needs and sensitivities, including a GPS sleeve that can be attached anywhere, a GPS belt, and a GPS shirt. 90% of parents reported that their child became completely comfortable wearing the AngelSense GPS device within three weeks.

2. Full Day, Nonstop, Real-Time Tracking



The device never enters standby mode & is always tracking, even when the app is closed. It allows parents to see their child's detailed routes, including planned and unplanned stops along with a timeline view of where the child has been, so they can react more quickly if something goes awry.

3. Proactive Alerts for Unexpected Changes in Routine



Parents receive alerts for every departure and arrival to keep track of their child throughout the day. If the child is in an unknown place or did not arrive at an expected destination, parents receive an immediate notification to their phone

as well as real-time locations on a map to locate the child as rapidly as possible. They can quickly contact the school or daycare to locate their child or alert authorities if the child is lost. Our smart, innovative device offers unlimited, automated geofencing. It is not necessary to preset locations; the app learns the child's locations.

4. Runner Mode: Tools to Quickly Respond to a Wandering Incident



If parents suspect their child has wandered – even before they know for certain – they can activate AngelSense Runner Mode to quickly locate the child and prevent disaster.

When activated, parents can:

- ✔ Receive 10-second updates on the child's location
- ✔ Talk to their child with AngelCall – children do not need to know how to click or pick up; it happens automatically
- ✔ Sound an alarm to quickly find a child who is lost in a crowd or hiding
- ✔ Alert first responders with the click of a button; police and other first responders will receive real-time location information on the child and can respond quickly to avert tragedy

Unlike typical GPS devices, AngelSense uses a proprietary design to work inside buildings like schools and malls.

If you are a government or nonprofit agency charged with supporting special needs parents or keeping special needs children safe in your community, AngelSense gives you the power to protect the children you serve. Join the hundreds of agencies around the country already using AngelSense to empower the families in their communities to protect special children

