

Behavioural Resource Sheet: Wandering and Exit-Seeking

Wandering and exit-seeking include searching, mobilizing as if lost, or trying different ways out (e.g., doors, windows). A person may be distressed when seeing others entering/leaving and may sometimes follow them. They may also watch the door closely. These behaviours can be challenging, especially when the environment is not set up to reduce this risk.

Possible Triggers of Wandering/Exit-Seeking:

- Stress of the environment
(e.g., noisy, cluttered, crowded)
- Boredom
- Being disoriented (especially at night)
- People coming and going
- Searching for something/someone
- Repeating routines
(e.g., going to work)
- Hallucinations or delusions

Things to Consider...

- Boredom—let them wander and engage in tasks. Minimize restraints and follow standard fall precautions to reduce risk.
- Environment—lighting (e.g., brightness, shine on the floor, shadows), flooring (e.g., patterns), and noise (e.g., loud noise)
- Comfort—consider different cushions or have positioning assessed to keep the person comfortable, safe, and supported.
- Sleep hygiene—establish a routine around a bedtime based on a person's needs and previous preferences. Use strategies to improve sleep.

In the moment...

- Be respectful and calm. Respond to the person's expressed feelings (e.g., fear, anger, etc.)
- Walk with the person to their room. Reinforce familiarity, comfort and ownership in their space.
- Assess for pain and other unmet needs that could make them restless (e.g., hunger, thirst, urinary tract infection, temperature, over- or under-stimulation)

To prepare for next time...

- Take note of behaviours and/or use the Direct Observation System (DOS) to track behaviours.
- Encourage family/friends to visit around times that the person is commonly wandering or looking to leave.
- Remove things that may stimulate thoughts about "going home or going out" (e.g., clothes hangers, coats, hats)

Other helpful Tips:

- Engage the person in tasks they find meaningful, helpful, or interesting. This could include meal clean-up, sweeping, wiping tables/chairs, sorting flatware, polishing, caring for plants, outdoor chores in a supervised or secure space, sorting and folding clothes, sorting items (e.g. nuts and bolts, poker chips), or sanding wood.
- Have others participate in keeping the person busy. Family members, maintenance staff, cleaning staff, etc. can offer activities that feel meaningful and keep the person occupied.
- If in Saskatoon, consider adding the individual to the Vulnerable Person Registry. Other options include GPS medical alert bracelets, the "Share My Location" function on iPhones, and listing contact information on jewelry/clothing items. One online resource for purchasing items in Canada is www.alzstore.ca.