

# Visual Supports and Resources to Engage People with Autism and Their family Members

## First Responders/Medical



1516 Atwood Avenue Johnston, RI [www.theautismproject.org](http://www.theautismproject.org) (401) 785-2666

This project is supported by Grant No. 2020-J1-BX-0013 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

# ABOUT AUTISM: TIPS FOR FIRST RESPONDERS



**In the United States, 1 in 44 individuals has a diagnosis of Autism. (CDC, 2018)**

People with developmental disabilities have 7X more contacts with police.



(Organization for Autism Research, 2014)

1 in 5 youth with ASD have been stopped and questioned by the police before the age of 21.

(Rava, Shattuck, Rast, & Roux, 2017)

## TIPS FOR INTERACTION

**Don't Assume:** Do not assume the individual will respond to 'stop' or other commands or questions

**Allow Space:** Give the individual time and space, and avoid the use of restraint

**Stay Calm:** Maintain a calm and relaxed demeanor, if sitting, get down on their level

**Offer Water/Snack:** Hold it out to the individual

**Simplify Language:** Use simple, literal phrases

**Reassure:** Even if the person is nonverbal, offer reassurance

**Offer Tools:** Offer a phone, iPad, or paper/pen to communicate—these items may also calm the individual

49% of children with autism attempt to elope from a safe environment  
(Phillips, Briggs, Fisher, & Greer, 2018)



23% of individuals with ASD have had interactions with first responders due to wandering or eloping.

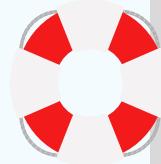
(Engaged Scholars, v. 7, 2019)



## TIPS FOR SEARCH & RESCUE

**Act Quickly:** People with autism may head straight to water, traffic, or abandoned cars/areas, so treat each case as critical regardless of age

**Search Water First:** Search any type of nearby water, including waste water



**Ask Questions:** Ask the caregiver if the individual will respond to his/her name, and about likes/dislikes (Will they be drawn to certain music, favorite characters, fire trucks, mom's voice? Or afraid of certain noises, sirens, search dogs?)



**The Autism Project**  
[www.theautismproject.org](http://www.theautismproject.org)



**Public Safety Special  
Needs Coalition**  
[www.PSSNCRI.com](http://www.PSSNCRI.com)

# If Person With Autism is Missing

- Treat each case as critical.** Those with autism can have an impaired sense of danger and often go straight to water or traffic.
- Ask the caregiver if the person wears a personal tracking device, if so, immediately initiate tracking measures.
- Search Water First!** Even if the child or adult is said to dislike water, search any type of nearby water, including waste water.
- Ask about other dangers that the person may be attracted to; busy roads/highways/construction sites, etc. and immediately dispatch personnel to secure those areas.
- Ask about individual's likes that may assist in search efforts – Will they be drawn to certain music, favorite characters, fire trucks, mom's voice, etc.
- Ask about individual's dislikes and fears or sensory issues that may hinder search efforts. (Dogs, Sirens, Aircraft, Lights, Shouting.)
- Ask if the individual will respond to his/her name when called.
- Implement Reverse 9-1-1 (Visit [achildmissing.org](http://achildmissing.org) for details.)
- Issue an Endangered Missing Alert.



***"We're ecstatic we found this kid with everything stacked against us."***

*Capt. B.J. Jones, who helped locate a nonverbal 7-year-old boy in a riverbed after an eight-hour search - ModBee, January 2014*



## Training & Search Resources

National Center For Missing & Exploited Children:  
[missingkids.com](http://missingkids.com); 1-800-THE-LOST

Project Lifesaver Tracking:  
[projectlifesaver.org](http://projectlifesaver.org)

SafetyNet Tracking:  
[safetynettracking.com](http://safetynettracking.com)

Reverse 911:  
[achildmissing.org](http://achildmissing.org)

Autism Risk Management:  
[autismriskmanagement.com](http://autismriskmanagement.com)

Take Me Home Registry:  
Officer Jimmy Donohoe  
[Jdonohoe@ci.pensacola.fl.us](mailto:Jdonohoe@ci.pensacola.fl.us)

EMA Emergency Alert Guidelines:  
[ncjrs.gov](http://ncjrs.gov)

## Prevention Resources for Families

National Autism Association  
[nationalautismassociation.org](http://nationalautismassociation.org)

NAA's Big Red Safety Box  
[bigredsafetybox.com](http://bigredsafetybox.com)

AWAARE Collaboration  
[awaare.org](http://awaare.org)

Today's date:

## Meet \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ is diagnosed with autism and could be misunderstood if there is ever an encounter with law enforcement or other first responders.

Because \_\_\_\_\_ has difficulty visiting new places or people, I'm writing you today to introduce this amazing person who may not know what to do in a stressful situation.

In addition to some of the characteristics I've marked on the right side of this page, other behaviors include:

Should this person ever become lost, please search nearby water, busy streets and these places:

This person has certain likes/dislikes that may affect interactions with police or other first responders. To limit risk, please:

If this person is ever lost, I can be reached at:

\_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.

I may be attaching other helpful information. Should you have any questions, please call me at the number listed above. Thank you for all the work you do to protect the lives of people with autism.

Sincerely,

(place image here)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Meds or Allergies: \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Contact: \_\_\_\_\_



### This Person with Autism May:

- Not speak
- Appear deaf
- Avoid eye contact
- Not respond to their name or verbal commands
- Rock, pace, spin or hand-flap (stimming), or repeat phrases (echolalia)
- Hold hands over ears due to sound sensitivity
- Avoid or resist physical contact
- Have unusual fears or obsessions with things like flashing lights, sirens, K-9s
- Not answer questions
- Need time to process questions or demands
- Try to run away or hide
- Appear to be under the influence
- Not be properly dressed for the elements
- Have the mental capacity of someone much younger



### How Do I Approach Someone with Autism?

- If there is no imminent danger, give the individual time and space
- Maintain a calm and relaxed demeanor
- Look for a medical ID, contact caregiver immediately
- Speak in a normal tone of voice using simple phrases
- Use first/then approach to ease anxiety: "First, we are going to sit in the car, then we'll see your Mom."

# My Fire Safety Plan

We have fire alarms in our home to keep us safe.



When the fire alarm beeps, I will leave the house and wait at the mailbox.

The mailbox is my family's emergency meeting area.



Even if I do not smell or see smoke, when the alarm beeps, I will go to the mailbox.

I will wait at the mailbox until my parents, or a firefighter come to get me.

This will help keep me and my family safe if there is a fire.

# AUTISM & WANDERING PREVENTION TIPS

*promoting safety in the home & community*



**49%**  
*wander*

blue = prevention  
green = education  
red = response

Similar to the wandering behaviors in seniors with dementia or Alzheimer's, children and adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are prone to wandering away from a safe environment. Because many children with ASD have challenges in areas of language and cognitive function, it is critical for parents to understand ways to keep their child or adult with autism safe.

## Install Home Safeguards



Install secure locks (exterior doors), home security system or door/window chimes; fence yard; secure gates; keep garage opener out of reach; use baby monitors and visual prompts like simple stop signs.

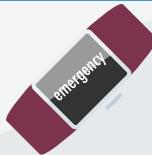
## Identify Triggers/Teach Self-help



Be aware of any known triggers that could prompt fleeing (loud noises, bright lights, fears, etc.) and work towards teaching your child safe alternative ways to respond.

For an individual who demonstrates bolting behaviors due to fear or stress, etc., use aids, such as noise-cancelling headphones, and teach calming techniques using favorite topics or items.

## Secure Personal Safeguards



Have wearable identification on your child; Temporary Tattoos are great for field trips and other outings; Check with local law enforcement to see if they offer Tracking Devices.

## Teach Safety Skills



Enroll your child into swimming lessons. Final lessons should be with clothes and shoes on.

Use social stories to teach individuals with autism ways to stay safe, and use favorite objects or tools to demonstrate when it's outside time versus inside time.

## Create Community Awareness



Alert trusted neighbors, and introduce them to your child; fill out an alert form for local police, include a current photo and unique characteristics, likes, fears, and behaviors; alert the school, and bus drivers.

## Call 911



Remain calm and always call 911 immediately if an individual with ASD is missing; law enforcement should treat each case as "critical."

Law enforcement agencies are encouraged to contact the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678) for additional assistance.

## Remain Hyper Vigilant



Stay on extra high alert during warmer months, holidays, vacations, camping trips, transition periods, outdoor gatherings, a recent move to a new home or school, visiting an unfamiliar setting, public outings.

Initiate a "tag, you're it" system during family gatherings and transitions. Tag one responsible adult to closely supervise your child for an agreed-upon period of time.

## Search Water First



Immediately search areas that pose the highest threat first, such as nearby water, busy streets, train tracks, and parked cars.





# Tips for hosting a Sensory Friendly Touch-A-Truck with First Responders

## PLAN AHEAD

SET THE ENVIRONMENT UP FOR SUCCESS. ONLY INCLUDE ITEMS THAT ARE SAFE FOR KIDS TO TOUCH & PLAY WITH.



## CREATE A NATURAL BARRIER

SET UP VEHICLES, TABLES, AND ACTIVITIES AROUND THE PERIMETER CREATING A NATURAL BARRIER AND REDUCING THE RISK OF ELOPEMENT.

## SENSORY SAFE

LIGHTS & SIRENS CAN INCREASE STRESS AND RISK OF SEIZURE. WHEN CREATING A SENSORY SAFE ENVIRONMENT, DON'T FORGET TO TURN DOWN OR MUTE OTHER ALARMS & WALKIES.



## HUDDLE-UP

BEFORE THE EVENT BEGINS HAVE A MEETING WITH YOUR TEAM TO HELP CLARIFY THE EXPECTATIONS AND GIVE MEMBERS AN IDEA OF WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN WORKING WITH SPECIAL NEEDS FAMILIES.



## CREATE A BREAK SPACE

DESIGNATE AN AREA AWAY FROM LOUD NOISES & CROWDS WHERE INDIVIDUALS CAN TAKE A BREAK IF NEEDED.



## USE VISUALS

USE VISUALS SUCH AS STOP SIGNS TO IDENTIFY AREAS THAT MAY BE OFF LIMITS. OTHER VISUALS HIGHLIGHTING WHERE TO WAIT, WHERE TO TAKE A BREAK, & DIFFERENT ACTIVITY AREAS CAN BE HELPFUL.



## SUSPEND JUDGMENT & COMMENTS

SENSORY FRIENDLY EVENTS ALLOW FOR FAMILIES TO INTERACT IN A JUDGMENT FREE ZONE CREATING A SAFE SPACE FOR SPECIAL NEEDS FAMILIES.



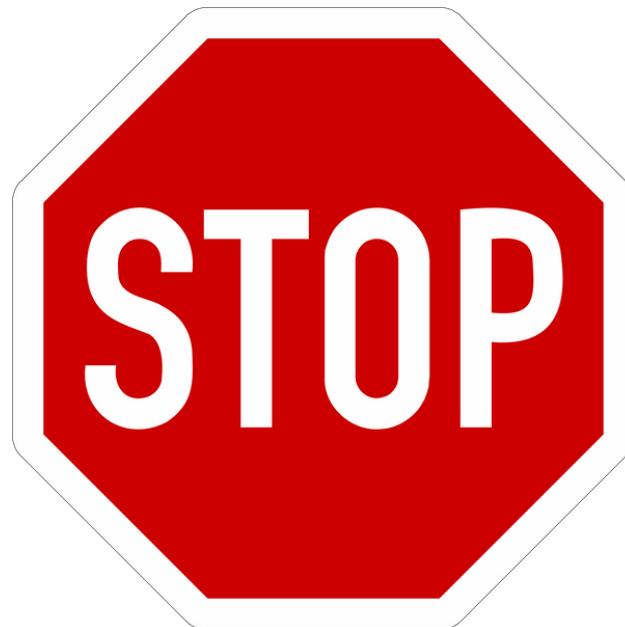
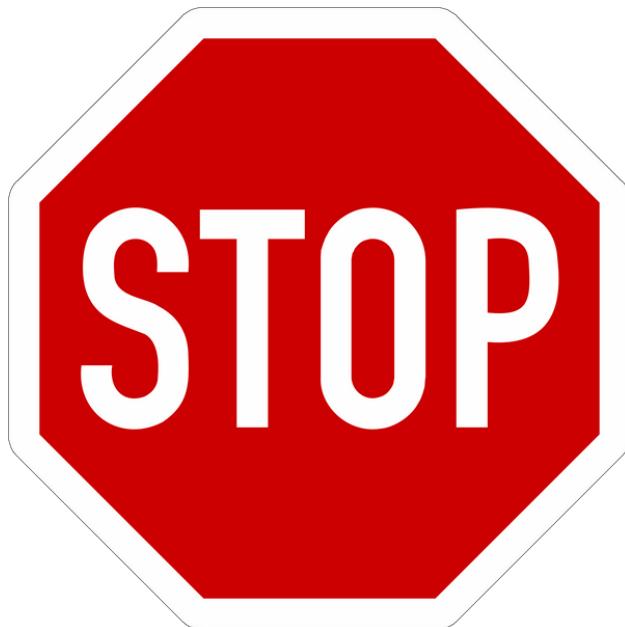
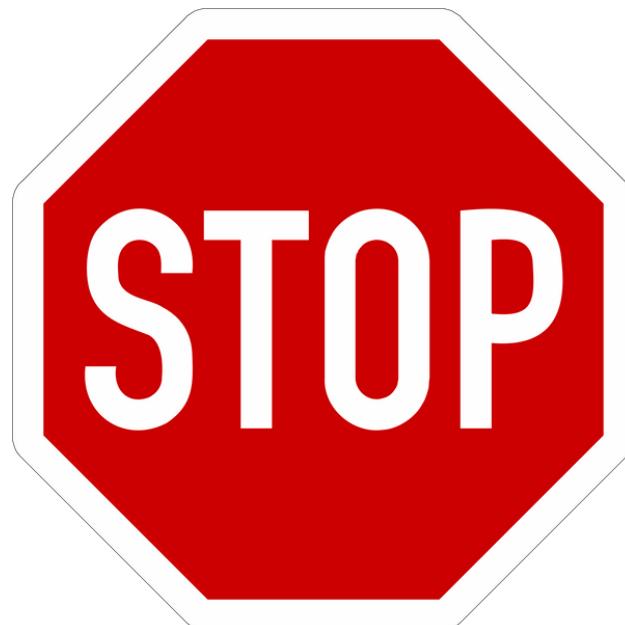
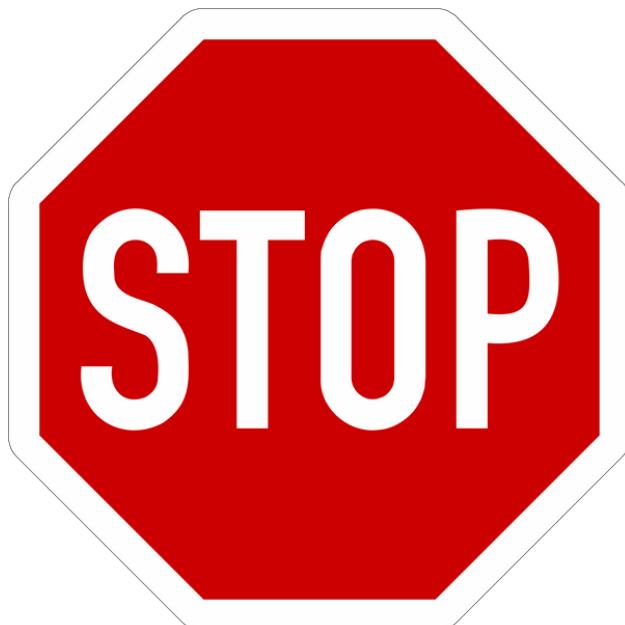
## TAKE THE PARENTS LEAD

MELTDOWNS HAPPEN! IF A KIDDO HAS A HARD TIME CHECK IN WITH THE PARENT OR CAREGIVER HOW YOU CAN BE HELPFUL.

**Public Safety Special Needs Coalition**

For more helpful tips and information visit

[www.pssncri.com](http://www.pssncri.com)







BREAK



BREAK



BREAK



BREAK



BREAK



BREAK

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I will wait at the mailbox until my parents, or a firefighter come to get me.

This will help keep me and my family safe if there is a fire.

**FIRST**

**THEN**



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**5**

**4**

**3**

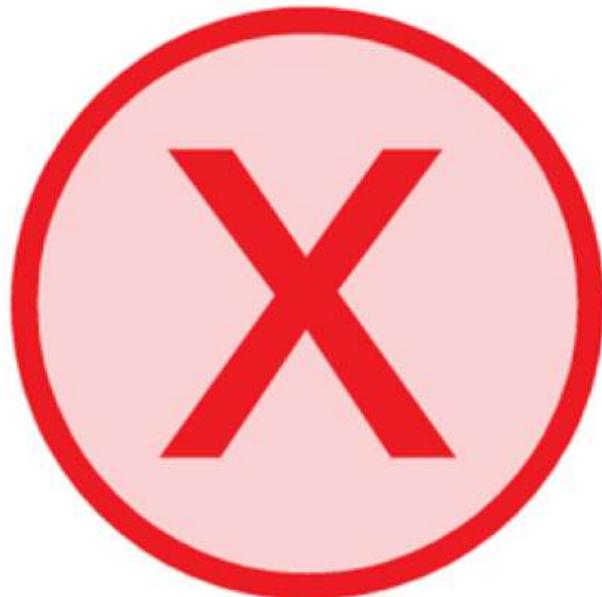
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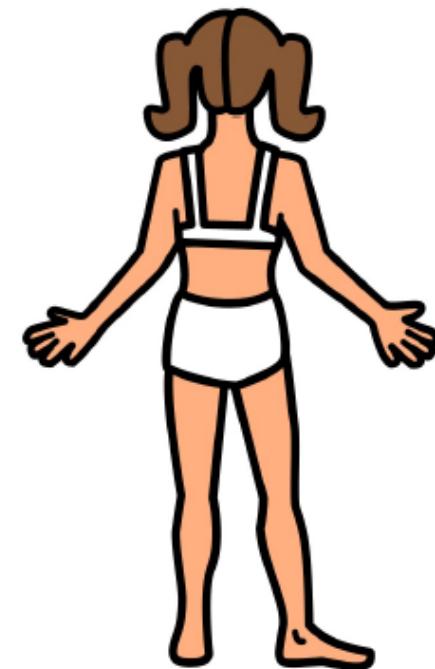
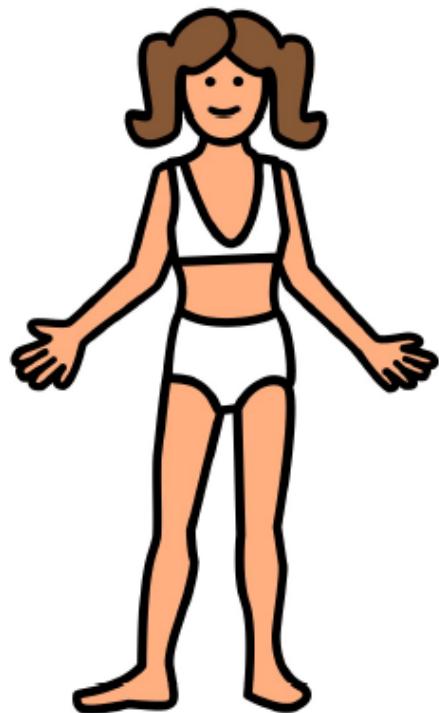
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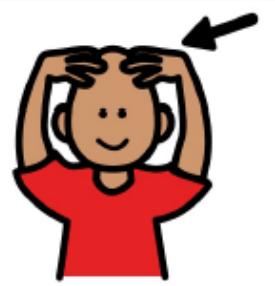
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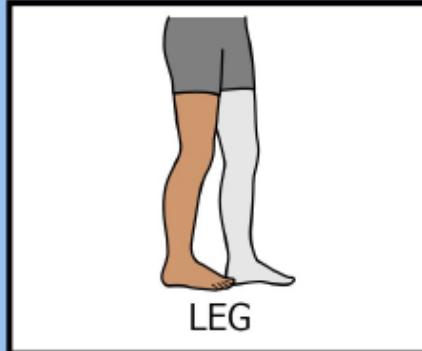
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# Where does it hurt?



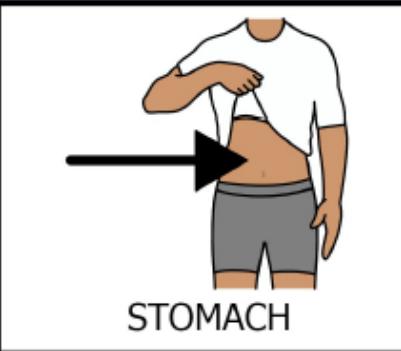
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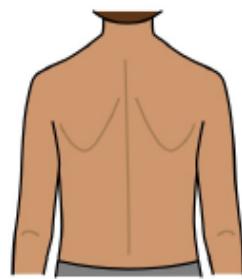
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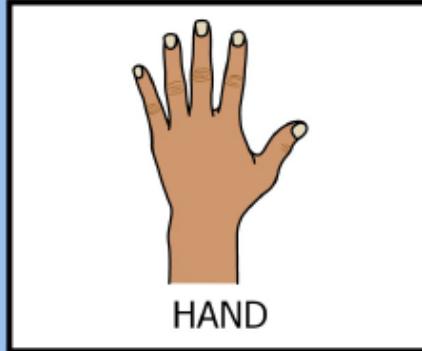
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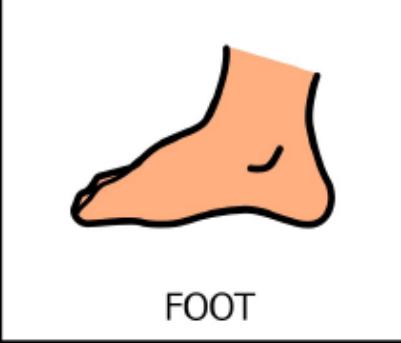
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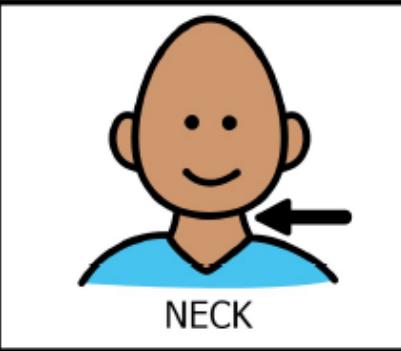
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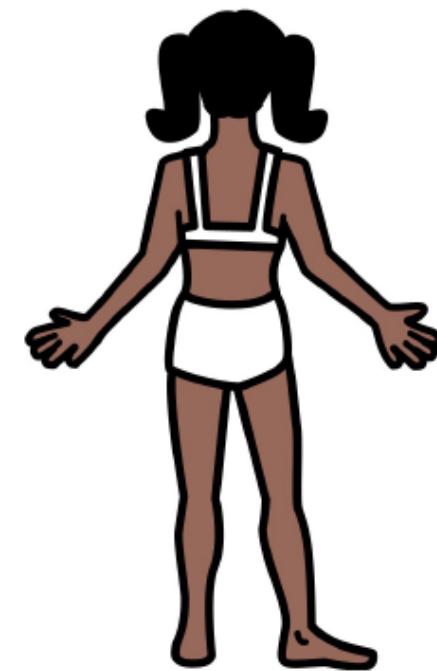
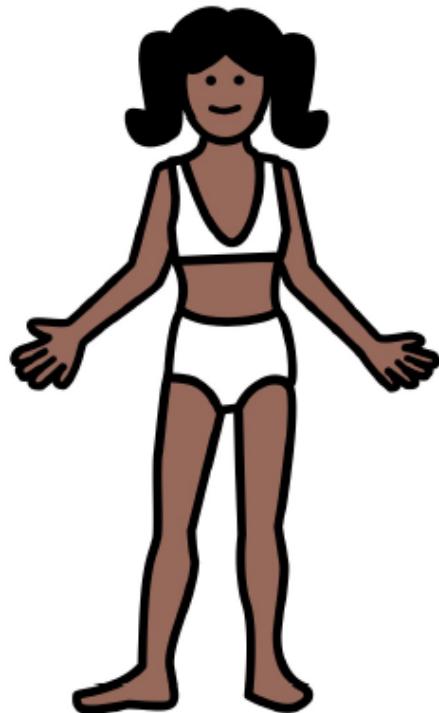


FOOT



NECK

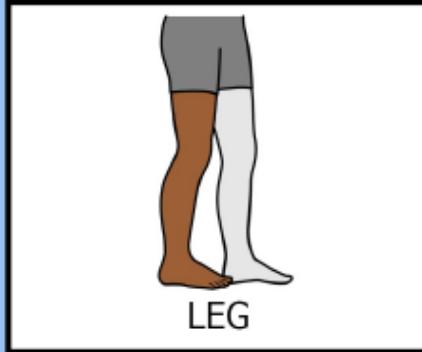
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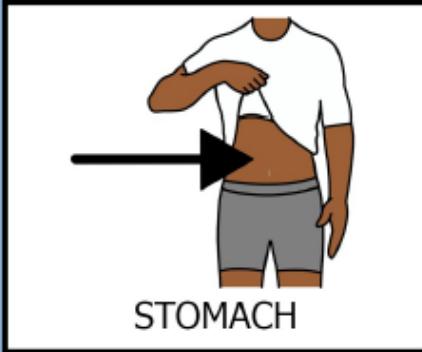
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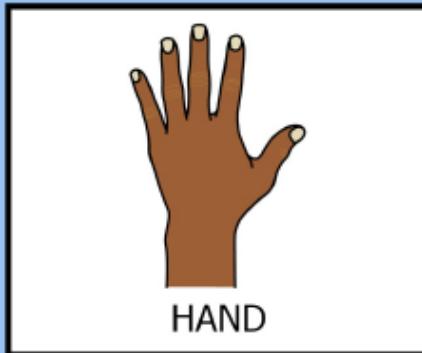
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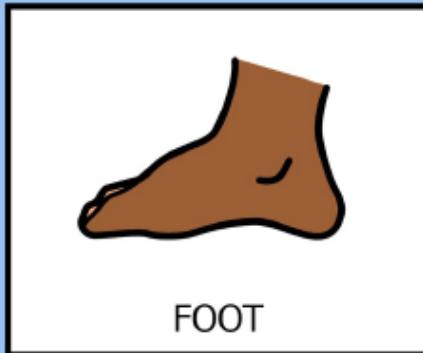
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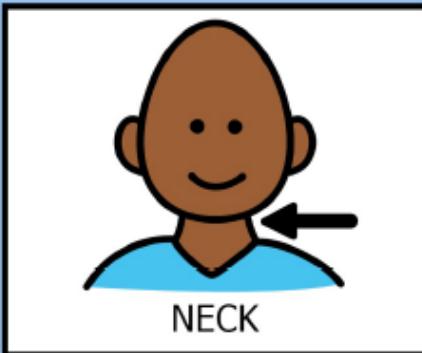
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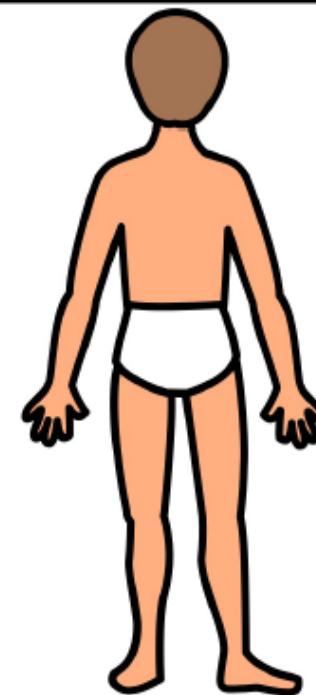
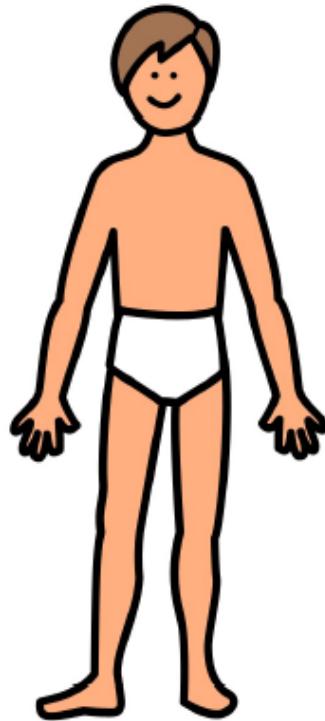


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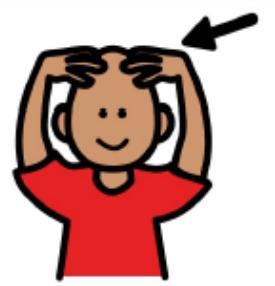


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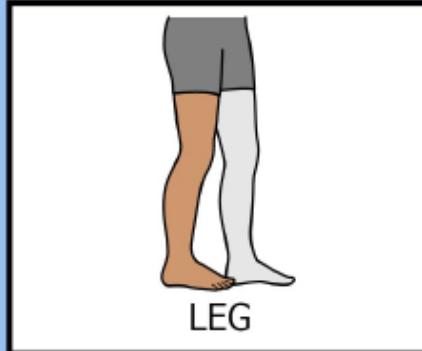
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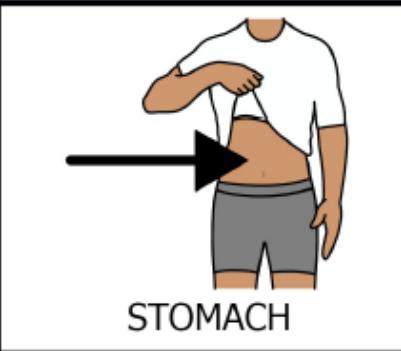
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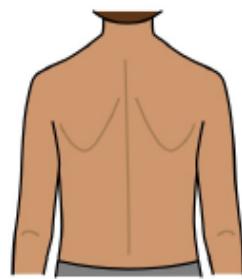
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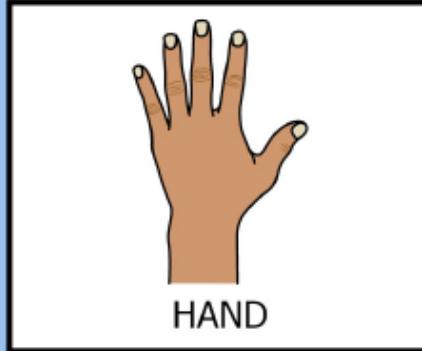
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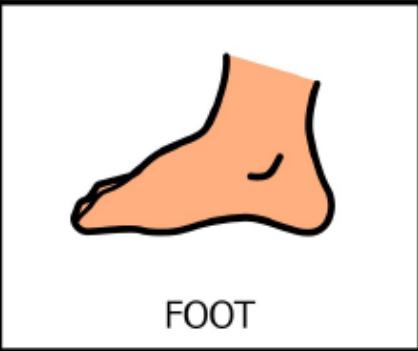
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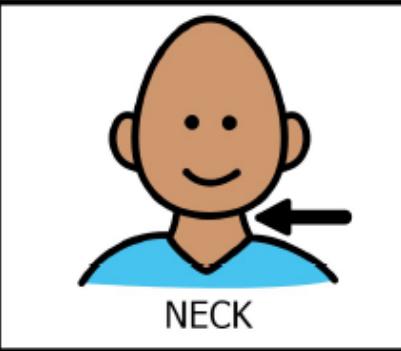
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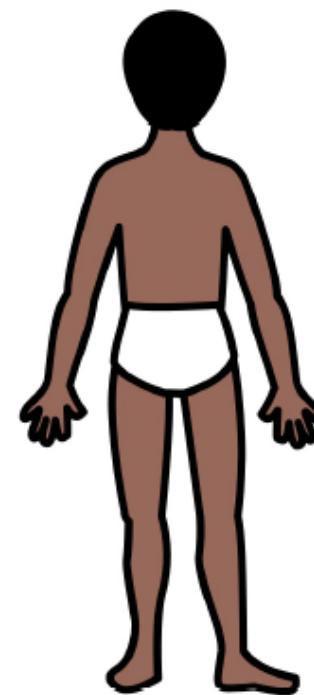
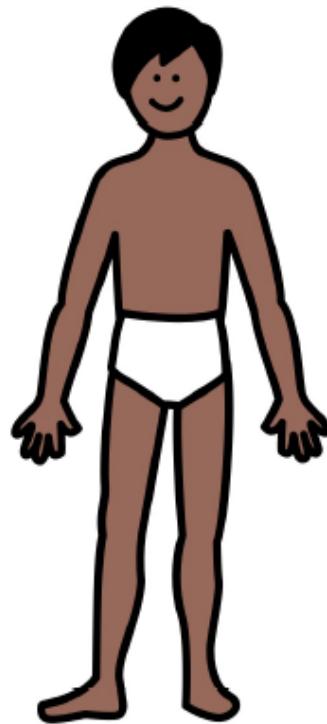


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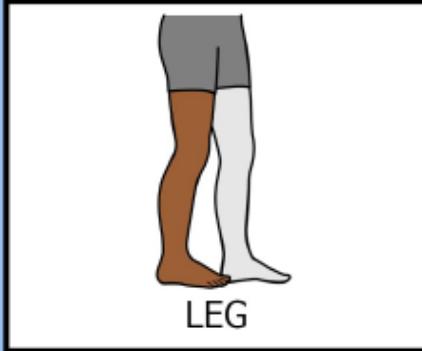
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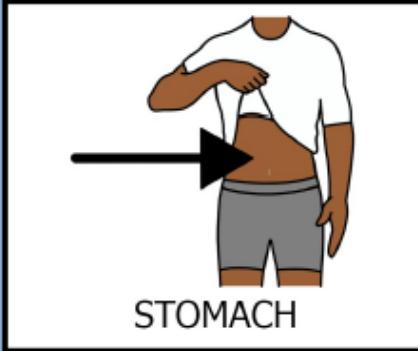
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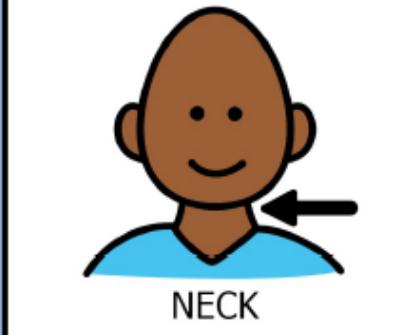
BACK



HAND



FOOT



NECK

# Where does it hurt?



EARS



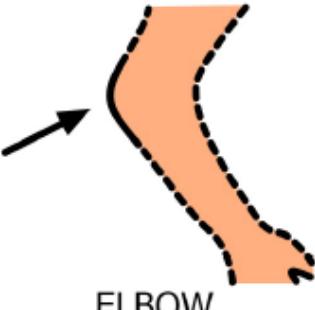
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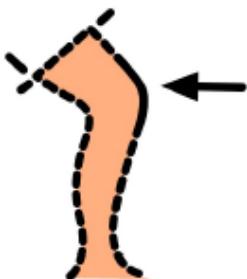
THROAT



TEETH



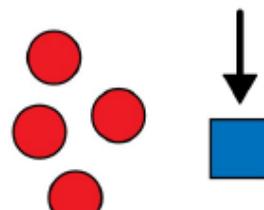
ELBOW



KNEE



BACKSIDE



OTHER

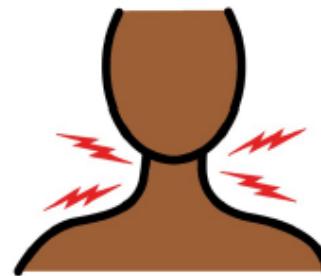
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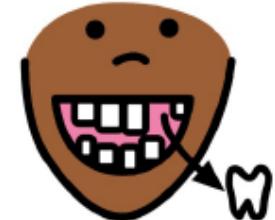
ears



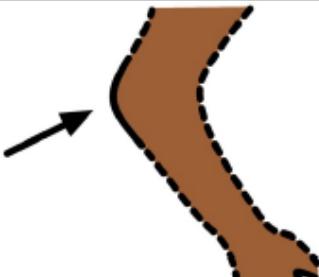
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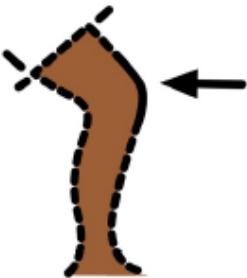
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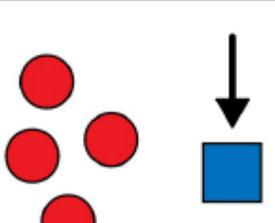
elbow



knee



backside



other

## COMMUNICATION

Verbal

Pre-verbal

Non-verbal

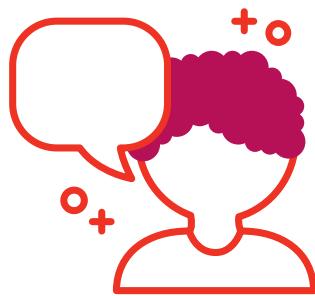
**You can communicate with me best by using:**

Simple language with extra time to process the information

Pictures

Written words

Technology



**When I am calm I am able to:**

Follow verbal and nonverbal directions

Use visuals to help follow directions

Indicate my likes and dislikes

Request what I want or need

## STRENGTHS

**I'm really good at or I really like:**

Sports

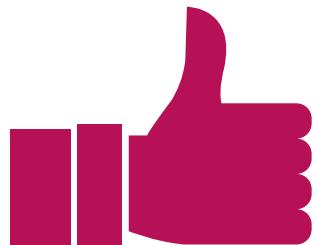
Music

Movement

Video Games

Art

Other: \_\_\_\_\_



## CHALLENGES

**I have challenges with:**

Self-regulation

Yelling or swearing

Wandering or running away

Aggressive behavior

Self-injurious behavior

Spitting

Repetitive rituals

Maintaining personal space

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## WHEN I AM UPSET YOU CAN HELP BY:

Reducing demands

Offering a break or fidgets

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Increasing space

Offering choices (visually)

Using visuals, written words, or pictures

Reducing language (including stop talking)

# THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT ME

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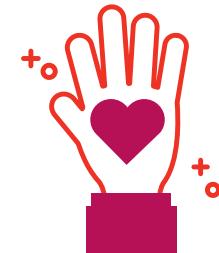
## Likes & Special Interests



## TRIGGERS



## SENSORY CHALLENGES



## HELPFUL TOOLS

For more information contact:



1516 Atwood Ave  
Johnston, RI 02919

401-785-2666

[www.TheAutismProject.org](http://www.TheAutismProject.org)