

## Quick Reference Guide

**Responding To Exit Seeking & Leaving a Safe Area**

This quick reference guide contains strategies to assist you in caring for a person with exit seeking behaviour. Dementia can affect a person's abilities to remember where they are and find their way around. As a result, they may attempt to leave their home, place of care or the company of others, when it is unsafe for them to do so. This behaviour may be caused by the person:

- Being cued or prompted to leave, e.g., seeing keys may be a trigger to go home.
- Trying to meet a need, e.g., get to a place that looks familiar, go home or find a toilet.
- Trying to fulfil long held routines and responsibilities, e.g., going to work or picking children up from school even if they no longer work or their children have grown up.
- Trying to find a place where they feel more comfortable.
- Feeling unwell or in pain.

Always alert the police as soon as possible if the person goes missing.

Your DBMAS behaviour consultant may tailor several of the strategies listed below by understanding the person and their situation.

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***The person is trying to leave to go 'home', a more familiar place or to meet needs or responsibilities e.g., work or children.*****✓ Do:**

- Validate the person's needs. Reassure; e.g. "You are safe here." Reminisce, distract or re-direct to something that is valued by the person. Refer to the DBMAS Quick Reference Guide on Psychosocial Approaches: Validation.
- Remove and store items out of sight that may make the person want to leave, e.g., keys, coats, handbags, and suitcases.
- Maintain the person's routine. Support the person to do activities which are meaningful to them. These might include: work tasks, outside jobs, domestic chores, or adaptations of past hobbies.
- Make the area the person spends time in look and feel familiar to them, e.g., have familiar photos, pictures/mementoes around and favoured music.
- Keep your focus and connection with the person in public settings to avoid the person getting disoriented and lost.
- Provide signs and night/sensor lighting to help the person find their way to places they need overnight e.g., the toilet.
- Let neighbours know who they should contact if they see the person walking around the neighbourhood unaccompanied.
- Provide opportunities for the person to talk with familiar family members/friends on the phone or computer (e.g. Skype).

***The person repeatedly tries to open doors and enter different areas as they explore the environment.***

**✓ Do:**

- Consider if signs on doors can be safely trialled. In some situations, it may be helpful to place signs ('Stop', 'Do not enter'), a black non slip mat or strips of non-slip black tape on the floor in front of exit doors and doors which are not safe for the person to enter.
- Consider minimising cues and visibility of exit seeking by camouflaging/disguising doors/key pads, e.g., portable screen in front of doors, painting door same colour as walls, covering key pads/door handles.
- Provide safe indoor and outdoor areas the person can walk around in.
- Provide physical activities during the daytime e.g., cleaning, walking.
- Place interesting items near the areas the person frequently uses, e.g., memory boxes or activity pods. These give the person something else to explore and collect instead of opening doors.

***The person threatens to or tries to leave because they feel trapped or do not want to be there.***

**✓ Do:**

- Find out what strategies worked, if the person has previously left a place of safety.
- Encourage the person to stay in areas which are supervised or where they have to pass a supervised area to reach the exits. Accompany the person when they leave their home or care environment. A short walk may sometimes help.
- Keep exit doors locked, key padded, alarmed, or secured if there are no other safe options.
- Consider the use of alarm mats, sensor lights or bells attached to door handles to alert others that the person is leaving a safe area.
- Arrange for the person to carry ID, a security bracelet or GPS tracking device (e.g. mobile phone), in their pocket, handbag or attached to their clothing or person. Some GPS devices can alert you when a person leaves the home.
- Ensure you have a current photograph and information about the person should they wander away. List their details with the Safe Return (SA), Safely Home (NSW, Qld) or Safe Return Home (NT) services.

**✗ In all situations, avoid:**

- Arguing with the person or in any way making the person stay in an uncomfortable area or forcing the person to stay by physically restraining them.

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**Want more information?**

Shifting focus: Wandering <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzJpwq7PxlC>

I want to go home: How to distract & redirect <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWIGLFoWrUo>

Ideas for managing wandering behaviours <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gkogN6NKDg>

DBMAS Dementia and Wandering <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjQyTf2WBqU>



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