

Searching For Subjects with Autism

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The National Autism Association has compiled a SAR checklist when the missing subject is autistic (http://www.awaare.org/docs/NAA_AWAARE_LEASHEETCHECKLIST.pdf), as has the Autism Safety Project (http://www.autismsafetyproject.org/site/c.kuIVKgMZIx/b.5058459/k.987A/Search_and_Rescue.htm).¹ Their suggestions are summarized here.

Searching For Subjects with Autism Checklist

- Treat each case as **CRITICAL**. Children with autism generally have an impaired sense of danger and often die very quickly.
- Interview and listen to caregivers, they know best the areas their subject may be seeking.
- Ask if the subject wears a personal tracking device—if so, immediately initiate tracking measures.
- **SEARCH WATER FIRST**. Immediately dispatch personnel to nearby bodies of water. Ask about any pools, rivers, ponds, . . . , in the area that the child may be especially drawn to.
- Ask about other dangers that the subject may be attracted to: busy roads/highways/construction sites, . . . , and immediately dispatch personnel to secure those areas.
- Find out if there has been anything that has attracted the attention of the subject within the past 24 hours. Have they been obsessed with a location or object, at a location, within that time?
- Ask about the subject's likes that may assist in search efforts. Are they drawn to certain music, favorite characters, fire trucks, . . . ?
- Ask about subject's dislikes and fears or sensory issues that may hinder search efforts. (Dogs, Sirens, Aircraft, Lights, Shouting.).
- Ask if the subject responds to his/her name when called.
- On many searches the autistic person has hidden from searchers.
- Remember that someone with Autism most likely does not experience fear. Do not discount searching any location that a reasonable person would not enter.
- Immediately implement Reverse 9-1-1 (A Child is Missing).
- Issue an Endangered Missing Alert.
- Make sure that the Incident Commander understands the degree of Autism they are dealing with. It makes a difference in dealing with the subject when located.

Once the subject is found:

- Maintain a calm and relaxed environment.
- Speak in a normal tone of voice using simple phrases.
- Bring caregiver to the recovery site as quickly as possible.
- Avoid the use of restraints.

¹These links are no longer active. The website <https://www.autismspeaks.org/information-law-enforcement> and the document <http://nationalautismassociation.org/docs/BigRedSafetyToolkit-FR.pdf> contain similar suggestions.