

# One-third of autistic children likely to wander, disappear

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A review of data on 1,420 children ages 6 to 17 with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) found that more than one-third had wandered away from a safe environment within the past 12 months, according to findings from two studies reported at the Pediatric Academic Societies meeting in Baltimore.

"Elopement, or wandering, places children with autism spectrum disorders at risk of serious injury or even death once they are away from [adult supervision](#)," said Andrew Adesman, MD, chief of developmental pediatrics at Cohen Children's Medical Center of New York and senior investigator of the studies. "Despite its clear relevance to the safety of these children, there has been little research on elopement." Researchers examined data from a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey of parents and guardians of more than 4,000 children ages 6 to 17 diagnosed with ASD, an intellectual disability or [developmental delay](#). For their studies, analysis was restricted to only those children with ASD.

The researchers found that wanderers were more likely to not realize when they are in danger, to have difficulty distinguishing between strangers and familiar people, to show sudden mood changes, to over-react to situations and people, to get angry quickly, and to panic in new situations or if change occurs.

Researchers also found that wanderers were more than twice as likely to elope from a public place, compared to their home or school."As the

prevalence of [autism spectrum disorders](#) in the United States continues to rise, there is a need to better understand the behaviors that may compromise the safety and well-being of these children," said Bridget Kiely a research assistant in the division of developmental and behavioral pediatrics at CCMC and principal investigator of the study.

These findings also highlight an urgency to identify more effective strategies for preventing potential elopement tragedies.

Provided by Northwell Health

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