

# 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](mailto:info@autismsociety.org)

