

Some children with autism have a very poor concept of boundaries, to the point where even a 6 foot fence is no barrier. For others a fence is adequate to keep a child within his home or kindergarten environment. Many parents are concerned for their child's safety at pre-school and later when s/he goes to school, as many Primary Schools have a very low fence, if they have one at all.

- At child care, pre-school and school 'transition' programmes, it may be necessary to plan for extra adult support or time to carry out the suggested program.
- Define the area the child is allowed to play in by walking the boundaries. Keep language simple e.g. "stay inside fence", "no climbing".
- Define the area more obviously using extra visual cues eg witches hats, masking tape, chalk or painted lines.
- If the child is climbing fences or gates, or running out through a door, use extra cues, e.g. painted STOP signs on the door/fence; masking tape on floor across doorway.
- Establish a consequence for escaping i.e. if the child does leave the boundary area the consequence could be to sit on a chair for 2 minutes. Use simple language eg "No running off". When 2 minutes is up, walk around the boundary with him/her to redefine the boundaries
- When the child stays within boundaries reward often with praise eg "Good boy - playing in yard". Use more powerful reinforcers, e.g. chocolate, when first teaching this new behaviour.
- Teach the child to STOP – Come Here
  1. Teach this as you would any other skill, i.e. in a controlled situation and not just at times of running off.
  2. Use additional cues as well as verbal ones e.g. hand up for natural stop gesture; a painted STOP road sign; physical prompts.
  3. Practise **STOP** games, e.g. Jump and Stop; walk and stop (with music, stop when music stops), play musical instruments and stop. Do this with a small group of one other child or adult to act as model. Practise these STOP games inside and outside.
  4. Gradually increase the physical distance between yourself and the child so that he/she learns to respond to STOP from a distance.
  5. Get an adult or child to hold the child's hand and call and gesture "come here". Reinforce verbally as the child is brought to you.
  6. The child stands in the centre of a small circle of adults or children. Someone says "\_\_\_\_\_ come here". Reward when he/she comes.
  7. Gradually increase how far you stand from the child.
  8. Reward every time he/she "comes" on request, even if another person was holding his/her hand all the way.
  9. Gradually decrease prompts, e.g. initially someone may need to physically bring the child to you in response to "Come here", or physically stop him/her in response to stop. Then try walking beside the child not touching. Gradually increase the physical distance between the helper and the child until help is no longer necessary.