

Teaching Safety FAQ

How can I help my child with autism learn skills to keep themselves safe?

The increased safety concerns associated with autism often result in parents and caregivers going to extraordinary lengths to keep their loved ones with autism safe. Learning potentially lifesaving safety skills are important for every individual with autism and should be taught at home and in school across their life span. Evaluating what skills your child needs to be safe and protected at home, school and in the community is an important part of creating a comprehensive safety plan. Work with your child's behavioral therapists, teachers, IEP team and doctors to determine the specific safety skills and learning goals needed to teach your child with autism how to stay safe and out of harm's way!

What tools can I use to help me teach my child with autism to stay safe?

Teaching your child how to react, respond and modify their behavior to remain safe when faced with a possible danger is just as important as taking steps to safely secure the physical space of your home and your child's school. Some helpful tools and interventions you may consider using to teach safety include:

- Visual supports/prompts
- Teaching stories
- Visual schedules/charts
- Role playing/modeling the desired behavior to practice ways to act safely in realistic situations
- Consistent reinforcement for safe behavior across all settings
- Consistent consequences for unsafe behavior across all settings

What should I do with visual supports/prompts?

Use pictures to set limits and clear boundaries around locations or activities to communicate basic expected behavior, like waiting.



STOP Example: You can adhere an image of a stop sign to a door. When your child stops at the door say "Stop." Give praise to reinforce following this rule. Once the concept is taught, use the same visual prompt in other settings where the rule is needed but not as clear, such as the school hallway.



WAIT Example: You can present the visual for "Wait" briefly before your child can have a preferred item. When asking for a snack, hand them the "wait" visual and count to 10 (or use a timer). When you reach 0, trade the "Wait" visual for the snack. Give praise to when the wait is successful! Once the concept is taught, gradually increase the time and situations in which your child is expected to wait.



What is a teaching story?

Teaching stories are stories with pictures and text that can be used to help explain a situation and expected behavior by providing step-by-step instructions. You can customize a teaching story yourself using your own pictures your child will recognize to help your child know what to do stay safe in various situations.

What are examples of safety skills or goals my child should learn?

Your child with autism should learn safety skills that can help keep them out of harm's way across all settings, whether at home, school or out in the community. The specific safety goals you work on will depend on your child's individual skill level, needs and risk factors (tendency to wander, impaired sense of danger, attraction to water, etc.). The following are examples of general safety goals that could be included in a behavior plan or individualized education plan (IEP):

- Responding to name
- Safely responding to questions about personal information
(*ex. stating phone number or showing ID card*)
- Seeking a parent or teacher if a stranger approaches
- Requesting help when lost
- Safely crossing the street
- Waiting when necessary (*ex. getting out of a car, walking in a parking lot*)
- Identifying boundaries (*ex. do not leave the house*)
- Requesting to leave a classroom or activity
- Using a cell phone
- Refrain from running/bolting
- Get sensory needs met in an appropriate way
- Learning water safety (*ex. staying out of water when not "pool time," learning swim skills*)

Always share your safety concerns and related goals with your child's family, friends, neighbors and other trusted adults they regularly interact with so they can support your teaching safety efforts and reinforce skills in multiple environments!

Where can I find additional resources and information?

For additional information on Visual Supports and Behavioral Health Interventions, download the following resources for free at autismspeaks.org/tool-kit:

- **ATN/AIR-P** An Introduction to Behavioral Health Treatments
- **ATN/AIR-P** Parent's Guide to Applied Behavior Analysis
- **ATN/AIR-P** Visual Supports and Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Challenging Behaviors Tool Kit

To find local behavioral and other autism intervention services, visit autismspeaks.org/resource-guide.