



## Help! My Child Runs Away!

**A**ny parent whose child runs away can feel scared and frustrated. Children run away for a variety of reasons. Many parents struggle to identify warning signs and many do not know what to do once they have discovered their child has run away. Parents also want to know how to prevent their child from running away again.

### Reasons Why

The reasons children run away are complex. Most of the time, it's a delicate balance of teens feeling out of control and running gives them a sense of control.

Teens may also:

- Feel that they need to get away to avoid something bad that may happen, or that is happening.
- Be afraid their parents will be mad at them for something they did wrong such as breaking house rules.
- Feel that their parents won't forgive them so they have to leave.
- Feel that their parents don't understand them and they run away to be with others who will let them be themselves.
- Run away to be with someone they are forbidden to be with.
- Feel lonely and begging for attention.



- Avoids spending time with the family.
- Acts strange, or has extremely emotional feelings that seem out of control.
- Has been hanging out with people who drink, use drugs, or go out and look for trouble.
- Has had changes in sleep patterns: Waking up early, fatigue, insomnia, increased sleeping.
- Has abrupt personality changes: mood swings, excessive blow-ups triggered by small things, apathy, boredom, irritability, preoccupation with a single thought.
- Has school issues: failing grades, truancy, cutting classes, fighting, and disciplinary problems.
- Seems to withdraw or fall out with friends, hostility toward former friends, make new older friends, and/or be reluctant to introduce you to their new friends.

### What To Do if Your Child is Missing

- File a missing persons report with your local police.
- Contact the local youth shelter.
- Think clearly. Where would your child go?
- Record. Keep a record of everyone you contact.
- Look for clues.
- Check the room for signs of preparation.
- Ask friends, teachers or other family members for ideas.
- Check neighborhood hangouts.
- If your child calls, remain calm and speak with love and concern.

### Warning Signs

The following are some signs that your child might be thinking about running away. He or she:

- Is withdrawn and unsociable.

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## What To Do When Your Child Comes Home

What your child needs most is for you to listen and not overreact. Take things slowly. You should also:

- Determine if medical attention is needed.
- Contact schools, officials, and police to inform them that the child has returned home.
- Develop a plan with the child to work on the problems that exist within the home.
- Maintain communication and view the identified changes as “new” family traditions.
- Connect with a counselor or family therapist.

## What Can I Do To Help Prevent Running Away?

Give your kids as much control as possible. This doesn't mean that you let them take the car whenever they want and have a 4:00 a.m. curfew. But as much as possible, give them choices—including even that it *is* their choice to run away. You might also point out that you, in turn, have choice to make when they run away. (Calling the police, restricting curfew, etc.)

You also want to spend as much time with your children as possible. Try to tone down your instincts to give advice and instead just listen.

Other ways to help:

- Take your children's concerns seriously—don't ignore their worries and fears.
- Pay attention to requests for help and respond quickly.
- Confront trouble signs directly, firmly, and, especially, calmly. Discuss concerns and consequences without lecturing.
- Tell them how much you love them, even if it seems like they don't want to hear it.
- Talk to teachers and other parents. Consider joining a parent support group if there is one in your area.
- Seek professional help with counseling. Often your willingness to go to therapy with your child goes a long way. Therapy isn't a

magic bullet—it's work for both you and your kids. But often a therapist can help the whole family when things get aired out.

There are many reasons why children run away; this is only a brief insight in to what your child may be thinking. If further assistance is needed please contact the county's department of social services, or a local runaway program.



## Resources

From our [Lending Library](#)

- [Child Sex Trafficking: Signs, Risk Factors, and Tips to Keep Kids Safe](#)

Other Web Resources

- [Wisconsin Runaway Programs](#)
- [Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs](#)
- [Homelessness and Runaway](#)
- [Homeless and Runaway Youth](#)



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