
Facts

- People with dementia typically wander on foot and are found within 5 miles of their home. However, individuals have also been reported lost who have left in their own cars or on public transportation.
- People who become lost are often found in other people's yards, retail businesses, along streets and highways, and in public buildings like libraries and hospitals. Occasionally they are found in remote areas such as woods or fields.
- Most people with dementia who become lost in the community are safely returned to their caregivers. **However, in some cases, people have become injured or have even died while lost in the community.**

Safe Return

***Safe Return** is a program of the National Alzheimer's Association to enable the safe return of persons with dementia who have become lost in the community.

Contact your local Alzheimer's Association or Safe Return (888-572-8566) for details.

Developed by Meredith Rowe, RN, PhD,
UF College of Nursing/Institute on Aging
mrowe@ufl.edu

Helping Persons with Dementia

Information for
citizens about
helping persons
with dementia who
are lost in the
community

For more information
contact your local
Alzheimer's Association
chapter or national office
(800-272-3900).

Did you know?

Over 100,000 times per year, persons with dementia (such as Alzheimer's disease) become lost in their own community and are unable to find their own way home.

Generally persons with dementia (PWD) become lost because they leave home without their caregiver, but PWD living in nursing homes can also become lost in the community.

The situations that often lead to a person becoming lost in the community occur in **all** caregiving environments:

- The caregiver is distracted or asleep.
- The person is left alone in the home.
- The person is on an outing with the caregiver and wanders away.
- The person is on a regular outing in the community and becomes confused.

Recognizing a PWD

When a PWD is lost, they rarely ask for help to find their way home. *Often a good samaritan is the only person between the PWD being found safely or being found dead.*

Signs to be concerned about:

- Inappropriate clothing such as not enough/too much clothing for the weather.
- Being outside with pajamas or pieces of night clothing on.
- Clothing that is very dirty or disheveled.
- Acting confused about the environment. For instance, unable to correctly cross a street, or wandering in or on the side of a street/highway.
- Acting confused in a store such as loitering too long or eating merchandise without paying.

- Going into someone else's backyard or trying to get into someone else's house.
- Sitting on the sidewalk.
- Rummaging through garbage.

While we often associate these signs with homelessness, they may represent a PWD who desperately needs your help.

Communicating with a PWD

Gently get the person's attention by directly facing them.

Ask if the person needs help and pay particular attention to whether the answer makes sense or there is any confusion.

If so, ask them their name and where they are going.

Keep your questions simple and direct about the situation.

If there is any concern that the person may not know where they are, call 911.

REMAIN with the individual until help arrives.