

Wandering & Elopement Safety Plan & Response Workbook

A Family & Caregiver Preparedness Toolkit for Wandering / Elopement Risk

For families and caregivers of anyone at risk of wandering, bolting, or becoming lost — including autistic and neurodivergent children and adults, people living with dementia, and people with an intellectual or developmental disability, brain injury, or any other condition that affects memory, judgment, or communication. Complete this workbook together, keep a copy at home, and share the First Responder sheet with school or care staff, caregivers, and neighbours.

Individual's Name:

Plan Prepared By:

Date Prepared:

Review / Update Date:

How to use this workbook:

1. Complete Section 1 to understand this individual's specific wandering risk and triggers.
2. Fill out the First Responder Sheet (Section 2) and print extra copies to share.
3. Work through the home safety checklist and emergency response plan together as a family or care team.
4. Send the community notification letter to trusted neighbours and to school, day program, or care staff.
5. Log every incident, even near-misses — patterns help you prevent future incidents.

A note on words: “Elopement” is the term most often used in autism and school settings; “wandering” is more common in dementia care. This workbook uses both to mean the same thing: a person leaving a safe place, or becoming lost, without the people responsible for their safety knowing.

Why This Workbook Matters

Wandering or elopement — walking away, bolting, or leaving a safe environment without notice — is one of the most serious safety concerns reported by families of autistic children and adults, by families caring for a person living with dementia, and by caregivers of others whose disability or health condition affects memory, judgment, or communication. It can happen in seconds, from home, school, a care setting, or in public. Having a written plan in place, and sharing it with the people around your family, helps everyone respond faster and more safely.

Who This Workbook Is For

The plan is built around what a person does and needs, not around a diagnosis. Use it for anyone who may leave a safe place and be unable to keep themselves safe or find their way back. For example:

- **Autistic and neurodivergent children and adults** — who may bolt from sensory overwhelm or a demand, or head toward water, traffic, or a special interest.
- **People living with dementia**, including Alzheimer's disease — who may become disoriented on a familiar route, or set out to "go home," go to work, or find someone from an earlier time in their life.
- **People with an intellectual or developmental disability, FASD, brain injury, or a mental health condition** — or anyone else who may not recognize danger, may become lost, or may be unable to ask for help.

Not every question will apply to every person. Skip what does not fit, and use the notes lines to add what does.

What's Inside

- ☐ Section 1 — Wandering & Elopement Risk Profile & Triggers
- ☐ Section 2 — First Responder / ID Information Sheet
- ☐ Section 3 — Home & Environment Safety Checklist
- ☐ Section 4 — Emergency Contacts & Response Plan
- ☐ Section 5 — Community Notification Letter
- ☐ Section 6 — Incident Tracking Log
- ☐ Cut-Out Cards — First Responder Pocket Cards (last page)

If someone is missing right now:

Call 911 immediately — there is no waiting period to report a missing vulnerable person. Search water sources first — pools, ponds, ditches, canals — as drowning is the leading cause of death in autism-related elopement and water is a serious danger for anyone who wanders. In cold, wet, or very hot weather, exposure is also an urgent risk, especially for older adults. Give first responders the completed First Responder Sheet from Section 2 right away.

This workbook is a planning and communication tool, not a substitute for professional risk assessment, a Personal Behaviour Support Plan, medical or dementia care advice, or emergency services. Pair it with the individual's ISP/PBSP or care plan where relevant.

1 Wandering & Elopement Risk Profile & Triggers

Understand the who, when, and why behind this individual's risk

Individual Information

Full Name _____

Date of Birth _____

Condition(s) relevant to wandering (e.g. autism, dementia, brain injury) _____

Communication Level (verbal / limited / non-verbal / AAC device / varies) _____

Wandering / Elopement History

- ☐ This individual has wandered or eloped before
- ☐ This individual has attempted to leave but was stopped
- ☐ This individual has not wandered or eloped, but shows early warning signs
- ☐ This individual has become lost or disoriented in a familiar place
- ☐ This is a new or emerging concern

Describe the most recent or most serious incident (where, how, how found):

Known Triggers

Check any that apply, and add specifics in the notes lines below:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Sensory overwhelm (noise, crowds, lighting, textures) | ☐ Emotional distress, anxiety, or meltdown escalation |
| ☐ Attraction to a specific object, place, or special interest | ☐ Seeking a person, animal, or place that feels safe or familiar |
| ☐ Attraction to water (pools, lakes, ditches, bathtubs) | ☐ Confusion or disorientation — not recognizing where they are |
| ☐ Attraction to traffic, trains, or moving vehicles | ☐ Trying to “go home,” go to work, or follow a past routine |
| ☐ Seeking to escape a demand, task, or transition | ☐ Late-day or evening restlessness, or waking at night |
| ☐ Change in routine or an unfamiliar environment | ☐ Unmet need (hunger, thirst, pain, washroom, boredom) |

Notes on specific triggers for this individual:

Common Wandering / Elopement Locations

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Home (doors, windows, garage) | ☐ Outdoor / recreational settings (parks, trails, campgrounds) |
| ☐ School, daycare, or day program | ☐ Care home, hospital, or respite setting |
| ☐ Vehicles / parking lots | ☐ A once-familiar route, alone (on foot, driving, or on transit) |
| ☐ Public outings (stores, appointments, events) | ☐ Toward a former home, workplace, or other meaningful place |

Time of day or situations when risk is highest:

Tip: Bring this section to the school, day program, respite or home care provider, care home, and any Behaviour Consultant or physician involved. Naming specific triggers — not just “wandering risk” in general — helps every caregiver recognize warning signs before an incident happens.

2 First Responder / ID Information Sheet

Print extra copies — keep one by the door and share with police, school or care staff, and neighbours

This page is designed to stand alone. Print it separately and give copies to police, EMS, school or care staff, respite and home care workers, and trusted neighbours so they can recognize and safely approach this individual in an emergency.

RECENT PHOTO	Full Legal Name:	_____
	Nickname / Preferred Name:	_____
	Date of Birth:	_____
	Height / Weight:	_____
	Hair / Eye Colour:	_____
	Identifying Marks:	_____

Communication & Approach Notes

Condition(s) responders should know about (e.g. autism, dementia, brain injury):

Communication Level (verbal / limited / non-verbal / AAC device) and language(s) understood:

Places, people, or interests they may head toward or be hard to redirect from (special interest, former home, workplace):

Best way to safely approach or calm this individual:

Words, sounds, or actions that may cause distress — approach with caution:

Response to name / touch / uniforms (e.g. may not respond to name; may answer to an earlier name; avoid grabbing):

Medical & Safety Information

- ☐ Non-verbal or minimally verbal — may not be able to state name or address
- ☐ Memory loss or confusion — may give an old address, appear capable, or not realize they are lost
- ☐ May not recognize danger (traffic, water, weather, strangers)
- ☐ Drawn to water — check pools, ponds, ditches first
- ☐ Has a medical condition requiring urgent attention (see notes)
- ☐ Wears / carries a medical alert or GPS tracking device
- ☐ May be driving or have access to a vehicle (make, model, colour, and plate in notes)

Medical conditions, allergies, or medications first responders should know:

Primary Contact

Name _____	Relationship _____
Phone Number(s) _____	Home Address _____

3 Home & Environment Safety Checklist

Reduce opportunity for wandering in the spaces this individual moves through

Doors & Exits

- ☐ All exterior doors have alarms, chimes, or monitored sensors
- ☐ Deadbolts or additional locks installed above reach / out of sight
- ☐ Door alarms tested and working
- ☐ Garage door opener secured / access restricted
- ☐ Car keys secured, where driving is no longer safe
- ☐ Coats, shoes, keys, and bags kept out of sight of the door, if they prompt leaving

Windows & Perimeter

- ☐ Window locks or alarms installed on ground-floor and easily-accessed windows
- ☐ Yard fully fenced with a self-latching, locked gate
- ☐ Fence height and gaps checked — no climbable or squeezable points
- ☐ Pool, hot tub, or water feature has a locked, self-latching safety fence
- ☐ Night lighting, motion sensor, or bed / floor alarm in place for night-time waking

Tracking & Identification

- ☐ Individual wears a medical ID bracelet, shoe tag, or clothing label with name/contact info
- ☐ GPS tracking device or app set up and tested
- ☐ Recent photo kept on phone and printed for quick sharing
- ☐ Individual is registered with local police Vulnerable Persons Registry (if available)

Community, School & Care Settings

- ☐ School, day program, or care home has a written wandering / elopement protocol on file for this individual
- ☐ Supervision plan (classroom, playground, outings, or care unit) addresses wandering risk
- ☐ Trusted neighbours have been given a First Responder Sheet
- ☐ Local police non-emergency line is aware of this individual (where applicable)

Fire safety note: Extra locks and alarms are meant to alert a caregiver, not to confine someone. Never leave a person alone in a home they cannot get out of, and make sure everyone providing care can open every exit quickly.

Water and weather note: Enrol in adapted swim lessons where possible. Even strong swimmers can panic or misjudge depth — supervision and barriers matter more than swim ability alone. In cold weather, a person who leaves without a coat or shoes is in danger within minutes.

Additional Notes

4 Emergency Contacts & Response Plan

Know who to call and what to do in the first five minutes

Emergency Contact List

Name	Relationship	Phone	Notes

Immediate Response Protocol

- 1 Search the immediate area first (30–60 seconds).**
 Check the last place seen, favourite hiding spots, and behind/under furniture or vehicles. Note whether a coat, shoes, keys, wallet, or vehicle is missing.
- 2 Check water sources immediately.**
 Pools, hot tubs, ponds, ditches, and bathtubs — water is one of the greatest dangers when someone wanders.
- 3 Call 911 without delay.**
 Do not wait to “see if they come back.” State clearly that this is a vulnerable person — for example autistic, non-verbal, or living with dementia — who may not respond to their name or know they are lost.
- 4 Alert neighbours and nearby businesses.**
 Share the First Responder Sheet (Section 2) with a recent photo immediately.
- 5 Check high-risk / high-interest locations.**
 Anywhere tied to a special interest, a former home or workplace, a previous incident, traffic routes, or transit stops.
- 6 Assign one person to stay at the point last seen.**
 This helps responders orient their search and reunites the individual with a familiar face.

Search Priority Locations for This Individual

List specific addresses / locations relevant to this person — nearby water, favourite places, former homes or workplaces, usual walking or driving routes:

5 Community Notification Letter

A ready-to-print letter for neighbours, school or care staff, and caregivers

Fill in the blanks and print this page to share with trusted neighbours, school or care staff, or anyone who regularly spends time near this individual. Attach a recent photo.

Dear Neighbour / Friend,

My name is _____, and I live at _____. I'm reaching out because my child / parent / spouse / family member, _____ (age _____), is autistic / lives with dementia / has _____ (circle or fill in) and has a tendency to wander or leave safe places without warning, sometimes called "elopement."

If you ever see them outside alone, or looking lost or confused, please:

- ☐ Call me right away at _____
- ☐ Call 911 if you cannot reach me or the situation feels unsafe
- ☐ Try to keep them in sight, but do not grab or restrain them — approach calmly and quietly
- ☐ Check nearby water, if any, right away

They may not respond to their name, may seem confused, or may not be able to tell you where they live. A recent photo is attached to help you recognize them. Thank you for helping keep our family safe — I'm so grateful to have you as a neighbour.

With gratitude,

Name · Phone · Email

Tip: Consider giving a printed copy to your immediate neighbours, the crossing guard, the school office or day program, nearby shops your family member visits, and any regular respite, home care, or support workers.

Sample Social Media Post

Save this on your phone ahead of time so it's ready to copy, fill in, and post immediately if this individual goes missing.

MISSING — PLEASE SHARE

Name: _____ **Age:** _____

Last seen: _____ (area) **Time:** _____

Wearing: _____ **On foot / vehicle:** _____

- Autistic / living with dementia / _____ — may not respond to their name or may seem confused

- May be heading to: _____ (water, traffic, trains, a former home, etc.)

- Please do NOT approach or restrain — call 911 immediately if seen

- Photo attached — please share widely

If seen, call 911 or _____ (your number) right away.

#Missing[City] · #FindHelpFor[Name]

6 Incident Tracking Log

Record every incident or near-miss — patterns reveal triggers over time

Log incidents as soon as possible after they happen, including near-misses that were caught early. Bring this log to appointments with your Behaviour Consultant, school team, care team, or physician — patterns in time, place, and trigger are some of the most useful data you can share.

Reviewing your log: Every few months, look back for patterns — same time of day? Same location? Same trigger? Bring what you notice to the care team so the safety plan can evolve with new insight.

This workbook was created by the Parent Partnership Project to help families build practical, shareable safety plans.

First Responder Cut-Out Cards

Fill in all three cards and cut along the dashed lines. Keep one in a wallet or purse, one in the vehicle, and one in a backpack or coat pocket — ready to hand to police, EMS, or search volunteers the moment someone goes missing.

FIRST RESPONDER CARD — PERSON AT RISK OF WANDERING		Parent Partnership Project
RECENT PHOTO	Name: _____ Goes by: _____ Date of birth / age: _____ Height / weight: _____ Hair / eyes: _____ Identifying marks: _____ Condition(s) (e.g. autism, dementia, brain injury): _____	
Communication: _____ May head toward: _____ How to approach / calm: _____ Avoid (causes distress): _____ Medical / medications: _____ ☐ May not respond to name ☐ May not know they are lost ☐ Drawn to water ☐ May not recognize danger ☐ May be driving Emergency contact: _____ Phone: _____ Alt: _____		

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