

Wandering



What is wandering?

Wandering is when a person leaves a safe area or responsible caregiver.

Wandering can occur under any kind of supervision and in people of all age groups. People with Autism, developmental disabilities, and Alzheimer's/Dementia are at an increased risk of injury or death due to wandering. Those who wander may not communicate with speech or understand the risks and potential dangers involved.

Why do people wander?

Wandering is often a form of communication.

Examples include:



Biological factors

“I have to use the bathroom” or “I’m hungry”



Personal want/need

“I forgot my stuffed animal on my bed, and I need it!”



Sensory safety

“It’s too loud/crowded, and I need to find a quiet place!”



Dysregulation

“I’m having trouble coping and need to leave.”



Curiosity

“I want to explore.”

Approximately 49% of individuals with Autism have wandered or eloped.

Accidental drowning accounts for 91% of deaths in children with Autism under 14 subsequent to wandering.

Those who wander are commonly found:

1. In or near water
2. In or near traffic
3. In wooded areas
4. At another residence
5. At preferred stores / restaurants / attractions



In the event of a missing person

Call 911 then immediately arrange a search of all nearby bodies of water (pools, ponds, canals, etc.)

Questions to consider if your loved one has wandered:

- Do they have a locative device?
- What is most likely to elicit a response from them? (a certain song, high-interest, key word, calling their name?)
- Where does the missing person like to go?
- Does the missing person have medical conditions that could pose further risks?

Proactive Tips to Secure Your Home and Surrounding Area



Install door alarms on each door or window in the house.



Install pool fences with self-latching doors around pools/ bodies of water. Turn off pool pumps, hot tubs, jacuzzis, and whirlpools. If drains have not been updated or the suction from jets is high, know how to turn off to prevent hair/clothing/jewelry pulling someone under the water.



Identify all bodies of water in close proximity to the home.



Talk to trusted neighbors about your loved one. Trusted neighbors can be of assistance in case of an emergency.



Have a safety plan.

- Call 911
- Check all surrounding water.
 - Enlist the help of neighbors, friends, caregivers.
 - Go to known areas of interest.

Other Considerations



Be mindful of the specific things that may act as a deterrent or scare the individual.

- Loud noises, helicopters, drones, megaphones, crowds, etc.



Get to know your local law enforcement before an emergency.

- If a loved one goes missing and law enforcement is familiar with them, it will help law enforcement identify how to best approach them in the event of an emergency.
- Share an informational sheet about your loved one and keep the information up-to-date.



Support communication needs .

- Ensure access to effective communication, especially ways to communicate basic needs/wants, express distress, and request help.



Monitor the individual for changes in behavior, changes of favorite spots or interests.



Learn about locative technology to decide if GPS/tracking as a last line of defense is right for you/your family.



Together, we can ensure safety for all members of our community.

The Autism Society's National Helpline seeks to connect the Autism community with the resources they need, when they need them.

Email: info@autismsociety.org