

SAFE AT HOME ON THE SPECTRUM: A PUBLIC SAFETY INITIATIVE

Presented by McKinley Castillo



WHO I AM & WHY I'M HERE

My name is McKinley Castillo. I am 16 years old, an 11th-grade student at Western High School, and a resident of the City of Sunrise.

I am also the older sister of a 7-year-old autistic child who is nonverbal and full of curiosity and personality. After moving to Sunrise, I began to notice how much work my mom put into making our home safe for him. In our house, safety looks different. We have locks on doors and windows not to keep people out, but to keep him safe inside.

One day after another repair, my mom and I talked about how expensive it is to safety-proof a home for a child like my brother. That conversation became the idea for Safe At Home On The Spectrum.



THE REALITY FAMILIES FACE



- Families raising autistic children face constant safety concerns.
- Many autistic children are prone to elopement (wandering away from safe spaces without warning).
- Sensory-seeking behaviors may include:
 - Climbing furniture
 - Hiding in small, enclosed spaces
 - Interacting with appliances in dangerous ways
- Everyday objects like closets, shelving, washers, and cabinets can become hazards.
- These normal home features require modifications to prevent serious risks.
- The emotional toll of worrying about safety inside the home is significant.

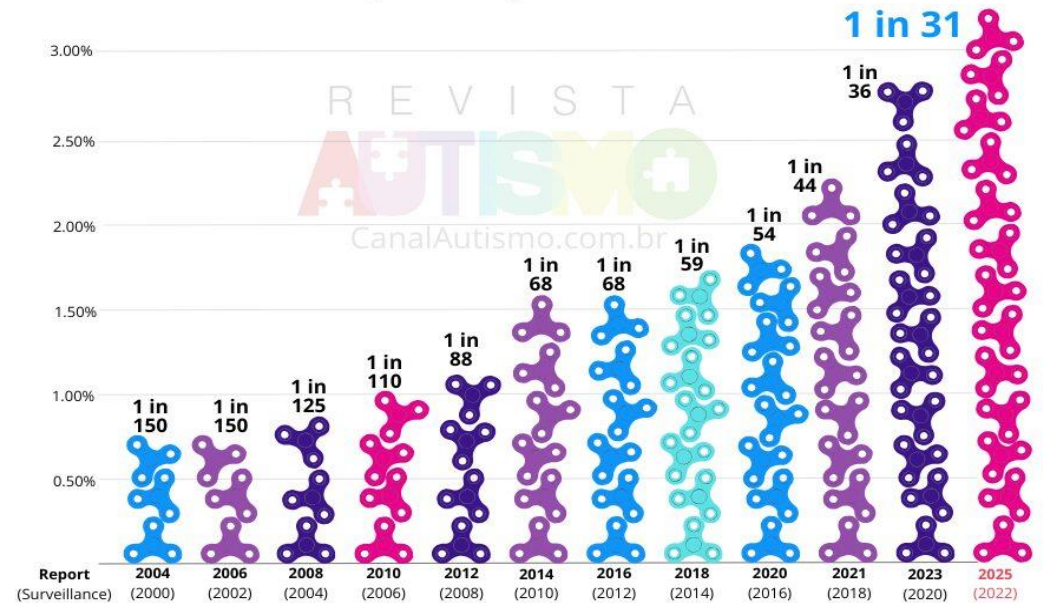
WHY THIS MATTERS

Autism is now diagnosed at the rate of 1 in 31 children in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As this population grows, so does the responsibility of parents and the community to ensure environments are safe for kids like my brother.



Autism Prevalence in the U.S. up to 2025 (via CDC)

(number of diagnoses in 8-year-old children in the United States)

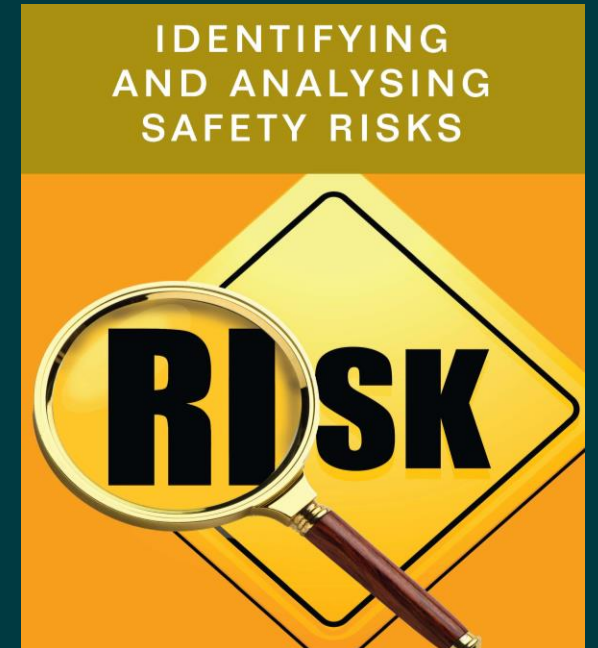


Source: CDC — Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (USA)

Image credit: Revista Autismo / CanalAutismo.com.br

AUTISM AND PREVENTABLE SAFETY RISKS IN THE UNITED STATES

- Nearly 48% of children with autism attempt to wander (elopement).
- Many autistic children are drawn to water for sensory stimulation, increasing danger.
- According to the National Autism Association:
 - Children with autism are 160 times more likely to die from drowning than their neurotypical peers.
- Research shows:
 - Up to 40% of injury-related deaths among autistic individuals occur in homes or residential settings.
 - These risks are not caused by illness, but by environments not designed for their needs.
- Behind every statistic is a family working tirelessly to prevent tragedies that can happen in seconds.



RECENT STORIES FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

New Orleans, Louisiana In August 2025, a 12-year-old nonverbal boy with autism named Bryan Vasquez wandered away from his home and later was found in a canal. His passing sparked a large search effort and an investigation into emergency response timing.

Detroit, Michigan 2025 . A 6-year-old autistic boy drowned after wandering away from a family gathering in Belle Isle Park. Despite rapid first-responder action and CPR efforts, he did not survive.

RECENT STORIES FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

Lyons, Nebraska 2025. A 9-year-old nonverbal child with autism left his school during recess and was later found in a nearby lagoon. Family and community members mourned his loss and called for increased safety at school and in outdoor play areas.

Maryland 2024. A five-year-old Miles McMahon, who had a long history of wandering behavior, drowned after leaving his home. His parents later shared that he had slipped away more than 700 times before, highlighting how unpredictable and constant the risk can be even with precautions in place. This tragedy led to discussions about improved tracking, school planning, and safety policies.

OTHER RECENT INCIDENTS

In November 2025, a 5-year-old autistic boy in Port St. Lucie drowned after wandering from home.

In February 2026, a 7-year-old boy in Georgia drowned in Lake Oconee after wandering from a relative's house.

These heartbreaking events show a consistent and preventable pattern. Wandering combined with environmental hazards creates deadly situations.

Safe At Home On The Spectrum aims to interrupt that pattern before tragedy strikes.



THE FINANCIAL BURDEN

- Raising a child with autism involves ongoing therapy, medical care, and specialized support.
- Families also need to invest in home safety modifications, including:
 - Reinforced locks
 - Door alarms
 - Pool barriers
 - Furniture anchoring systems
 - Replacement of damaged items
- Insurance typically does not cover these preventative safety measures.
- Families must absorb these costs themselves.
- Over time, these repeated expenses create a much higher cost of living compared to other families.
- Safe at Home would help ease this burden while improving safety across the community.



WHAT IS SAFE AT HOME ON THE SPECTRUM

Safe At Home On The Spectrum is a proposed community safety initiative designed to help families in Sunrise who are raising autistic children. It focuses on prevention rather than reacting after tragedy occurs.

The goal of this initiative is to reduce preventable injuries inside the home by helping families afford essential safety modifications. Many homes are not designed with autistic children in mind, and families are left to manage these risks on their own.

Safe At Home On The Spectrum is about strengthening public safety by protecting some of our most vulnerable residents before an accident happens.



HOW THE PROGRAM WOULD WORK

Safe At Home On The Spectrum is designed to be supported through partnerships with local organizations, businesses, nonprofits, and community leaders who are committed to public safety and family support.

This funding model encourages shared responsibility. It brings together the City, community partners, and residents to create a collaborative solution that strengthens public safety without increasing financial burden on taxpayers.



EXAMPLES OF SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS



The types of items covered could include high-mounted or keyed door and window locks, door and pool alarms, self-latching gates, furniture anchors, reinforced shelving, appliance locks, and stove safety devices.

These are simple, practical tools that can significantly reduce life-threatening risks inside a home. They are not luxury upgrades. They are preventative protections.



AIM BOARD

Collaboration, Advocacy, and Education

The City of Sunrise shows a strong commitment to its community.

Through the AIM Board and the work of city leaders and staff, Sunrise continues to support programs that improve safety, recreation, and quality of life for residents.

These efforts reflect the city's dedication to building a stronger and more supportive community for all families.





A MODEL THAT CAN BE REPLICATED

This initiative is structured to be a model that other cities can study, adapt, and implement within their own communities. The goal is to create a scalable framework that allows municipalities to reinvest existing funds into preventative safety programs for families raising autistic children.

Safe At Home On The Spectrum is not just a program. It is a blueprint for preventative public safety.



SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES

The stories we have heard are not statistics — they are children and families whose lives changed in minutes.

Autism is increasing nationwide, and many tragedies happen because environments are not designed with autistic children in mind.

Safe At Home On The Spectrum focuses on prevention by helping families make simple safety improvements like locks, alarms, and secure gates that can prevent dangerous situations.

This initiative is meant to start in Sunrise but serve as a model other cities can follow. By acting now, we can reduce risks, support families, and protect vulnerable children.

Safe At Home On The Spectrum turns awareness into action and makes safety a priority where it



WITH YOUR HELP

I respectfully ask the AIM Board and the City Commission and City Staff to consider exploring this idea and the feasibility of the **Safe At Home On The Spectrum** initiative.

I ask that staff review possible partnerships, funding options, and how the program could be managed to see if a pilot project could be implemented in Sunrise.

With the guidance of City leadership, **Safe At Home On The Spectrum** could become a community-supported initiative that helps protect vulnerable children and support families while creating a program that could be replicated.