

Preventing Elopement in Senior Care

Elopement from senior care facilities can result in serious resident harm and life-threatening situations. Further, elopements can put facilities at risk of citations and litigation. The National Institute for Elopement Prevention and Resolution notes that 10 percent of all lawsuits against long-term care facilities involve elopement.¹

To improve resident safety and address potential risk exposure, senior care leaders — in collaboration with facility providers and staff — should develop an elopement prevention program with a response plan that contains protocols and training initiatives designed to reduce the risk of resident elopements. Additionally, healthcare staff should receive ongoing education regarding the care of cognitively impaired residents.

This checklist may serve as a helpful tool in reviewing a facility’s elopement prevention program and response plan to determine any aspects that staff need to address or modify.²

	Yes	No
<i>Elopement Prevention Program</i>		
Does your facility have an elopement prevention program and an elopement response plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the protocols in your facility’s elopement prevention program and response plan practiced, evaluated, and updated on a set basis and following any elopement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If technology is used to enhance elopement prevention and resolution efforts, do managers ensure it is not used as a substitute for supervision?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Environmental Safety</i>		
Does the physical environment of your facility support a range of safe activities and restful areas?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
<i>Environmental Safety (continued)</i>		
Does your facility conduct routine environmental safety rounds and elopement drills?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are door alarms, video cameras, resident tracking devices, barriers, and buffers used to help prevent wandering and elopement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are security monitors and alarms tested and used consistently and properly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are all exits, including elevators not intended for resident use, either securely locked or equipped with alarms?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the alarms on all door exits tested at least daily to ensure proper function?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has facility leadership considered installing alarms on exit doors in resident care units or resident room doors as an extra precaution?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has facility leadership considered installing video surveillance cameras at all exterior doors?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Resident Risk Assessments</i>		
Are residents assessed for their risk of elopement and wandering behavior when they are admitted, on a quarterly basis, and when changes in behavior and cognition occur?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do assessments include evaluation of physical, emotional, and psychological factors that might contribute to the risk of elopement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do assessments include evaluation of any changes in medication that may impact a resident's cognition?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do assessments occur when changes in routine occur (cessation or modification of dining or gathering activities, smoking times, etc.)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are resident photos taken annually or when a resident's appearance has changed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are photos of residents who demonstrate wandering behaviors posted at the front entrance reception desk?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Resident Risk Assessments (continued)		
Are staff members trained to review resident photos (residents with wandering behaviors) at the front entrance reception desk before unlocking the door and allowing a resident to exit the facility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
New Residents		
If a new resident is determined to be an elopement risk, does your facility ensure that special preventive precautions are in place for the resident's protection?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are new residents placed in rooms away from exits and closer to community areas to assist with close monitoring?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the initial days following admission of new residents, are staff members especially vigilant until they become familiar with new residents' behavior patterns and the residents become familiar with their living environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff members limit the level of sensory stimulus for new residents?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are family and staff educated about each new resident's potential for elopement and wandering behavior?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff members document and redirect any unusual behavior or wandering patterns exhibited by new residents?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staffing, Education, Training, and Reporting		
Does your facility maintain sufficient staffing levels that reflect resident acuity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are all staff members educated about the facility's elopement prevention program and response plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are appropriate staff members trained on reporting and documenting all elopement incidents and the facility's response to them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does staff training include the importance of not propping open both interior and exterior entrance and exit doors?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are residents and visitors periodically educated about not holding doors open for others walking behind them or walking toward them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Staffing, Education, Training, and Reporting (continued)		
Are all facility/community staff routinely educated as to which residents are at risk for elopement and wandering?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have facility leaders considered creating a severity-based classification system to evaluate elopement incidents?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interventions and Monitoring		
Are interventions to prevent elopement (e.g., optimizing environmental conditions, encouraging social engagement, and increasing participation in activities) consistent with each resident's needs, goals, and care plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are interventions to prevent elopement monitored for effectiveness and modified as needed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are staff members well-versed on each resident's habits as well as any physical, mental, or behavioral issues they may have?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff members from housekeeping, activities, dietary, and the physical, occupational, and speech therapy departments also participate in observing and redirecting wandering or eloping residents?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Missing Resident Emergency Procedures		
Does your facility have a missing resident protocol that clearly specifies procedures to follow if an elopement occurs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your facility have an internal alert system to signal staff if a resident is missing and to implement response procedures?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are staff members aware of the need for timely notifications to facility leadership and law enforcement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
During an elopement emergency, do staff members monitor specific sections of the facility and undertake a systematic search of resident care units and other immediate areas, including rooms, closets, kitchen areas, stairwells (including locked areas), and the roof (if access exists)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
<i>Missing Resident Emergency Procedures (continued)</i>		
Does facility leadership conduct missing resident drills and encourage staff members to report on any problems they encountered during the drills?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are all staff members (including front desk, security, housekeeping, activities, maintenance, dining room staff, laundry, etc. — as well as direct caregivers) trained on signs of dementia, tendency to wander, the importance of prompt reporting (including during weekends or evenings), and how to respond to an elopement emergency?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Resources

- [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality: Elopement](#)
- [American Association of Post-Acute Care Nursing: Elopement Risk Management: Learn How to Increase Resident Safety and Reduce Facility Risk](#)
- [ECRI: Preventing Harm in Aging Services: Emerging Technologies to Mitigate Hazardous Wandering and Elopement](#)
- [State of Wisconsin: Nursing Home Strategies to Enhance Quality of Life for Residents with Dementia](#)
- [The Joint Commission: Elopement Risk Decision Tree](#)
- [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: A Toolkit: Patients at Risk for Wandering](#)

Endnotes

¹ The National Institute for Elopement Prevention and Resolution. (n.d.). *About us*. Retrieved from www.hospitalelopement.com/about-us.html.

² The information in this checklist is based on the following sources: ECRI. (2019, February 12). Wandering and elopement. *Aging Services Risk Management Guidance*. Retrieved from www.ecri.org; American Association of Post-Acute Care Nursing. (2021, August 23). *Elopement risk management: Learn how to increase resident safety and reduce facility risk*. Retrieved from www.aapacn.org/article/elopement-risk-management-learn-how-to-increase-resident-safety-and-reduce-facility-risk/; Lane, V. L. (2023, May 9). Preventing harm in aging services: Emerging technologies to mitigate hazardous wandering and elopement. *ECRI Blog*. Retrieved from <https://blog.ecri.org/preventing-harm-in-aging-services>; State of Wisconsin Department of Health Services. (2015). *Nursing home strategies to enhance quality of life for residents with dementia*. Retrieved from www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p01040.pdf

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