

Build it before you need it

A short guide for families, self-advocates, direct support staff, providers, and county boards.

When a person with a disability is separated from the people who know them, whether they wandered from home or were evacuated to a different shelter, responders start with nothing. The At-Risk Reunification Profile gives them, on two pages, what a parent or direct support professional already knows: what the person looks like, where they are likely to go, how to approach them, what becomes urgent, and who can safely take them home.

Who should have one

- **Anyone with a history of wandering or elopement.** Autism, dementia, and brain injury are the most common, but history matters more than diagnosis.
- **Anyone who cannot reliably tell a stranger** their name, address, or a phone number, or who may not understand or follow spoken commands.
- **Anyone who would hide or run from searchers,** or who is drawn to water, roads, or trains.
- **Anyone with a time-critical need,** such as seizure medication, insulin, or a device that depends on power.
- **Anyone who relies on equipment** (a power chair, AAC device, hearing aids) or a service animal that must stay with them if they are moved or sheltered.

If you support several people, build one for each. A profile for the house is not a profile for the person. Wherever possible, build it **with** the person. Section 5 includes a space for their own words.

The three pieces

- **At-Risk Reunification Profile (2 pages).** The full picture for the first responder on scene. Fillable PDF, or a Word version you can type into.
- **Responder Quick Card.** A fold-over wallet card that travels with the person, for the moments you are not there. It carries only first-minute information and leaves off the address, date of birth, and diagnosis.
- **Person-Centered Emergency Planning Checklist.** Tests the rest of the plan, one person at a time: alerts, power, evacuation, sheltering, staffing, and more.

Section by section

- **Responder quick view.** The box at the top of page 1 is what a responder reads in the first 30 seconds: what to call the person, how they communicate, how long to wait for an answer, safety notes, the most urgent medical need, and who to call. Fill it in last, once you know what matters most.
- **Safety notes.** “May not follow commands” and “may pull away if touched unexpectedly” are there to protect the person. An officer who knows that someone cannot respond to “show me your hands” can slow down instead of escalating. Describe needs, not labels.
- **1. Who to look for.** The photo is the most useful item on the page. Use a recent, well-lit, straight-on photo and write the date on it. Describe the person the way a stranger would see them. Diagnosis is optional; behavior is what searchers act on.
- **2. Fill in the moment they are missing.** Leave it blank until it happens. Then it takes under a minute: where, when, by whom, wearing, carrying.
- **3. Where they go and why.** Search teams plan from history and attraction. Water is the most important box on the page: check it if there is any chance at all. Name the places: the creek behind the school, a former home, a favorite store.
- **4. Technology that can help locate them.** GPS wearables, phones, and remote-support providers can shorten a search to minutes, but only if someone on scene knows they exist. Write the account holder and the number to call. Never write passwords.
- **5. How to approach.** This is where most searches go wrong. Write what a calm approach looks like and what to say. Responders read it aloud in the briefing.
- **6. Medical and time-critical needs.** Allergies first. Then what turns a search into a medical emergency, and how soon. A missed insulin dose at 6 p.m. is a different search at 9 p.m.
- **7. Equipment, service animal, and transportation.** Equipment should stay with the person whenever it is safe. Note how a power chair can be moved and whether the person needs an accessible vehicle.
- **8. Who to call, who may pick them up, and where to reunify.** List who can receive the person, and anyone who must not. A pickup code word, shared only in person, helps staff confirm the right adult. Name a meeting place and a backup, and an out-of-area contact in case local phones are down.

The consent line

The consent box lets the people holding the profile share it with responders, shelters, and search teams without stopping to ask permission in the middle of an emergency. Have the person sign it themselves when they can, or a guardian or authorized representative when they cannot, at a calm moment. It lasts one year unless you write a different end date, and it can be cancelled in writing at any time. Providers should confirm the wording fits their own policies and state rules.

Where it lives

A profile that only exists in a case-management system is not there when the power and cell service are out. Keep it in three places, and put the card on the person:

- **Printed at the residence**, somewhere every shift can find in the dark: inside a cabinet door or in the medication binder, in a sealed envelope. Not taped openly to the fridge.
- **In the go-bag**, sealed, with medications, chargers, and comfort items, so it travels with the person during an evacuation or shelter stay.
- **Pre-shared with local law enforcement, if you choose**. Many sheriffs, police departments, and 911 centers keep a voluntary vulnerable-person or special-needs registry that attaches a flag to an address or phone number. Ask by name: “Do you have a special-needs or vulnerable-person registry?” Before you enroll, ask how the record is stored, who can see it, and how to remove it. If there is no registry, ask whether the community resource officer will keep a copy on file. Pre-sharing is optional; some families prefer to hand the profile over only when it is needed.
- **The Responder Quick Card**, in a wallet, backpack, or wheelchair pouch, with the person’s permission where they can give it.

Review everything **every six months** and after any change in appearance, medication, equipment, residence, or staff. Put the next review date on the calendar now.

Keep it private

A completed profile holds health information, a photo, and a detailed description of how to approach and calm the person. In the wrong hands, that is a risk. Treat it like a passport.

- Keep it on paper and on your own or your provider’s secure systems.
- Do not post it online, save it to an open shared drive, or send it by regular email or text. Hand it over in person, or use your provider’s or agency’s secure upload.
- If you save the Word or PDF file, keep it on a password-protected device. A photo taken on a phone can carry location data; use a screenshot or a printed photo instead.
- Keep it sealed in the go-bag, not in an outside pocket or visible on the bag.
- If a go-bag or card is lost, update the profile and tell the registry and your provider.
- Shred old versions when you update.
- **Never add** a Social Security number, Medicaid or insurance ID, bank details, or passwords. Responders do not need them.

The first ten minutes when someone is missing

Call 911 the moment you confirm the person is gone, then search while you are on the phone. Do not search first and call later. Assign these in parallel; one person leads and nobody does all of them.

- **Minute 0: confirm and call**. A quick sweep of the room and the yard confirms it. Say “missing vulnerable adult” or “missing person with a disability.” Give the last-seen time, clothing, and direction, and say you have a reunification profile ready. Stay on the line.
- **At the same time: search the immediate area**. One person checks water, vehicles, closets, under beds, and the places they are drawn to. Call their name the way they respond to it.
- **At the same time: account for everyone else**. A second person cannot go missing while everyone searches for the first.
- **Minutes 2 to 5: notify on-call and family**. One person owns outside communication from this point.
- **Minutes 2 to 5: fill in Section 2 and hand over the profile**. Give it to the first responder on scene. Read Section 5 aloud to every searcher.
- **Until responders arrive: keep searching**. Widen outward from the last-seen point, checking water first. Log who checked where. When law enforcement arrives they command the search; your job is one point of contact and everything you know about the person.

Ask about state alerts. Many states have a Silver Alert or an endangered or missing-vulnerable-adult alert for people who do not meet AMBER Alert criteria. In Missouri, it is the Endangered Person Advisory, issued by the Highway Patrol at the request of local law enforcement. Ask the responding agency whether one applies where you live.

When a disaster separates you

Tornadoes, floods, fires, and hazardous-material evacuations can separate people from their support network for hours or days. The same profile helps, used a little differently.

- **Follow instructions from officials.** Do not drive to an active incident scene. Reunification usually happens at a designated, accessible location run by emergency management, a school, or a facility.
- **Send the go-bag copy with the person** if they are evacuated or transported without you. Hand it to shelter staff or EMS and point them to the quick view, Section 6, and Section 7.
- **Use your out-of-area contact.** When local phones are overloaded, a relative in another state can relay messages.
- **Keep equipment with the person.** A power chair, AAC device, or hearing aids left behind can make a shelter stay unsafe. Tell shelter staff about power-dependent equipment and battery runtime right away.
- **Ask for accommodations.** Shelters are expected to serve people with disabilities. A quiet space, a place to charge equipment, or a texture-modified diet are reasonable requests; Section 6 tells staff what the person needs.

For providers and county boards

- Make the profile part of the individual support plan for anyone flagged as a wandering or elopement risk, and audit it on the same cycle as the plan.
- Train every shift on where the profile lives and who hands it to responders. In an Incident Command structure, that is the Liaison role: one person who meets responders and speaks for the agency.
- Store completed profiles the way you store other health records, with access limited to staff who need them. Decide in advance who may release a profile and to whom.
- Build a relationship with your local law enforcement agency and 911 center before an incident. One meeting with the community resource officer or 911 director is worth more than any form.
- Run a tabletop exercise once a year that includes a missing-person inject. The free **Beyond the Binder** facilitator kit at graymattersalliance.com/reunification gives you a ready-made scenario.

Good sources for the rest of the plan

- **Ready.gov/disability** and **Ready.gov/caregivers**: FEMA's preparedness guidance for people with disabilities and the people who support them.
- **Ready.gov/plan**: family communication plans, meeting places, and out-of-area contacts.
- **Your local emergency management agency and 911 center**: local alerts, registries, shelters, and evacuation routes.

This guide is a preparedness resource. It does not replace calling 911, a local emergency plan, instructions from public safety officials, or legal or medical advice. Gray Matters Alliance offers the blank forms free and never collects completed profiles through its website. Questions about building profiles for a program? Email info@graymattersalliance.com.