Safety is the first concern with wandering and elopement behaviors. Safety of the student who is trying to flee an area as well as the safety of the school staff. Often these behaviors aren’t addressed early and they become a pattern for a student. Even worse, the natural response to run after the student might be an unintentional reinforcement for this unsafe behavior. The following information should be considered to develop a thoughtful and meaningful plan to curb elopement behaviors. (This is an excerpt - to read the full article visit pathfindersforautism.org/articles/safety/elope-at-school/)

As with all behaviors, especially when they reach a crisis level, and deal with the safety of a student, we often want and need quick answers and responses. Unfortunately, it is hard to put a behavior plan in place when there isn’t any data. However, before we discuss the data collection process, there are some natural environmental supports that could be tried while you are collecting data.

Preventative Measures to Help with Wandering and Elopement

Establish a safe area with clear boundaries
In a classroom this might be the back of the room (if large enough) or a designated area in the hallway (marked with tape or cones to visually show the boundaries). In a larger environment, it might be a space in the auditorium (again clearly marked) or an area near the student’s location in the building. Establishing the assigned “safe wandering area” with the student should be done at the beginning of the class or before lunch/recess.

Place everyone strategically
If you know a student is prone to elopement, strategically place them away from an accessible door. It is recommended that a teacher, assistant or other adult be positioned near the student as well as the door to redirect the student if he attempts to leave.

Include staff throughout the building in the plan
Multiple staff – including those who may not directly teach the student – need to serve as reinforcements throughout the building. Include them in the wandering and elopement plan and equip them with walkie talkies so they can assist quickly if needed. Staff also need to understand why a student might be “wandering in the hallway” and be aware of the “safe zone areas” designated for the student.

The Elopement Plan

How a sample plan might read
An elopement plan might include:
1. If the student elopes from the classroom, an aid or adult will follow him.
2. The aid/teacher will immediately alert the support team through a call or walkie talkie.
3. The principal will immediately go to the front doors of the building. Assistant principal will cover the side exit, counselor will cover the recess doors, etc.
4. The person following the student will communicate with the support team what is happening (where the student is located, if they are walking, running, crying, etc.).
5. The team will communicate when the student is secure and debrief if the plan was effective.
6. An additional plan will need to be developed for returning the student to the learning environment after an elopement has occurred.
7. As with all behaviors that deal with the safety of a student, the incident should be documented, and parents should be informed immediately.

Developing a behavior plan
To develop a meaningful behavior plan, specific data collection is critical. School teams often collect data through the process of a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) to gain more information about a specific behavior. However, you do not need to wait for an FBA to be conducted to start collecting data, especially for elopement.

Collecting the data to establish a baseline
1. First identify the behavior you are targeting. Example: Elopement.
2. Clearly specify what elopement looks like to someone observing the actual behavior. Example: Elopement is defined as: The student leaving his chair and running for the nearest exit to escape the classroom and/or the school building. The student runs full speed and is very quick and agile. The student will stop sometimes to look behind him to see if anyone is following but will continue to run until he is far away from an adult.
3. Start a data collection sheet to track the student’s elopement (as defined above). The most common form of data collection is ABC data chart (antecedent, behavior, consequence). Example of an ABC data collect chart:

continued on back
4. Summarize the data collection period. Example: Data collection for elopement was collected over a 2-week period (2/26/20-3/11/20), 10 school days. Of the 10 school days, Jack eloped (as defined above) 8 times.

5. Discuss the data trends using a Functional Behavior Assessment tool.

Example

**Time of Day:** Jack only eloped during times when he was in a general education classroom with more than 20 kids.

**Dates:** Three of the elopements were on Monday mornings.

**Antecedents:** Request to write or draw (5/8 times).

**Behavior:** Elopement from the class 7/8 times. Elopement from the building 1/8 times.

**Consequence:** Sitting in principal office, taking walks, giving him choices, reminder about first/then chart.

**Determine Function of Behavior by asking the main question:** What does Jack gain by eloping from the room or building?!!!

6. Once you have a function for this behavior (in Jack’s case to escape written work) the team can start working on preventative strategies to decrease the student’s behavior. This is called a BIP (Behavior Intervention Plan).

**Behavior Intervention Plan for Elopement (Example)**

**Preventative Strategies:**
- Allow Jack to come into homeroom each morning with nothing on his desk.
- Read Jack’s social stories on School Safety Rules and Staying in the Classroom Keeps Me Safe.
- Present Jack a choice of tools to practice his letters – the iPad or magnetic letter board.
- Establish what Jack will earn once he practices his letters for 8 minutes.
  - Give Jack alerts when a writing tasks are scheduled.
  - Offer Jack choices for ways to complete the writing tasks.

**Teaching Strategies:**
- Read social stories each morning and discuss school rules.
- Model appropriate responses of replacement behaviors for elopement.
- Practice using those replacement behaviors every day.
- Reward Jack immediately when a writing task is introduced, and he reacts appropriately.

**Consequences:**
- Remind Jack of the safety school rules.
- Delay of earned break until he returns to class and finishes the work.
- Remind him Mom and Dad will be notified that he eloped.

**Track the data to determine if the interventions are working**

Once you have your data and a plan in place it will be important to continue collecting data using your ABC chart or other system. It will also be important to identify the Behavior Plan in your child’s IEP or 504 plan.

**IEP objectives and goals**

Establish goals and objectives around each behavior to ensure progress monitoring is happening at school. School teams can easily write a behavior goal in an IEP once they have the baseline data. See the full article at [https://pathfindersforautism.org/articles/safety/elope-at-school/](https://pathfindersforautism.org/articles/safety/elope-at-school/) for sample IEP goals. The full article also includes a link to sample social stories.

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**Additional Resources**

Wandering and Elopement at School - full article (includes sample IEP goals)
[https://pathfindersforautism.org/articles/safety/elope-at-school/](https://pathfindersforautism.org/articles/safety/elope-at-school/)

PFA Safety Resources (includes wandering and elopement tools)
[https://pathfindersforautism.org/resources/safety/](https://pathfindersforautism.org/resources/safety/)

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