



Kansas Elopement Awareness & Preparedness Toolkit

Create a plan for your family using this toolkit as a guideline. As we all know, what works for one family may look different for yours!

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Check out our Kansas LEND Family Education Series presentation on Elopement on YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/rUQzWtD4dUY?si=jsUscx3ENglyYzA9>

PART I:

WHAT TO DO BEFORE

TO BE PREPARED IN CASE YOUR CHILD ELOPES

Elopement is... when a child who has ASD runs or wanders away from caregivers or secure locations.

Follow this link for a comprehensive plan and resources related to preparing for elopement from the **National Autism Association's Free Big Red Safety Toolkit:**

<https://nationalautismassociation.org/docs/BigRedSafetyToolkit.pdf>

Below you will find resources mentioned in the Big Red Safety Toolkit that are specifically for families in **Kansas and Missouri:**

- Meeting with First Responders, Take Me Home Program
- Securing Your Home
- Identification Tools & Personal Locating Devices
- Local Swimming Lessons

Get to Know Your Local First Responders

- Look for opportunities to introduce your loved one to local first responders (police officers, firefighters, EMTs, etc.) in a friendly and safe environment!
- **Follow your local first responders on social media** to stay updated on events in your area: NextDoor, Facebook, Twitter, etc.
 - Coffee with a Cop: <https://coffeewithacop.com/community/>
- Contact your local departments to ask about upcoming events or set up an individualized meet-and-greet with first responders in your area.
- Ask your local first responders what may be available in your area regarding alerts to be prepared in case of elopement!

Check For a Take Me Home Program in Your Area

- Take Me Home is a database developed by police departments for individuals who may need special assistance in times of emergency or elopement.
- **Talk to your local law enforcement about the program and how you can collaborate with them to bring Take Me Home to your area!**
- The table below show current Take Me Home programs in Kansas and Missouri.

Take Me Home Program Enrollment

Law Enforcement Group	URL
Topeka, KS Police Department	https://www.topeka.org/tpd/take-me-home-program/
Johnson County, KS Sheriff's Department	http://jocosheriff.org/operations-bureau/dispatch/take-me-home
Blue Springs, MO	http://www.bluespringsgov.com/2108/Take-Me-Home-Program
Lee's Summit, MO	https://cityofls.net/police-department/programs-and-services/take-me-home-program
Gladstone, MO	https://www.gladstone.mo.us/Police/takemehome.php
Smithville, MO	https://www.smithvillemo.org/forms.aspx?fid=558

Securing Your Home

These are suggestions not endorsements of products

Door/Window Alarms:

- [Harbor Freight: Bunker Hill Security Door/Window Entry Alarm](#)
- [National Autism Resources: Door Window Alarm Set of 5](#)
- [Amazon: Stalwart 8 Piece Mini Window Security System Alarm Set](#)

Door Guardian: prevents door from opening without unlatching a hook:

- [Walmart](#)
- [Door Guardian for different doors](#)
- Video instructions for how to install the Door Guardian can be found here: https://youtu.be/e2HsJUwt1vI?si=fV5_1Rv8jNgyDyQp

***Check with your local health care provider, case manager, or insurance provider about opportunities to help cover the cost of safety devices.**

- You may be able to submit a request to help cover the expense of safety devices for your loved one.
- For example, if your loved one is on the IDD waiver, a window/door alarm might fall under home modifications or assistive services.

Identification Tools

These are suggestions not endorsements of products

Check with your local police department or school- they may be able to provide you will a free ID card annually!

- ID Resources (Pathfinders for Autism):
<https://pathfindersforautism.org/resources/safety/identification-tools/>
- Make Your Own ID Card! Include the following:
 - Photo of your loved one
 - Name
 - Optional: DOB, Address
 - Your loved one's disability
 - Emergency Contacts' Name and Phone Number
 - Try to include 3 contacts
 - Examples: guardians, family members, friends, etc.
 - Back: important information about your loved one
- 'If I Need Help' Safety Kits:
<https://ifineedhelp.org/shop/Safety%20Kits/27>

Set a date each year to update your information:

- Take a new picture on your child's birthday
- Update your ID information & emergency contacts
- Supply updated information to your local police department

Personal Locating Devices

These are suggestions not endorsements of products

Check with your local police department- some programs may be able to help with the costs of a tracking device.

- Jibit GPS device: <https://www.jibit.com/>
- Tracking Device Resources (Pathfinders for Autism): <https://pathfindersforautism.org/resources/safety/tracking-devices/>
- Community Developmental Disability Organization (CDDO)

Medical Alert:

- This service provides small devices (carried or worn) to provide emergency services or assistance 24 hours/day and is available to individuals with a medical need that could become critical at any time.
- Check with your health insurance company for a list of providers of this service.
 - Destiny Home Health, LLC may be able to offer support for these services in Overland Park, KS.
- Tracking Device Reviews from Autism Parenting Magazine: <https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/best-gps-tracker-for-autism/>

Water Safety/Swimming Lessons

Contact your local community pool to see if they offer swimming lessons!

Program/Location:	Contact:	Pricing:
<p>Sensory Enhanced Aquatics: KU Dept. of OT Education</p> <p>Locations vary in Kansas: contact KU at KUsea@kumc.edu for more information.</p> <p>For children ages: 4-17 with autism spectrum disorder.</p>	<p>Email: KUsea@kumc.edu</p> <p>Website: https://www.kumc.edu/school-of-health-professions/academics/departments/occupational-therapy-education/outreach/ku-sensory-enhanced-aquatics.html</p>	<p>Contact KUsea@kumc.edu for pricing information.</p>
<p>Ability KC Aquatic Therapy and Adaptive Swim Sessions (Kansas City, MO)</p> <p>For children ages: 3-5, 6-8, 9-14</p>	<p>https://abilitykc.org/service/seasonal-programming/</p> <p>*Contact AbilityKC for more information.</p>	<p>Some insurance companies may provide financial coverage for these programs or aquatic therapy.</p>
<p>YMCA Adaptive/Challenger Swim Club: Ages 4-30</p> <p>See locations below: -Olathe Family YMCA</p>	<p>https://kansascityymca.org/programs/adaptive-challenger/challenger-adaptive-swim-lessons</p>	<p>Prices vary by center. Financial assistance may be available.</p>

Program/Location:	Contact:	Pricing:
(Olathe, KS) -Paul Henson Family (Prairie Village, KS) -Cleaver Family YMCA (Kansas City, MO) -Red Bridge Family YMCA (Kansas City, MO) -North KC YMCA (North KC, MO) -Platte County North (Platte City, MO)		
Garden City Family YMCA (Garden City, KS)	Cara Kieft: gckymca.aquatics@gmail.com	Contact your location for more information.
Salina YMCA (Salina, KS)	Connie Bachofer: cbachofer@salinaymca.org	Contact your location for more information.
Wichita YMCA (Wichita, KS)	Clarence Wagner: clarence.wagner@ymcawichita.org	Contact your location for more information.
North Branch YMCA (Wichita, KS)	Kyle Cline: kyle.cline@ymcawichita.org	Contact your location for more information.

Program/Location:	Contact:	Pricing:
YMCA of Hutchinson and Reno County (Hutchinson, KS)	Laurie Carr: lcarr@hutchymca.org	Contact your location for more information.
Elite Gymnastics and Aquatics (Lenexa, KS)	https://www.elitegymswim.com/swimming (913)-469-5554 info@elitegymswim.com	Contact Elite for pricing information.
AquaTots Swim School (Olathe, KS)	https://www.aquatots.com/olathe/	Prices vary based on their programs.

PART 2:

WHAT TO DO DURING ELOPEMENT TO ENSURE YOUR CHILD ARRIVES HOME SAFE

For Parents/Caregivers:

Call 911: General Information to Share

- State your loved one's name for the 911 operator
- State they have a cognitive impairment or provide diagnoses, and that they are endangered and/or have no sense of danger
- Provide child's DOB, height, weight, other unique identifiers (braces, eyeglasses, hand-flapping, etc.)
- Request to issue an alert that can be broadcasted in your area to the public and other first responders, if applicable.
 - In Johnson County, KS, law enforcement may send mass phone calls/texts to citizens through *Joco Notify*.

Specific Information to Share with Law Enforcement

- Provide information on what the child likes and how they may respond in this situation
 - What would make them feel most comfortable and safe?
 - What may startle them (i.e. loud noises, people coming up from behind, someone running up to them)?
 - Share your loved one's preferred method of communication
- Share information about possible search areas (see next page)
- Send a recent picture of your child to law enforcement
 - Examples: school ID, birthday picture, etc.
- Share GPS tracking device information, if applicable.

Other Contacts and Search Areas

- Designate family/friends that can help search for your child
 - Choose individuals who know your child well
 - Give your contacts specific places to search
- Consider areas your child would likely be attracted to in the case of elopement:
 - Nearby water sources (check first)
 - Areas your child has eloped to before
 - A familiar place
 - A place they feel secure, safe
 - A place that is interesting to your loved one

For more information about steps to take during an elopement event, check out the Big Red Safety Toolkit:

nationalautismassociation.org/docs/BigRedSafetyToolkit.pdf

Tips for Neighbors, Friends, Store/Park Employees For Helping During Elopement

- Consider a child's body language:
 - Do they seem scared or lost?
 - Are they wandering by themselves?
- Look for identifiers:
 - Wrist band/bracelet
 - Shoe tag
 - ID card (backpack, wallet, or shirt)
- Always approach children slowly, calmly, and identify yourself.
 - Considerations:
 - The child may communicate differently than you do!
 - Avoid startling the child (loud noises, running up to them, approaching them from behind)
 - What might make them feel most comfortable?
- Reach out to law enforcement and the family if a child is found.

Tips for Law Enforcement for Helping During Elopement

- Search nearby water sources first
- Ask about GPS tracking device information on the child
- Upon locating the missing individual:
 - Maintain a calm demeanor
 - Use the information gathered from the parent/caregiver about how to approach their loved one best
 - Approach the child at their level
 - Contain the child in passive way to keep them from running
 - Avoid using any forms of restraints
 - Bring the parent or guardian to the scene
 - Use clear, concise commands or communication aids
 - Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS): click <https://pecsusa.com/pecs/> for more information.
 - Check the child to make sure they are physically safe and don't have any injuries.

Information above gathered from Calibre Press.

Tips for Educators for Helping During Elopement

- Use caring gesture and positive relationship skills
 - Convey to the student that they are wanted in class and that you (the teacher) want them to be safe
- Use active listening skills and reassuring messages
- Use directive statements
 - Ex: “Come back inside the classroom”, “Close the door”
- Be aware of triggers and events that may have occurred leading up to a previous elopement event for a child

PART 3:

WHAT TO DO AFTER ELOPEMENT TO CHECK-IN AND HELP PREVENT FUTURE INCIDENTS

Elopement is a very stressful and overwhelming situation for the whole family. Below are several ways to help manage thoughts, feelings, and actions after a loved one has eloped.

Checking in with YOURSELF

Allow time to let your thoughts and emotions calm before discussing or addressing an elopement.

- Activities could include taking a hot bath/shower, having a hot cup of tea/coffee, taking a walk. Check out this Self-Care Episode: <https://youtu.be/ac4Bw9hKi18?si=PNsQtTs39fSa9kiB>
- Try not to make a big deal about the elopement.
- Avoid scolding, screaming, yelling or being mad at your loved one because they eloped.

Reflection: Why Did My Loved One Elope?

To stop a behavior, such as eloping, from happening, we first need to understand why the behavior is happening in the first place.

- Ask your loved one why they wandered off!
- Consider the environment or behaviors they engaged in right before elopement. Common themes may include (but are not limited to):
 - Enjoyment of running or exploring
 - To get to a place they enjoy
 - To get out of a situation that causes stress
 - To see something interesting

Keep a Journal

An excellent way to help understand why elopement occurs, is by keeping a detailed diary of what may have triggered the elopement in the first place.

Information should include:

- When they eloped: date, time, location
- Possible reasons for elopement (ask your loved one)
- Any behavior(s) they engaged in right before elopement
- Where your child eloped to/where they were found
- Any small details that may help you notice what may have triggered the elopement

Seek Assistance If Needed

You are not alone in managing your loved one's elopement events! Talk to healthcare providers or other families who understand this unique situation.

There are many people you can contact to help you with problem solving, collecting information, and figuring out how to prevent elopement in the future.

Some people you might contact include:

- A behavior specialist from your child's school
- A behavior therapist with expertise in autism and other developmental disabilities
- A therapist from your doctor's office

Activities to Help a Loved One Learn About Safety

- Pick an activity, such as going out to dinner, choosing a favorite movie or going to the park. Use the outings to begin teaching your loved one to tell a responsible party when they want to leave.
- Ask and/or identify things your loved one likes. Make a rewards chart and put stickers on the board when your loved one tells someone they want to leave.
- Play a game of stop and go to teach your loved one to stop when they are told. Practice in an indoor setting, then practice outside of the home once your loved one has shown their ability to follow the directions.
- Set a timer to remind you to check on your loved one if there is an extended period of time you will be away from them.
- Give praises and rewards when your loved one does not elope. TRY NOT MAKE ELOPEMENT NEGATIVE; instead, make not eloping something VERY positive.
- If your loved one elopes at night because they do not like all the space in their bed, consider a smaller sleeping space.

Safety Precautions:

See the **Part 1: Before, Preparing in Case of Elopement (pg. 2-8)** for safety measures you can take to help keep your loved one safe and prevent future elopement incidents.

If you have any questions, comments, concerns, or would like to share any additional Kansas-based community resources related to elopement not included in this toolkit, please let us know!

Contact us at: kansaslend@kumc.edu

For additional resources, check out these sites and projects below:

[National Autism Association](#)

[Interactive Autism Network](#)

[Autism Speaks Safety Program](#)

[Autism Society Water and](#)

[Wandering](#)

[National Center For Missing and Exploited Children](#)



Interested in learning more about Kansas LEND? Check out the links below!

Website: <https://www.kumc.edu/school-of-medicine/academics/departments/pediatrics/academics/leadership-education-in-neurodevelopment-and-related-disabilities.html>

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/KansasLEND>

YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/@kansaslend>

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