Safety Moment

Elopement

Wandering/**elopement** refers to an individual with cognitive challenges or special needs who wanders, runs away from or otherwise leaves the safety of a responsible person's care or safe area, which may result in potential harm or injury.

SPECIAL NEEDS SCOUTING

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Primary Reasons

Based on a survey about **half of children and youth with ASD** were reported to wander. Of those, many were missing long enough to cause concern and were most commonly in danger of drowning or traffic injury.

The primary reasons for wandering included:

•Enjoyment of running or exploring, or being chased

•To get to a place he or she enjoys

•To get out of a situation that causes stress (for example, being asked to do something or getting away from a loud noise)

•To go see something interesting (for example, running to the road to see a road sign)

Quick Facts

•According to a study in *Pediatrics*, nearly half of children with autism have a tendency to wander/bolt from safe settings

•More than one third of children with autism who wander/elope are never or rarely able to communicate their name, address, or phone number

•The leading cause of lethal outcomes is accidental drowning, followed by traffic injuries

•Other dangers include dehydration; heat stroke; hypothermia; falls; physical restraint; encounters with strangers

•Increased risks are associated with autism severity

•As a child matures, the risk of elopement declines

Best Practices

What Can We Do to Keep Scouts Safe Who Might Wander?

- Know your Scout
- Use the Buddy System
- Make a plan with the parent
- Have an emergency plan to respond in place
- Inform other unit leaders and volunteers (as necessary)
- Be alert about the child's location
- Watch the child's behaviors
- Provide safe-space 'escape' alternative, such as a tent or quiet nook (Tranquility Base)
- Stay extra vigilant during transitions, parties, visits, & noise/stress/ commotion
- Assign an additional leadership/volunteers depending on the situation