

How to Create a Family Safety Plan (FSP) for an Individual with a Developmental Disability

Assess Risks:

In order to ensure that your FSP is as effective as possible, you will need to tailor it to fit the individual. To do this, take some time to write down any safety concerns that are applicable. Examples include:

- Individual may try to elope
- Individual is non-vocal or non-verbal
- Individual is attracted to water sources
- Individual has access to weapons
- Individual has obsessions that may put them in harms way (trains, dogs, etc.)
- Individual has fears and/or aversions that may cause fleeing (sirens, dogs, etc.)
- Individual has a seizure disorder
- Individual's room is locked to avoid elopement
- Individual is unaware of the dangers or traffic
- Individual is unable to choose appropriate clothing (no coat in winter)
- Individual becomes combative when frustrated
- Individual uses self-injurious behaviors
- Individual may enter strangers' houses uninvited
- Individual may go with strangers when invited

By identifying applicable safety concerns, you can work to develop a plan that covers both mitigation and response. Mitigation of concerns will help to avoid potentially harmful situations from occurring, however, some situations will simply be out of your control. In these instances, having a response plan for each concern will help you to keep a level head; allowing you to resolve the situation quickly and efficiently.

Plan how to Mitigate:

Now that you have a list of safety concerns, you can take steps to mitigate, or reduce, the risk of these concerns happening. To start, order your list by priority, with your highest priority concern at the top, working your way down to the lowest priority concern. By focusing on each concern individually, you can avoid becoming overwhelmed. The order of priority will help you determine how quickly you need to put your mitigation ideas into practice.

When planning for mitigation, break the safety concern down into 3 parts; the concern itself (yay, you already know this), why this is a concern, and solutions for the 'whys'

from part two. As you do this, you might find even more safety concerns that you can address. Don't be afraid to add these as their own concern and come up with reasons and solutions for it. An example of this might look like:

Safety Concern	Reason for Concern	Solutions
Elopement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not ask permission before leaving. • Able to unlock doors to exit house. • Doesn't stay in room during the night. • May put the individual at risk: see other concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install an external lock on room door. • Install sirens/bells at doors exiting the house. • Work on teaching individual to mand (request) before leaving the house.

It is important to note that just because you put an idea down, doesn't mean you have to follow through with it. If your solution for the individual not staying in their room through the night is to put an external lock on the door, you still have to decide whether or not it is safe to do so. For instance, if their room is on ground level, then an external lock might be ok, but if their room is on the second floor, a locked door would put them at risk for injury if there was a fire.

When you do find solutions that you can implement safely, do so. Each solution you come up with will help to increase the individual's overall safety.

Plan how to Respond:

Unfortunately, no matter what precautions you take, it is always possible for a concerning safety situation to arise. If you take the time to plan what steps you will take in response to a safety concern, rather than waiting until one does arise, you'll have an easier time remaining calm and making appropriate decisions. The more information you can give yourself ahead of time, the better.

When devising a response plan, make sure to be thorough. Think about why each item on your list is a safety concern. For example, elopement is a concern for several reasons: the individual may be hit by a car; the individual may not wear enough clothing; the individual may be at risk for drowning; the individual may not be able to find their way home.

Obviously, fixing the situation as quickly as possible is your best option. In the example, that would mean finding the individual in as little time as possible. However, as you list these reasons, you will note that some of them are out of your control. In our above example, once the individual has eloped, there is little you can do to decrease the risk of them being hit by a car. You can, however, minimize the risk of drowning by knowing where the nearest water sources are and checking those locations first. Once you've

ensured that the individual isn't there, and therefore at a decreased risk of drowning, you can continue your search.

As seen in the previous paragraph, a response plan is all about having information prepared ahead of time and knowing what you are going to do if a situation arises. When preparing information, tailor it to the concern. For example, if an individual is attracted to water sources, mark all of the water sources within a mile of their frequently visited locations (home, school, etc.). Other examples include:

- Marking the locations of the individual's favorite stores on a map.
- Marking the locations of any playgrounds, friend's houses, or other attractions on a map.
 - Suggestion: Use one map for all 3 examples and just use a different color for each type of location.
 - Blue: water
 - Black: store
 - Red: attraction
- Plan a driving path for when a situation occurs.
 - Plan on how to get to areas of highest concern (such as water) the fastest.
 - This loop can include driving by other attractions but should focus on the most concerning threats first.
 - Have a route planned for starting at home/school.
 - Have a route planned for coming from another location (work or grocery store).
- Prepare a medical folder with key information that you can give to healthcare providers.
 - This will allow you to focus on the individual and help them to remain calm.
- Have a layout of your house printed out and stored in your garage.
 - If there is a fire, use this to show firefighters which rooms to check for the individual first.
- Keep a short document of critical information about the individual on your fridge for first responders in case you are unable to provide information.

There are a number of different response steps that you can come up with, and that's ok. After all, each response plan is going to be unique to reflect the individual's individuality. Hopefully this list helps you come up with some ideas for your own family. If you need more ideas, searching for family safety plans, or similar key words, online can provide more examples.

Once you have the individual steps of your plan created, it is time to create your response plan/s. Each plan should be for a specific safety concern; your response to an elopement should be very different that your response for a fire. The response plan is created by listing your response steps in order of importance. A response plan is typically going to look something like this:

Response Plan: Elopement

Step 1: Call 911.

Step 2: Grab folder with maps and information.

Step 3: Follow driving route to water sources and check for individual.

3a: While driving, call contacts (if safe to do so) and request they keep an eye out or search for the individual if they are available.

Step 4: Follow driving route to attractions and favorite stores.

Response Plan: Fire

Step 1: Attempt to get individual out if safe to do so.

Step 2: Call 911.

Step 3: Get layout of house from garage.

Step 4: Provide firefighters with layout and key information.

- Where might the individual hide.
- Is individual likely to be combative.
- Where was the fire located.
- Why were you unable to get to the individual (fire blocking hallway).

These plans may seem too simple, but during a crisis situation, it is easy to become overwhelmed and not know what to do next. Having this simple list, and the information associated with each step, ensures you are doing everything you can to minimize risk to the individual. These plans can also help offer some peace of mind outside of crisis situations because you know that you've done all you can. Plans can be as short or long as you would like, but make sure that each step is simple to follow and has the necessary information included: knowing that you're supposed to go check water sources is no good if you don't know where they are.

Create and Utilize a Network:

Having a trustworthy network that you can utilize and rely upon can not only help you avoid and respond to situations, but they can also provide some peace of mind.

Everyone's network will look different, but many networks include neighbors, teachers, local first responders, and other people that the individual will interact with frequently.

Talking to neighbors is a great way to build your network. Some families may not feel comfortable talking to neighbors about the individual, and that is ok. For families that

feel comfortable sharing information with their neighbors, this network can help to avoid unnecessary 911 calls, decrease elopement time, increase safety, and increase community awareness/understanding. When neighbors know that the interactions with and behaviors of the individual may not be what they are used to, they are less likely to call 911 in response to a behavior that does not require the presence of first responders. Neighbors are also able to watch for the individual eloping or engaging in unsafe practices (such as standing in the street).

Utilization of teachers, paras, or other school workers in your network helps because they interact with the individual up to 40 hours a week. Given their closeness to the individual, they can not only assist with maintaining the individual's safety but can also give you feedback on your plan. They may even be able to inform you of safety concerns that you weren't aware of.

Including first responders in your plan allows you to share critical information with them. The easiest way to do this is to find a group, such as safeTY jacket, that is able to provide that information, education, and materials to multiple first responder agencies in your area. This will improve the interactions your individual has with first responders and can also help to decrease safety concerns such as elopement or injury.

Provide (appropriate) Information:

Now that you've built a network, it is important to decide what information to share with them. After all, not everyone will need the same amount of information. For neighbors, you may only need to share the individual's diagnosis and your contact information. For first responders, including information about the individual's emergency contacts, medical conditions, safety concerns, etc., is more likely to be beneficial.

There can be a lot of information to remember, so it is also important to provide your network with resources such as your phone number, a card with the individual's basic information, or even a full informational packet such as the safeTY jacket application.

Update Information:

Now that you have a FSP in place, it is important to remember to keep it updated. We recommend updating your FSP at least once a year. As individuals grow, learn new skills, or have new difficulties, plans have to be updated to reflect those changes. By keeping your FSP updated, you avoid a situation occurring and finding yourself having to start over because your previous FSP is no longer accurate. Changes to consider include:

- Updated Personal Information: Address, Emergency Contacts, Medical Concerns, Etc.
- Community Changes: New pools, Favorite stores/restaurants, Etc.

- Personality Changes: Likes/Dislikes, Triggers, Obsessions, Etc.
- Risk Updates: New risks, Risks that are no longer relevant, Etc.