



Wandering and elopement toolkit

State regulations for assisted living

States may regulate the following regarding wandering and elopement:

- Requirements for dementia care licensure
- Move-in/admission requirements and move-out/discharge criteria
- Topics and number of hours for staff training
- Reporting of incidents to the state
- Physical safety features
- Access to outdoor areas
- Egress management
- Elopement response
- Evacuation during emergencies

Physical environment

The physical environment should support safe walking and wandering, exploration, social interaction, stimulation and rest.

Policies and procedures

Topics to address in policies and procedures include:

- Admission and discharge criteria and/or scope of service
- Staff education and training
- Community safeguards
- Individualized assessment and interventions
- Communication regarding residents who are at risk, including care plans and interventions
- Supervision
- Individual and group outings (with staff)
- Resident leave (without staff)
- Incident response and drills
- Special circumstances (e.g., drills, actual disasters, special events)



Staff training

- Educate and train all staff on wandering, elopement and community policies and procedures.
- Education should be provided at orientation and at intervals defined in policies.
- Topics to address during staff education and training include:
 - The community’s policies and procedures
 - Effects of dementia on a resident’s health, physical function and emotional state, and changes in physical and mental health that may affect dementia
 - For professional staff, the clinical presentation of dementia and other conditions or issues that can resemble it
 - Wandering as a behavior driven by an attempt to satisfy needs rather than a negative behavior
 - Ways to support safe wandering
 - Individualized assessment and interventions, including guidelines, specific interventions, and techniques for redirecting people who wander unsafely
 - Common methods of exiting
 - Use and maintenance of relevant equipment
 - Proper response to alarms and the importance of not ignoring alarms
 - Incident response
 - Residents’ rights
 - Restraint alternatives and residents’ right to be free from unnecessary restraints.



Assess the resident

- Conduct individualized assessments of risk factors and wandering behavior using a standardized tool.
- Prior to admission ask the resident’s family and/or the transferring organization about the resident’s history and patterns of wandering and elopement and strategies they used to manage such behavior.
- Monitor newly admitted residents for wandering and elopement behaviors. Because of the heightened risk of unsafe wandering or elopement just after admission or a move to a different room or unit, additional monitoring strategies or interventions should be implemented during the first few days.
- Educate family members about the resident’s risk for unsafe wandering or elopement, general protective measures used by the community, and what family members can reasonably expect of the community.
- Policies should define when and how often older adults with dementia should be assessed for risk of unsafe

wandering and elopement — such as on admission, on a change in condition, and at least quarterly.

- Staff should meet with the family after each assessment to inform them of the resident’s risk for unsafe wandering and elopement. At such times, staff can gain more information about the resident’s life history, such as his or her past occupation, daily routines and interests. This may inform the selection of interventions.



Develop and select interventions

- Develop interventions with the input of the care team.
- Wandering behavior and triggers vary from person to person; therefore, interventions must be individualized. Select interventions tailored to the resident and monitor their effectiveness.
- Address causes of wandering, particularly unmet needs; maintain the individual’s mobility and autonomy and support his or her safe and independent movement; prevent unsafe wandering and elopement; and minimize disruption to others.



Communicate with the team

- Have a process for informing the staff of the resident’s behavior, needs and planned interventions.
 - Small-group meetings among those who frequently care for a specific resident
 - Morning stand-up meetings
 - 24-hour reports
- After interventions have been implemented for a particular resident, it is important to continually evaluate their effectiveness. Monitor:
 - Wandering behavior
 - Safety
 - Way-finding
 - Disorientation
 - Maintenance of body weight
- Document the resident’s responses to interventions.
- If interventions are ineffective, try new interventions and update the service/care plan as necessary. Interventions that are effective may not remain so, which is the reason for periodic reassessment

Technology

- Evaluate technology use and ensure that technology is not a substitute for supervision
- Use of technology should be viewed as only one part of the person's individualized set of interventions
- Several types of technologies are available:
 - Door alarms. An alarm sounds when the door is opened or when someone passes through the doorway
 - Optically activated alarms. A light beam triggers an alarm if someone passes through it.
 - Pressure-activated alarms. Pads are placed in certain areas, and an alarm sounds if pressure is applied to or removed from the pad
 - Pull-tab alarms. A tab is placed on the resident; if he or she moves away from the unit, the tab detaches and an alarm sounds
 - Tracking systems. These systems use either radio-frequency technology or GPS locators to find a resident who has left the home or facility
 - Advanced systems. Such systems include GPS locators and cellular phones, individualized notification systems, and centralized notification systems
- Staff must know when and how to check the function of all monitoring devices; a system should be in place for documenting such checks
- For devices that require recharging, a charging schedule may be necessary
- Have a system for alerting staff to the necessity of replacing devices or batteries before they expire, if applicable
- Develop a procedure for responding to alarms, and assign responsibilities for responding to and turning off alarms
- Develop contingency plans for times when the system or individual units are out of service (e.g., during repairs or disaster drills)





Create missing-person response plan

- Establish plans for responding to missing-person incidents and conduct routine drills
- Inadequate response to an elopement or other missing-resident incident could contribute to significant harm to the resident and the community
- When developing missing-person response plans, meet with local law enforcement to identify when and how staff should contact police.
- Be prepared to provide a recent photograph and a description of the resident to the police.
- Periodically assess buildings, the campus and surrounding areas for hazards to residents at risk of unsafe wandering or elopement (e.g., ponds with unrestricted access, construction sites) to review and revise the response plan
- The response plan should define what constitutes a missing-person incident and requires activation of response procedures
- Outline which departments or individuals are responsible for searching specified areas of the building and grounds
- Develop a readily accessible response toolkit containing items such as maps and checklists tailored to each individual role that has assigned search responsibilities.
- Steps to include in a missing-person protocol:
 - Thoroughly search the unit and other immediate areas
 - Use an internal alert system to signal staff that a person with dementia is missing and they should begin response procedures.
 - Assign search responsibilities to specific staff members, consistent with departmental search roles outlined in the policy
 - Search all spaces, even those that are usually locked or otherwise inaccessible to residents.
 - Check off searched areas on a checklist or shade them in on a floor plan
 - Notify management and the attending physician and seek their help in implementing procedures.
 - Notify family members and ask them if they know where the resident may try to go
 - Notify law enforcement and the state agency, as required by law
 - Document and give law enforcement information on where and when the resident was last seen, what he or she was doing, and the resident's history of wandering or elopement. Provide a full description and a recent photograph of the person
- If the resident is found, obtain a complete medical evaluation to identify injuries and necessary treatment. Notify previously contacted people and agencies of the resident's return
- During the incident or immediately afterward, document all actions taken
- Complete an incident report
- Reassess the resident and adjust his or her interventions and service or care plan as needed
- Conduct a reactive analysis of the incident
- Develop and enact a plan to prevent future occurrences
- To ensure that staff knows what to do and acts swiftly; practice incident response through routine drills
- Consider assigning someone the dedicated responsibility for assessing staff performance and system vulnerabilities during the drill. Drills should be seen as opportunities to learn and improve, not just practice. Ensure that drills themselves do not jeopardize resident safety
- In recent years, many states have enacted programs that notify the public when an older adult goes missing (circumstances and individual characteristics that trigger alert activation vary by state). Often called "Silver Alert" programs, they are much like Amber Alerts for abducted children and typically use the same or similar technology and infrastructure. In most states, local law enforcement or a state agency activates the alert, which may be broadcast on the radio, on television and on automated highway signs
- Fee-based emergency response services for older adults with dementia, such as the Alzheimer's Association's Safe Return program, are also available
- Investigate Silver Alert programs in your state and neighboring states along with available fee-based services; consider whether and how to incorporate them into missing-person response plans



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