



PARENT GUIDE • SAFETY & ELOPEMENT

Running Away & Elopement Behavior Blueprint™

Prevent the run. Protect the child. Teach a safer way to get needs met.

PROTECT FIRST. REGULATE NEXT. TEACH LATER.

What elopement is

Elopement is leaving a safe area or responsible supervision without permission or notice. It may look intentional, impulsive, or automatic. It must always be treated as a serious safety risk and a signal to understand—not a character flaw or parenting failure.

Shared responsibility: Families, schools, healthcare teams, first responders, and community spaces all have a role in prevention. Autism is not an excuse to stop teaching coping, communication, and safety skills; those skills must be taught without shame or blame.

Ask two questions

WHAT IS THE CHILD RUNNING FROM?

Overload, noise, crowds, demands, conflict, transitions, fear, pain, uncertainty, or feeling trapped.

WHAT IS THE CHILD RUNNING TOWARD?

Water, movement, a preferred place, person, object, routine, attention, or another meaningful destination.

Step 1: find the driver

ESCAPE FROM OVERLOAD

Noise, crowds, demands, conflict, transitions, or feeling trapped may trigger flight.

SEEKING SOMETHING

Water, movement, a preferred place, person, object, or routine may pull the child away.

COMMUNICATION BARRIER

Running may be the fastest way to say break, no, help, finished, quiet, or space.

FEAR OR TRAUMA RESPONSE

A person, sound, memory, place, or sudden event may activate automatic flight.

IMPULSE OR DANGER AWARENESS

The body may move before the child can pause, scan for danger, or recall a rule.

LEARNED OUTCOME

Leaving may have ended a demand, created pursuit, gained attention, or provided access.

Common trigger, setting, or destination:

Step 2: match the response

MELTDOWN OR FLIGHT RESPONSE

Secure safety, reduce language and demands, remove overload, co-regulate, and wait for recovery.

GOAL-DIRECTED ESCAPE OR ACCESS

Keep the safety boundary firm, prompt the replacement, and do not make unsafe running the easiest route.

SENSORY OR MOVEMENT SEEKING

Build supervised movement, outdoor access, or a designated run-and-return routine into the day.

COMMUNICATION OR UNCERTAINTY

Use visuals, schedules, break cards, safe-person cues, and clear transition warnings.

Remember: Do not lecture, shame, interrogate, or demand explanations while the nervous system is in crisis.

Step 3: map the 0-60 Journey™

	Scans exits, watches a destination, asks to leave, or moves to the edge
	Paces, pulls away, becomes restless, repeats “go,” or stops engaging
	Moves toward a door, hides, refuses transition, or becomes more urgent
	Bolts a short distance, tests barriers, or cannot use the usual safety cue
	Runs from supervision; reasoning and familiar communication are limited
	Enters traffic, water, wilderness, or another immediate danger

10-20 signals:

30-40 signals:

50-60 signals:

Steps 4-7: Secure-Locate-Regulate-Review Plan™

04 • SECURE DANGER

Protect traffic, water, heights, doors, and other hazards. Alert nearby adults and emergency services when needed.

05 • LOCATE STRATEGICALLY

Check known destinations and highest-risk areas first. Share a photo, description, communication needs, and water attraction.

06 • REGULATE AFTER REUNION

Check injury, lower stimulation, reduce demands, and reconnect.

Say: "You are safe. I'm here."

07 • REVIEW THE PLAN

After recovery, document trigger, route, destination, response time, and what helped. Update prevention.

Emergency: When a child is missing, act immediately. Check nearby water and other known high-risk destinations first. Call local emergency services when the child cannot be immediately located or is in danger.

Step 8: teach what to do instead

STOP AND WAIT

Practice stopping at a visual boundary, curb, doorway, or adult safety cue.

ASK FOR A BREAK

Use a word, gesture, picture, AAC button, or break card that adults honor reliably.

GO TO A SAFE PERSON

Teach exactly who to find at home, school, stores, events, and in the community.

USE A SAFE ESCAPE ROUTE

Create an approved calm space the child may access without leaving supervision.

RESPOND TO A SAFETY CUE

Build the response through brief positive practice—not only during emergencies.

SHOW IDENTIFICATION

When appropriate, practice showing an ID card, wristband, or communication card.

The replacement skill we will teach first:

Where and how we will practice:

Prevention and coordinated safety plan

SECURE THE ENVIRONMENT

Use appropriate alarms, locks, fencing, identification, supervision, and GPS without relying on one tool alone.

PREPARE FOR WATER

Prioritize water-safety teaching, barriers, direct supervision, and immediate checks of nearby water.

COORDINATE THE TEAM

Write exact home, school, transportation, outing, and first-responder steps—who acts, where they look, and how they communicate.

TEACH & PRACTICE

Rehearse stop, wait, break, safe person, identification, and return skills in calm real-world settings.

Highest-risk places or destinations:

Environmental safety layers:

Search order and responsible people:

Communication, ID, and emergency details:

School planning: Request a written plan with exact prevention supports, supervision, transition and transportation steps, responsible staff, search procedures, parent notification, incident documentation, and recovery supports. Consider FBA/BIP and IEP/504 supports when appropriate.

Safety note: This educational guide does not replace an individualized emergency plan, medical care, school-team planning, or local emergency services.

Need an individualized plan? Schedule at calendly.com/optimizemylife/newclientintake or email mary@supportiveminds.us.

Copyright and trademark notice

© 2026 Mary Stanley / Supportive Minds. All rights reserved. Supportive Minds™, Running Away & Elopement Behavior Blueprint™, Secure-Locate-Regulate-Review Plan™, The 0-60 Journey™, and The C.O.R.E. Path™ are proprietary framework names used by Supportive Minds. This guide may be downloaded and printed for the purchaser's or recipient's personal use. It may not be copied, republished, resold, distributed, adapted, or used in training materials without prior written permission.