



# Wandering

By Raquel Castaneda

If you have a loved one with special needs, you know the never-ending feeling of fear at the possibility of losing them if they wander away. Wandering can happen anywhere, at the mall, school, grocery store, out of the front door of the house, or even inside the home.

I remember one of the first times, Joel, my brother with Down syndrome wandered off. My dad was watching him while my mother and I went to the store. When we returned, we found my dad had fallen asleep on the couch and we couldn't find Joel anywhere. As we searched, we discovered him in the bathroom with his head in the toilet. Since then, there were numerous occasions when we found him in the most random and scary places at home (e.g., the attic, garage, and even stuck in-between furniture).

There were also times Joel wandered away from us in Walmart, Home Depot, and department stores. Most of these incidents turned out to be him playing a game of hide-n-seek that only he knew about, leaving us frantic until we either found him or he came out of hiding on his own.



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He's 16 years old now, but wandering is still an issue sometimes. The most recent incident was when he walked out of the house alone. We found him a couple of blocks away almost reaching the highway. He has never wandered that far before.

I think that he gets curious or sometimes misunderstands what is said. Recently he thought our mom said it was okay to go get ice cream at Baskin Robbins, but what she said was, they would go after she got dressed. When mom finished dressing and came out of her room, she found he was gone. When we found him, he seemed very relieved and tired. As soon as he got in my car, he said: "Hi Aquel, go ice-cream."

He obviously doesn't realize the danger that is out there and I am fearful of him being found by bad people, walking into traffic, or accidentally getting hurt. It is a good idea to familiarize yourself and your loved one with his or her neighbors, local police, and the local fire department. This way they will know what to do if they find him/her wandering in the neighborhood. It could also help your loved one figure out who to go to if they get lost.

For an array of resources on preventing wandering for parents and first responders, visit:

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/wandering-resources>



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