

Queensmill Research: Elopement

Introduction

Recent research (Anderson et al., 2012) assessing parent-reported elopement occurrence among children with ASD used a sample of 1218 and demonstrated that:

- 49% of survey respondents reported their child with an ASD had attempted to elope at least once after age 4 years;
- 26% were missing long enough to cause concern;
- Of those who went missing, 24% were in danger of drowning and 65% were in danger of traffic injury.
- Elopement risk was associated with autism severity, increasing, on average, 9% for every 10-point increase in Social Responsiveness Scale T score;
- Unaffected siblings had significantly lower rates of elopement across all ages compared with children with ASD.

Conclusions highlighted the urgent need to develop interventions to reduce the risk of elopement, to support families coping with this issue, and to train child care professionals, educators, and first responders who are often involved when elopements occur.

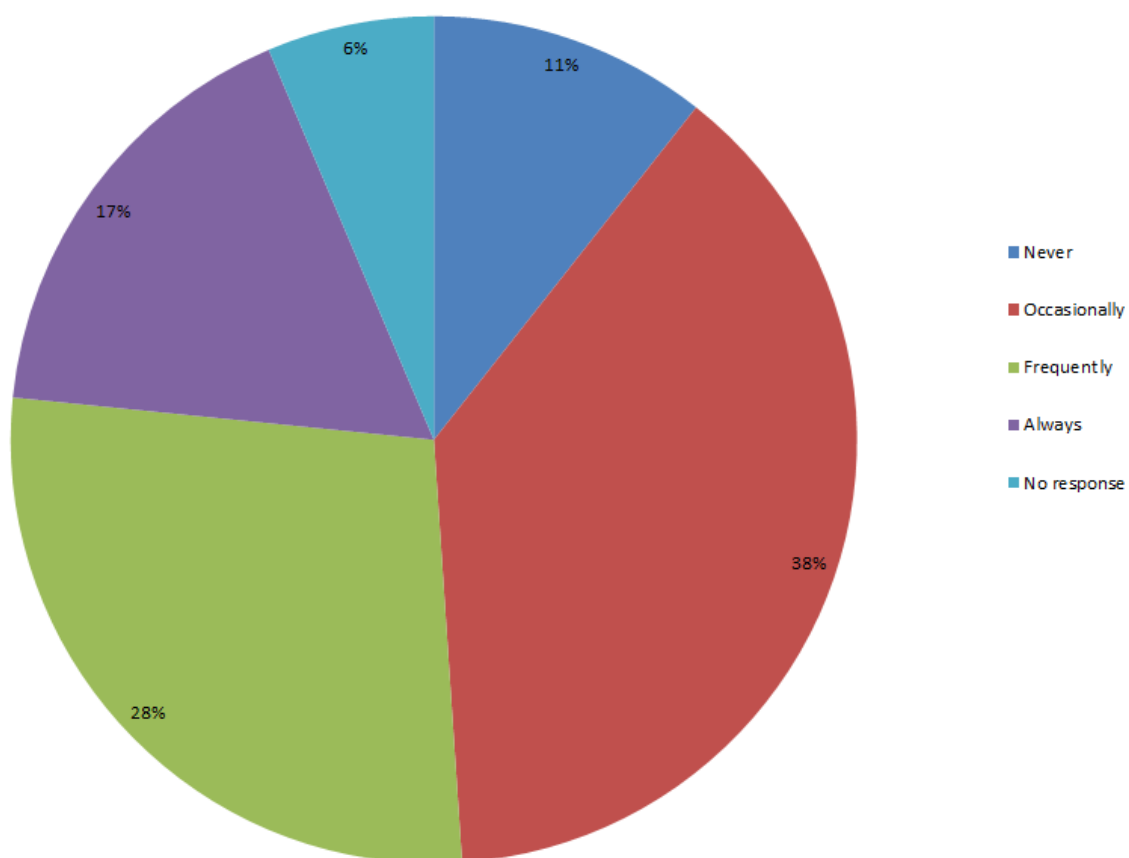
In response to this research and an increase in the number of reports of elopement from families of Queensmill students, a questionnaire was sent out to all parents/carers of students (n=132) to seek information about elopement occurrence, the perceived function of this behaviour and the support needs of parents in addressing this issue.

Findings: Elopement occurrence

- Forty seven questionnaires were returned by parents (34%).
- 83% of respondents said that their child attempts to wander off (either occasionally, frequently or always). See figure 1.
- 53% of respondents said that their child has gone missing at least once.
- Of those who reported that their child had gone missing and provided details, 29% went missing from home and 71% when out in the community.
- Children were missing for between 5 minutes and 1 hour.
- The most common possible reasons for elopement identified by parents were their child:
 - Wanting to explore;
 - Trying to get to a specific place or item (e.g. shop for biscuits/sweets, park, swimming pool);
 - Being distracted by their environment (finding it difficult to stay with an adult when out in the community).

Figure 1

1) Does your child attempt to wander off?

**Findings: Parent support**

- 94% of respondents said that they had not received any support or advice on preventing elopement.
- 87% indicated that they would like support and/or advice to address this issue.
- In particular, parents said they would like to receive written advice and/or attend a parent workshop.
- Other support strategies suggested were working more closely with/offering training to the police and teaching children about staying with adults.

Summary, implications and follow-up:

Elopement is reported by a large number of parents of Queensmill students (83% of respondents) and is an issue that parents would like support with. Queensmill staff (Occupational Therapy team and Parent Partnership link) will therefore provide this support in the form of written advice and a parent workshop. Information provided to parents will be informed by research on the effectiveness of interventions to treat elopement in individuals with developmental disabilities (Lang et al., 2009) and will involve liaison with local services such as the police and social services. Feedback will be gained from parents following intervention to identify the impact.