BOSTON MEDICAL CENTER

The Autism Program

Water Safety Guide



The Autism Program at Boston Medical Center strives to assist and empower individuals on the autism spectrum and their families. In this guide, we will provide water safety tips and information on local swim classes.

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In this guide, we outline some tips to keep your child safe while around water. One of the biggest tips we can offer is to always be aware of your surroundings and don't be afraid to help others. It takes a village to raise a child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder and it can be difficult to ask for help. If you see a child who might need additional supervision or could potentially be in an unsafe situation, don't be afraid to step in and help!

"All of us, at some time or other, need help. Whether we're giving or receiving help, each one of us has something valuable to bring to this world. That's one of the things that connects us as neighbors—in our own way, each one of us is a giver and a receiver." - Mr. Rogers

Water Safety Facts

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics 2019 Prevention of Drowning Policy, "Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are also at increased risk of drowning, especially those younger than 15 years of age and those with greater degrees of intellectual disability. Wandering is the most commonly reported behavior leading to drowning, accounting for nearly 74% of fatal drowning incidents among children with autism."

Some studies suggest that a person can drown in less than 60 seconds and a child can drown in as little as 20 seconds.

Drowning is silent. Many children do not call for help when they are drowning. Once someone is submerged, they are unable to call for help.

A person can drown in as little as a 1/2 cup of water. If their nose and mouth are submerged, they are in danger of drowning.

Supervision

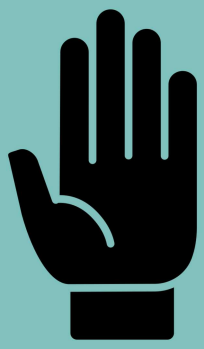
Supervising your child while they play in the water is the best way to avoid accidental drowning. Unfortunately, there are many distractions that can cause you to take your eyes off of your child.

Distractions

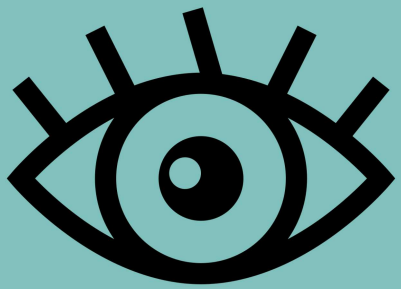
Physical



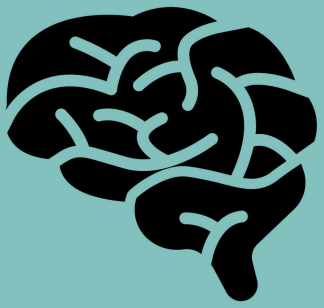
Manual



Visual



Cognitive



Supervision

Physical Distractions

Distractions which cause you to not be physically present

Physical Distractions:	**What to do:**
• Doing Housework • Taking another kid to the restroom • Leaving to answer the door	• Stay physically present • If you have to leave, everyone gets out of the water until you return

Visual Distractions

Distractions caused by looking somewhere else even if physically present

Visual Distractions:	**What to do:**
• Looking at another child • Watching other people enter the area • Watching other people in the area	• Keep your eyes on the prize! • Your brain can't process what your eyes can't see • Implement surveillance strategies

Manual Distractions

Distractions caused by body movements even if physically present

Manual Distractions:	**What to do:**
• Eating/Drinking • Putting on Sunscreen • Reaching for your phone • Adjusting hat/sunglasses	• Resist the urge to do other things while supervising • Keep phone out of reach/turn off notifications

Cognitive Distractions

Distractions caused by mental/emotional tasks even if physically present

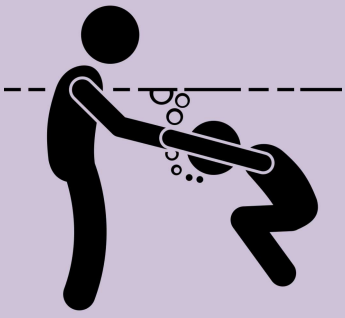
Cognitive Distractions:	**What to do:**
• Talking/Socializing • Stress • Impairment due to drugs/alcohol/ lack of sleep • Internal thoughts/feelings	• Don't socialize when supervising • Find strategies to stay focused • Supervise in an optimal state physically, mentally and emotionally

Supervision

Supervision Tips

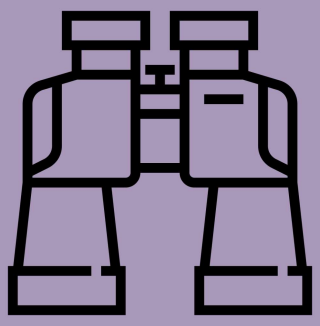
Be close and constant: Supervising adults should be close, constant, and free from distractions. It's recommended to have a designated "watcher" at all times. That watcher should be free from conversations and any other distractions. The supervising adult must be able to swim in case of an emergency

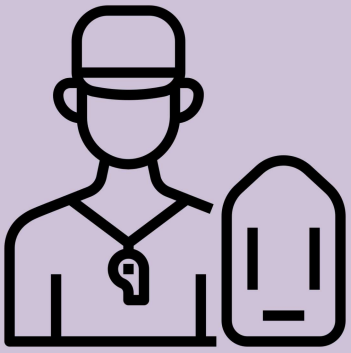




Keep children who are unable to swim with arms reach: The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends "touch supervision" for beginning swimmers, meaning the adult should be within an arm's reach of the child so he or she can pull the child out of the water if the child's head becomes submerged

DO NOT assume any one else (even a life guard) is supervising! If you know you will be supervising multiple children, request that a friend come with you to assist in supervising. Be sure to assign supervision responsibilities to the adults.





Swim at places (pools, beaches, lakes) with life guards and alert the life guard if your child has Autism Spectrum Disorder, specifically if your child is known to wander away and is unable to swim independently

Swim Suit Colors

The color of your child's bathing suit may be more important than you realize and whether or not it can be immediately seen if your child goes underwater could save their life.

Most swimsuit colors virtually disappear or are not identifiable as a struggling child when only a mere 18 inches below the surface of the water.

Visibility continues to decrease exponentially with any sort of water agitation, like in a moderately-active swimming pool or water park, or in a lake or ocean with any amount of wave activity.

Alive Solutions found certain swimsuit colors can mean the difference of being able to immediately find your child should they disappear under the surface and, as we know, where potential drownings are concerned those seconds saved could save a life.

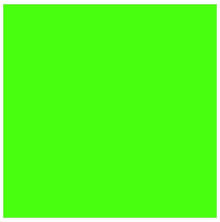
Swim Suit Colors



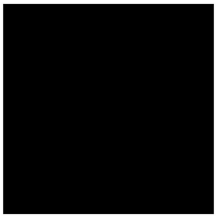
When possible, look for large chunks of color blocks or pair contrasting colors with different colored rash guards and swimsuit bottoms and trunks. For example, look for a bright orange rash guard and pair it with hot pink or day-glow yellow bottoms.



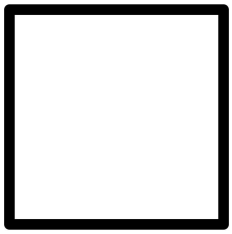
Consider having your child where a bright colored swim cap. The cap can increase visibility underwater. Swim caps are available in a variety of sizes and materials.

Best colors: orange, yellow, lime green, and neon colors.

Colors to AVOID include: blues, blacks, grays, and whites

Flotation Devices

Supervision is <u>STILL</u> required if your child is using a flotation device

<u>Life Jacket:</u> Life jackets are personal flotation devices specifically designed to keep someone afloat. A life jacket will turn its wearer face-up with their mouth and nostrils above water. A type 2 jacket includes neck and head support which can help a younger child with poor body control stay safer. All that support can be bulky and restrict a child's ability to swim for pleasure since they're meant to keep a child afloat.



<u>Puddle Jumper:</u> Puddle Jumpers are US Coast Guard approved flotation devices that are less bulky than a life jacket but safer than swimmies. These devices are considered a flotation aid. Flotation aids are more appropriate for preschoolers with better body control but do not turn a wearer face-up in the water like a life jacket will. If you have a preschooler between 30-50 pounds, you may be interested in trying puddle jumpers. These flotation aids combine elements of a swim aid and a safety vest. Look for a buckle that snaps in the back, which can help keep a child from removing the vest on their own. And, be sure to check the product packaging to ensure the puddle jumper of your choice is approved!

Flotation Devices

Supervision is STILL required if your child is using a flotation device

Bubble: The Back Float or "Bubble" as it is commonly known can increase the child's body buoyancy, provide good support and help beginner swimmers maintain balance allowing them to learn to swim. The bubble helps children adapt to swimming, move their arms freely, and feel more secure in the pool.

Open Water Swim Buoy: Even advanced or independent swimmers need to be aware of safety concerns. When swimming in open waters, consider investing in an open water swim buoy. This bright colored and light up buoy attaches to the swimmer by a tether. If the swimmer becomes submerged, the buoy will alert others to their location.

Additional Flotation Device Facts:

- Swim floaties, tubes, and pool noodles do NOT prevent drowning and should not be used in place of a life jacket. These devices can be used in addition to life jackets but should never be used alone.
- Always check to make sure your life jacket is U.S. Coast Guard approved and appropriate for the activity you are doing. This information can be found on the label inside of the jacket.
- Life jackets for children come in three different sizes based on weight. Always be sure to check that your child is wearing the right size:
  - Infant (8-30 pounds)
  - Child (30-50 pounds)
  - Youth (50-90 pounds)
- To see if a life jacket fits, after tightening all straps and zippers for a snug fit, pull up on the shoulders of the jacket. If the jacket comes up to the child's chin or ears, it may be too big or not fastened tight enough
- There are two types of life jackets - buoyant (made from foam) and inflatable. Children's life jackets should always be buoyant. Inflatable life jackets are not recommended for children under the age of 16.

Tracking Devices

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder are at a high risk of drowning especially if they have a tendency to wander. An additional layer of safety could be to invest in a tracking device. Tracking devices come in different forms such as a bracelet, anklet, watch, or clip-on. Below you will find different kinds of devices at varying price points. If cost prohibitive, check with the organization for financial assistance, grants, or other funding options.

Project Lifesaver is partnered with police stations throughout Massachusetts. To get a tracking device a call must be made to the police station to see what kind of availability they have. A list of police stations that are partnered can be found here. (prices can vary)

Amber Alert GPS is a more personalized clip-on GPS tracker. It syncs to your phone through an app, sets " safe zones," and calls through the device. (Price: $155)

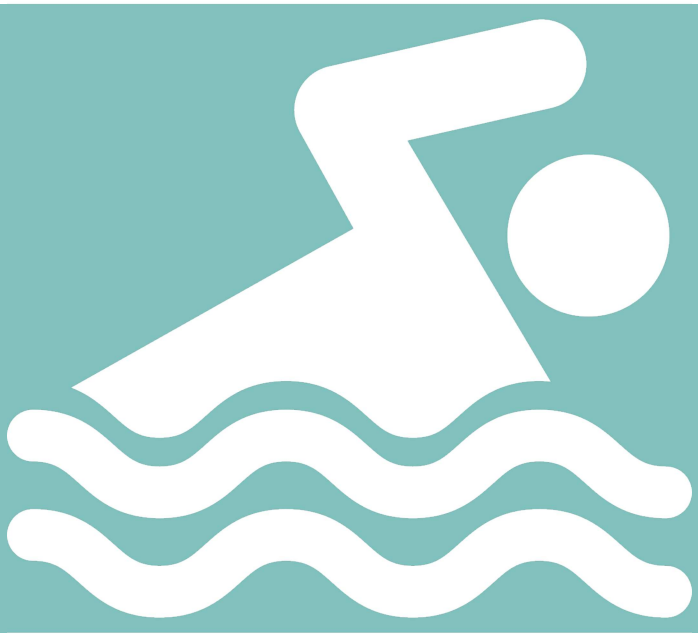
Apple Air Tags send out a secure blue tooth signal that can be found in the "find my" network on your iPhone or iPad. The price of an air tag is $30 and you can buy a key chain or bracelet to hold the air tag for an additional $10.

SafetyNet Tracking Systems has services all over Massachusetts and is partnered with public safety agencies to ensure that children with special needs are returned to their caregivers safely and quickly. They offer watches and bracelets for children. (Price: $120+)

Angel Sense is another personalized clip-on GPS tracker. It is difficult to remove, using a special magnetic key, making it great for children. There is an SOS feature on it and a way to speak to the parent through the device. ($33.33 per month).

Swimming Lessons

It's important to invest in swim lessons for your child. While even the strongest swimmers aren't safe from accidents, teaching your kids how to swim and how to behave safely around water is key to preventing drowning. Kids can start swimming lessons as early as 1-year-old and self-rescue techniques, as well as basic swimming skills, should be reinforced annually. Check out local swim lessons options on the following pages.



Swimming Lessons

Local Swimming Lessons:

Boston University

- Address: 915 Commonwealth Ave. Boston
- Phone: (617)-358-7946
- Email: swimming@bu.edu
- Website: www.bu.edu/fitrec/recreation/aquatics

- Year round program
- Member: $55
- Non member: $85
- Translators are available

Boys and Girls Club Dorchester

- Address: 89 South St. #603, Boston
- Phone: (617)-288-7120
- Email: eferrara@bgcdorchester.org
- Website:https://www.bgcdorchester.org/

- BGCD membership: $5 per year
- Private lessons are FREE
- 30 minute sessions begin in the fall

British Swim School

- Address: 501 Boylston St. Boston
- Phone: (617)-910-2568
- Email: goswimboston@britishswimschool.com
- Website: https://britishswimschool.com/city-of-boston/boston-sports-club-boylston/

- $32-$36 per 30 min session
- $146 per 4 weeks
- $182 per 5 weeks

Evelyn Kirrane Aquatics Center

- Address: 60 Tappan St. Brookline
- Phone: (617)-713-5435
- Email: aquatics@brooklinema.gov
- Website: https://www.brooklinerec.com/150/Kirrane-Aquatics-Center

- $50-$80 per lesson
- Financial Aid is available

Swimming Lessons

Local Swimming Lessons:

Franciscan Children's

- Address: 30 Warren St. Brighton
- Phone: (617)-254-3800 (x: 5475)
- Email: paward@franciscanchildrens.org
- Website: https://franciscanchildrens.org/resources/support-services/adaptive-sports-program/

- 7-8 weeks long
- Wednesday, Thursdays, and Saturdays

Goldfish Swim School

- Address: 20 Webster Pl. Brookline
- Phone: (781)-417-5315
- Email:
- Website: goldfishswimschool.com

- Multiple locations

JCC Greater Boston

- Address: 333 Nahanton St. Newton
- Phone: (617)-558-6442
- Email: lksainfo@jccgb.org
- Website: https://www.bostonjcc.org/program/swim-lessons/

- $20 a year membership fee
- 15 minute private lesson
  - Member: $34
  - Non-Member: $43
- 30 minute private lesson
  - Member: $68
  - Non-Member: $86

Jewish Family & Children's Services

- Address: 1430 Main St. Waltham
- Phone: (781)-647-5327
- Email: vmaio@jfcsboston.org
- Website: https://www.jfcsboston.org/

Swimming Lessons

Local Swimming Lessons:

Spaulding Adaptive Sports Center

- 45 minute session
- $20 per person

- Address: 300 First Ave. Charlestown
- Phone: (877)-976-7272
- Email: cblake7@partners.org
- Website: https://sasc.spauldingrehab.org/activitydescription.aspx?event=17228

Sunsational Swim School

- 30 min: $70-$80
- 45 min: $82-$94
- 60 min: $98-$110
- Accepts scholarships from 3rd parties
- Spanish speaking instructors available

- Address: Private at home instruction
- Phone: (858)-324-6501
- Email: office@sunsationalswimschool.com
- Website: https://www.sunsationalswimschool.com/special-needs-swim-lessons

Swim Angelfish

- Various locations in Massachusetts and New Hampshire
- Scholarships available

- Address: 135 Wells Ave. Newton
- Phone: (203)-545-0024
- Email:
- Website: https://swimangelfish.com/

YMCA of Greater Boston

- Address: 316 Huntongton Ave. Boston
- Phone: (617)-927-8060
- Email:
- Website: https://ymcaboston.org/healthy-living/healthy-living-swimming/swimming-lessons/

Swimming Lessons

Local Swimming Lessons:

Youth Aquatics

- Address: 510 Atlantic Ave. Boston
- Phone: (617)-860-3559
- Email: swim@youthaquatics.com
- Website: https://www.youthaquatics.com/

- $40-$65 per 30 minute session
- Various locations
- In-home lessons available

Swim Lesson Tips:

- Swimming lessons can be expensive, consider these options for financial support:
  - Talk to any support agencies you are working with (such as DDS) to see if they can offer any funding assistance
  - Talk to the swim lessons agency you are interested in to see if they offer any scholarships, sliding scales, or payment plans
  - Talk to your child's doctor to see if they have any financial support options
- Inform your child's swim instructor that they have Autism Spectrum Disorder and be sure they are able to provide the appropriate level of support
- If you are unable to swim, consider taking swim lessons to increase your capability of supervising your child in the water