

Intervention Planning Guide: ELOPING

When a student is exhibiting repeated or high-risk behaviors like eloping, follow the steps below to support your decision-making, identify the function of the behavior, and select appropriate replacement behavior strategies.

STEP 1: Identify the Pattern. Gather objective information about when and where the behavior occurs and what typically happens before and after. Identify patterns in time of day, subject, setting, people involved, and potential triggers. Focus on observable behavior, not assumptions.

- When is the behavior happening? (time of day, subject, transitions)
- Where is it happening? (classroom, hallway, specific locations)
- Who is present/involved? (peers, specific staff, independent work)
- What happens right before and after the behavior?

STEP 2: Determine the Function. Use observed patterns to identify what the student is communicating through eloping. Determine whether the behavior is related to escape or avoidance, emotional overwhelm, sensory needs, or control/autonomy.

Support understanding with brief, calm student input when appropriate. Use questions like:

- What feels hardest right now?
- What makes you want to leave?
- What helps you stay in class?
- What could help you take a safe break instead of leaving?

STEP 3: Identify & Teach Replacement Behaviors. Select 1–2 strategies that directly match the identified function of behavior. Each strategy must explicitly teach a replacement behavior—a safe, observable action the student will use instead of eloping to meet the same need.

Ask students what they will do instead of leaving when this need shows up?

- **Escape/Avoidance** → Task support, structure, or schedule tools that support asking for help, breaking tasks down, or staying with work
- **Emotional Overwhelm** → Regulation or break strategies that teach requesting support, naming emotions, or using a break signal
- **Sensory Needs** → Movement or sensory supports that provide access to appropriate regulation tools or break spaces
- **Control/Autonomy** → Choice-based strategies that support requesting options, making decisions, or checking in with an adult instead of leaving

Start small. Select strategies that are realistic for the student to use independently or with minimal prompting. Using too many strategies at once can reduce clarity and consistency, making replacement behaviors harder to learn.

STEP 4: Teach the Strategy. When the student is calm, introduce strategies proactively, not during escalation. Students need to learn the skill before they can use it in the moment.

- Explain the strategy clearly
- Model what it looks like
- Practice together
- Answer questions

STEP 5: Prompt & Reinforce Replacement Behavior in Real Time. When the student shows early signs of escalation, respond by prompting the replacement behavior, (e.g., Break request, signal, task list, or approved space) instead of the eloping behavior. Guide the student toward the replacement behavior using calm, consistent language. As you support:

- Prompt the replacement behavior early and consistently
- Use neutral, predictable language tied to the strategy taught
- Reinforce attempts to use the replacement behavior, even if partial or imperfect
- Maintain visual supervision and follow all safety procedures
- Avoid chasing or engaging in escalation that reinforces eloping

The goal is to replace eloping with a taught, functional skill that meets the same need in a safe and appropriate way.

STEP 6: Follow Up and Adjust. Check in consistently 2–3 times per day (start, middle, end):

- Was the replacement behavior used?
- Did it support regulation or reduce eloping?
- What adjustments are needed?

After 1–2 weeks, determine next steps:

- Continue current plan
- Adjust supports
- Introduce or refine replacement behaviors

Remember that progress takes time and small improvements matter.

STEP 7: Collaborate with the Team. Meet with the classroom teacher to review the plan once strategies are selected. Share the identified function of behavior and clarify how each strategy supports replacement behavior use. Collaboratively determine:

- When strategies will be prompted
- Who will provide support
- How staff will respond to eloping behavior

Ensure the classroom environment supports awareness and safety. For example, keeping the classroom door closed and using a subtle alert (e.g., a door bell or chime) can help staff quickly notice if a student exits unexpectedly.

Communicate the plan with all relevant staff and caregivers to ensure consistent language, expectations, and responses across different settings.

STRATEGIES TO REMEMBER

- Maintain a calm, neutral, and predictable adult presence.
- Help the student identify and use a preferred regulation strategy early (e.g., Deep breathing, sensory tools, movement).
- Provide scheduled or timed breaks during high-demand tasks or transitions.
- Develop a discrete signal the student can use to request a break or ask for help.
- Ensure access to a designated safe or calm-down location.
- Check in with the student before challenging situations, activities, or transitions.
- Use visual schedules and proactively prepare students for transitions, changes in activities, or shifts in expectations.
- Provide brief structured movement-break routines to support regulation.
- Break large or overwhelming tasks into smaller, manageable steps.
- Identify and connect students with trusted adults for support and regulation.
- Monitor patterns related to elopement (e.g., time of day, activities, locations, peer interactions).
- Reinforce self-advocacy, help-seeking, and communication of needs before leaving the classroom.
- Adjust seating locations to support success and reduce opportunities for elopement.