

# PREPAREDNESS /PANIC

A Get Ahead Guide to Elopements:  
Preparedness, Planning,  
Prevention without Panicking



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Operations and Program Specialist for RevealSol, with over 25+ years' experience in program development, operations management and start-up communities.

BS in Therapeutic Recreation  
ALF Manager and LNFA.

Presented on Elopements:  
Texas Search and Rescue in 2023.



# Goals for our time together

Open communication about an issue that seems to not be discussed until it makes the 5 o'clock news.

## **Elopement - Definition**

In the context of Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and critical incident reporting, "elopement" means an individual leaving a safe area or premise and going to a known or unknown location that places them at risk of serious injury or death.



**This presentation is interactive**

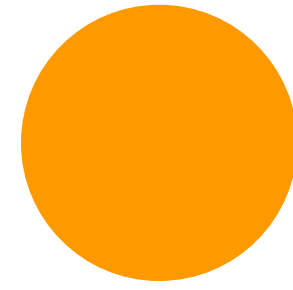


# Facts

60% of people living with the disease will wander at least once. Most individuals who wander, wander repeatedly.

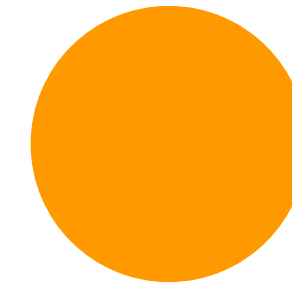
Alzheimer's Association

# Top Risk Factors for an Elopement:



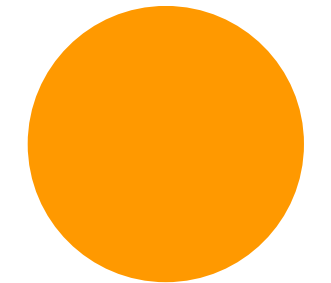
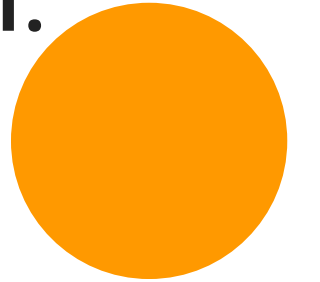
Facility failure - Alarm door didn't go off.

Resident pushed through the emergency exit door.



**Shift Change**

New Staff- Didn't get the information in new hire orientation

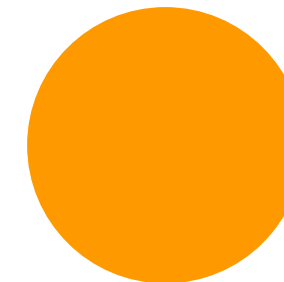


**Not my job....**

Multiple residents went missing after an activity.

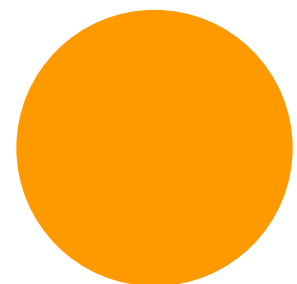
First 72 Hours

Inclement weather, extended bad weather



Snuck out the window

**Exit Seeking**



Used the furniture in the courtyard to hop the fence.

Blind spot - couldn't see the exit

# HHSC Regulations & Laws

In the context of assisted living facilities, elopement is considered a reportable incident.

According to the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) guidelines, a missing resident is one of the incident types that must be reported. If a resident is missing and not located after a search of the facility, facility grounds, and immediate vicinity, and there are circumstances that place the resident's health, safety, or welfare at risk, the facility must report the incident to HHSC. Examples of such circumstances include the resident requiring medications that, if not taken as scheduled, place them at risk of serious illness or death, exposure to extreme weather conditions, confusion or incapability of assessing potential danger, or suspicion of foul play.

The facility must immediately make an oral report to HHSC and follow up with a written report of the investigation no later than the fifth calendar day after the oral report. For more detailed information, you can refer to the **Texas Health and Safety Code 260A** and the **Provider Letter PL 19-23** which outlines the types of incidents that must be reported and the required timelines.

When in doubt, it is advisable to report the incident to ensure compliance and safeguard resident well-being.

In the context of assisted living facilities, elopement is considered a reportable incident







# 3 Things to Remember

1

It is estimated that approximately 40% of those diagnosed with dementia will become lost at some point in their disease process.

2

If a person with dementia is not found within the first 24-hours up to half will experience serious injury or death.

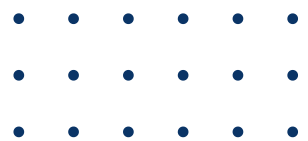
3

Most Elopements happen within the first **72-hours** of move-in.



# Start Preparedness

- Develop a resident profile system with photographs, medical information, and known triggers for wandering.
- Train staff on recognizing signs of agitation or restlessness that may precede elopement attempts.
- Establish a clear protocol for search and rescue procedures, including communication with local law enforcement.



# Emergency Preparedness

1

## Register for STEAR

State of Texas  
Emergency Assistance  
Registration  
Register Community for  
S.T.E.A.R. Emergency  
Assistance ([PL 2024-02](#))

2

## Register with AlertMedia

Register with  
AlertMedia  
Emergency  
Communication  
System ([PL 2025-01](#))

3

## Local Police

Register with your  
local police station.  
There are programs  
for Missing Person  
Readiness  
Programs.

**Use your Emergency Preparedness Coordinator**





# When to Prepare for an Elopement? Assessment

- Photo should be taken at Assessment or on Move-In Day
- Updated photo - Small Description of person, amubulation, DNR status or other identifiers
- Be aware that the photo you take at this moment might be used on the news or for Silver Alert.
- At Assessment screen for elopement risk.
- Start the conversation with family, build the trust.



# TRAINING

## Elopement Preparedness Binder

**Requirement:  
At least one resident  
Elopement Drill annually.**

**Use this time to complete actually hands on  
elopement drills. Make them realistic and make sure  
that everyone participates.**

**Requirement is 1 a year. Best Practice is quarterly.**

### **Staff Training:**

Facilities should train staff on elopement policies and procedures including search protocols and notification procedures upon hire and quarterly.

### **Elopement Binder:**

Prepare an elopement binder containing at-risk resident pictures, contacts, DNR status and health information. MAP of the community.

Needs to be updated monthly.

### **Regular Drills:**

Conduct regular elopement mock drills, including nighttime or low-light scenarios or multiple missing residents.

### **Document the Drill:**

Time Stamp Everything

Properly document the drill, including the date, time, summary of the drill and results.

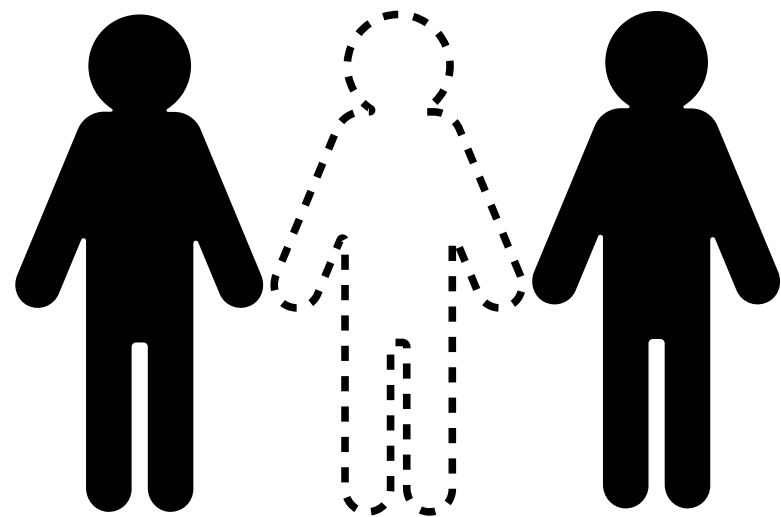
### **Review and Update:**

Regularly review and update elopement policies and procedures to ensure they are effective.



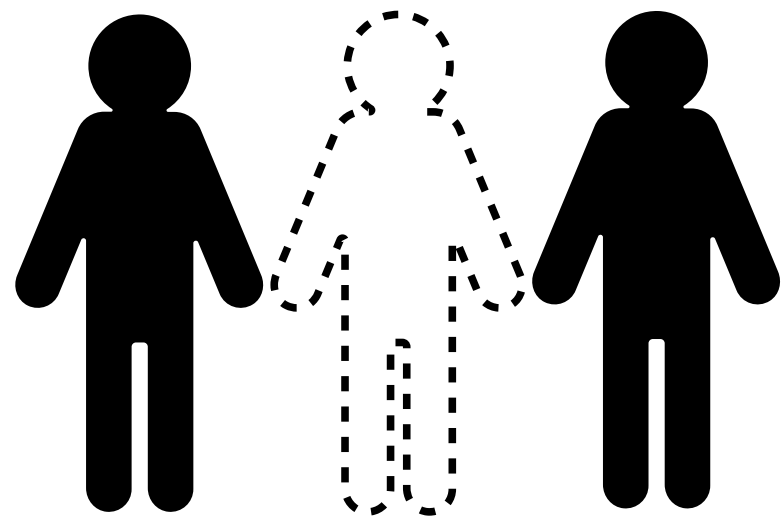
# When an Elopement Happens

## Follow Your Company's standard



1. Upon discovering a resident is missing, the staff member must notify the manager on duty immediately, this person becomes the facility search coordinator. The resident sign-out book must be checked. If the resident hasn't been checked out recently, they should be paged over the employee's radio. Call family to see if they are out.
2. If the resident can't be located, the manager must coordinate a search for the resident. Have a code, **Code PURPLE**. Screenshot your phone at this time so that you know when you started the investigation. Start timer for 10 mins. Instruct staff to search library, therapy, salon, other residents' rooms. This includes bathrooms, closets. **Binders should be located at each station and flyer with resident picture and details.**  
**Assign someone to review cameras.**
3. **Take a HEADCOUNT OF ALL RESIDENTS- DOCUMENT THIS STEP.** If the resident/residents cannot be found after a search is conducted, the search coordinator should notify the Administrator/Executive Director.
4. Expand the search into the community with teams of co-workers searching assigned areas. Fliers should be distributed at that time.

# Keep Searching Don't Give Up!



6. Within 30 minutes, the search coordinator must notify POA
7. The missing resident must be reported to the police department and an up-to-date photo and description should be provided.
8. If the resident is still not found, the search coordinator must notify the appropriate entities according to HHSC. SELF-REPORT
9. Upon finding the resident, a full physical and emotional evaluation should be conducted.
10. All parties must be notified that the resident has been found, and a report should be created about the incident. Physician notified.
11. WHEN NOT FOUND - MEDIA PREPAREDNESS  
That's a whole other talk....
12. A meeting should be held with staff members to review the incident and current elopement procedures. Use recommendations from staff in order to further prevent future elopements.

***Make sure that these important steps are highlighted in your emergency preparedness plan***

# MISSING RESIDENT Check Sign-Out Book, Transportation and Activities Book

SIGNED OUT  
FOUND

## Missing Resident Decision Tree

FOLLOW COMPANY  
POLICY  
AND PROCEDURES

NOTIFY  
MANAGER ON DUTY,  
SEARCH COORDINATOR  
RADIO ALL  
EMPLOYEES  
CHECK DINING  
ROOM, SALON,  
COMMON AREAS  
SCREENSHOT  
START TIMER  
10 MIN  
CALL FAMILY

FOUND



**CODE PURPLE**  
TAKE THE TIME TO DO A HEADCOUNT OF  
EVERYONE AT THIS TIME  
PRINT HANDOUTS  
START ROOM CHECKS  
NOTIFY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
ASSIGN SOMEONE TO REVIEW CAMERAS



FOUND



EXPAND SEARCH  
20 MINUTE TIMER  
ESTABLISH HEADQUARTERS  
CALL FAMILY  
NOTIFY POLICE  
NOTIFY REGIONALS



FOLLOW DIRECTION OF  
POLICE  
KEEP IN CONTACT WITH  
FAMILY (Q1)  
2 HOUR -NOTIFY HHSC  
MEDIA REPORT  
PREPARED



**FOUND**  
NOTIFY FAMILY,  
HHSC AND EMPLOYEES  
RESIDENT NEEDS TO BE  
CHECKED OUT  
DOCUMENT INCIDENT  
COMPLETE A REVIEW WITH  
STAFF - LESSONS LEARNED

# Identification



Identifiers - Road ID has a selection of items that can be worn as bracelets or attachments to watches/fobs.

**Key Chains with identifiers on how to call community**





# Facts

Further emphasizing the gravity of elopement incidents, "2023 investigation reported over 2,000 elopements from assisted living facilities nationwide since 2018, resulting in nearly 100 deaths.

More than half of these fatalities were due to exposure to harsh environmental conditions."

[AboutLawsuits.com](https://www.AboutLawsuits.com)



# Planning



Conduct regular risk assessments to identify and address potential elopement hazards.

Secure exits and install alarms or monitoring system to alert staff of unauthorized departures

Consider environmental design features that allow for safe wandering within a secure perimeter.

Review your systems for when the fire alarm goes off and emergency doors release.

Activities - Elopements can happen on outings. They can happen when unloading bus.

They can even happen when loading the bus!

**Boy do I have a stories to tell!**



# Best Practice

## Prevention

- Engage residents in meaningful activities and social interaction to reduce boredom and restlessness.
- Provide personalized supervision and support tailored to individual needs and abilities. Inform staff of new resident or change in condition with photo.
- Consider technology, such as GPS trackers or door sensors, to monitor residents' movements.
- 72 hour care - Include it in your Community Fee and provide a companion for the first 72 hours to help resident get acclimated to the community.



Keep your community systems (Physical Plant and hardware) updated. Review system monthly.

Talk to the families about residents using watches and phones as tracking device which would be monitored by family.

Stay up to date with new technology. Such as GPS trackers, smart locks, and alert system.

# TECHNOLOGY



## McKnight's Senior Living

A 2016 analysis of professional liability insurance claims found that elopement-related claims constituted 5.8% of all claims against assisted living communities. Notably, these claims had the second-highest average total payout, averaging \$388,048 per claim. **The same analysis revealed that assisted living communities accounted for 54.3% of elopement claims**, while skilled nursing facilities accounted for 45.7%. **Alarmingly, death was the most frequent injury associated with these claims, occurring in 45.7% of cases, with fractures in 34.8%.**



Go until they get “stuck”

Typically don't go backwards  
- straight line hypothesis

Find shelter in car, barn

Check local landscape -  
pond, fence line, lakes

Most are located within  
1.5 miles radius

## Dementia Behavior

Tips to help with  
finding the  
resident.

Looking to find home  
or something familiar.



# Once you have found the resident...

**1**

**Screenshot your phone to be able to document what time resident was located.**

**2**

**If you transport in a personal vehicle use childlock on your doors.**

**3**

**Must be checked out by nursing team or paramedics. Notify Dr. and HHSC**

**4**

**Circle back with everyone!  
Get statements and document.  
Do it when it is fresh.**





# Objectives

1

## Understand the Risk

Discuss behavioral patterns associated with elopement.

3

## Develop Strategies

Comprehensive prevention strategies that prioritize resident safety and autonomy.

2

## Identify and Address

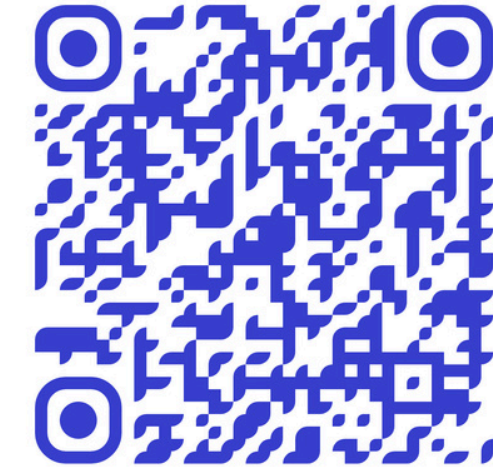
When to start preparing for an elopement and identify hazards.

4

## Discover Practical Tips

Through sharing experiences, discover tips and resources to enhance preparedness, planning and prevention efforts.

# Keep in touch! Follow us on LinkedIn for blog post.



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