



SPORTS | FITNESS

Co-presentation Title: Drowning and elopement risks for children with Autism: Strategies for reducing risk

Speaker: Dr. Jack Scott, Executive Director, Florida Atlantic University, CARD, and Maricarmen Saleta, Swimming Instructor

Day Two: March 24, 2023

Time: 9:15-10:15 a.m.

Abstract

Children with autism are at dramatically greater risk for injury and even death when compared to neurotypical children. Data from the Florida Bureau of Vital Statistics indicates that 10% of the children who drown in Florida are children with autism. The characteristics of the disorder are predisposing factors placing these children at risk. Differences in communication abilities, behavior, and socialization all to contribute to the risk. Elopement, sometimes referred to as wandering, so prominent in autism, takes on an especially dangerous aspect for children with autism. In South Florida, for example, water is everywhere with pools, spas, canals, retention ponds and lakes. Too often these children are attracted to water and, unless rescued immediately, the results can be tragic. This presentation will review the risks with a focus on elopement and drowning and then explore strategies to reduce these risks. We will provide strategies to prevent this risk of drowning, and empowering tools, and techniques to teach swimming to individuals with autism.

Learning Objectives

- State the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 4 years and for children with autism up to age 10 years.
- Identify three strategies for reducing elopements (wandering) from home and while in the community.
- Describe the benefits of developing an Autism Emergency Plan as the cornerstone for a rapid and effective response to an elopement of a child with autism.
- State the advantages of actively sharing child risk factors with their school to allow cooperative planning to reduce risk for the child with autism.
- Describe the three dimensions of risk in every drowning: Safer Water, Safer Kids and Safer Response.
- Provide empowering tools, and techniques to teach swimming to individuals with autism.

