



PERMANENCY

YOUTH WHO RUN AWAY FROM FOSTER CARE



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WHY IT MATTERS

Approximately one in eight youth run away from home, and a large majority of those are youth living in foster care.¹ In their 2015 article, *Running away from foster care: What do we know and what do we do*, researchers Kimberly Crosland and Glen Dunlap share the risk factors, motivations, and ramifications of running away from foster care:²

Risk factors: The many reasons why a youth may be placed in out-of-home care (e.g., abuse, neglect, family conflict) are the same risk factors that make it more likely that a youth will run away. Age and gender are also risk factors: youth between the ages of 15 and 17 are more vulnerable to running away, as are females. Substance abuse, mental health diagnoses, and instability of placements are all risk factors.

The ramifications for youth who run away are immediate and potentially long-lasting. There are higher risks for delinquency and victimization. Running away can be the gateway to human trafficking and criminal behavior. Both education and employment opportunities are reduced, as youth who run are more likely to dropout of high school, leading to poor employment prospects.

Motivation: Motivation for running away typically falls into two categories: running “to” something (friends, family, activities) or running “away” from something (untenable living circumstances). Often both of these reasons may be motivation for a youth to run. For

example, youth may run away from a placement they find difficult in order to meet up with siblings or relatives they haven’t seen in some time. In addition, research shows the relationship of the youth with their primary caregiver to be an important factor in whether a youth decides to run.

Ramifications: The ramifications for youth who run away are immediate and potentially long-lasting. There are higher risks for delinquency and victimization. Running away can be the gateway to human trafficking

and criminal behavior. Both education and employment opportunities are reduced, as youth *who run are more likely to dropout of high school, leading to poor employment prospects.*

While few studies have reported interventions specific to decreasing runaway behavior of youth in foster care, social capital has been identified as one

potential preventative factor. Stabilizing placements, allowing for more access to normalized and age-appropriate activities, and ensuring that there is at least one caregiver or other adult to whom the youth feels connected in a positive way are offered as possible strategies for reducing the likelihood that a youth will run.

ADVOCATES IN ACTION

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ACTIONS

- **Recognize the risk factors that make a youth vulnerable to running** away and ensure that they are well connected to multiple people in their lives who provide them with support, encouragement and confidence. Use person-centered approaches that allow youth to voice their goals and hopes as well as identifying functional and environmental reasons a youth might have for running away.
- **Provide a counseling session** after a youth runs to find out more about why and where they went. Try to understand the motivation for running and see what can be done to remove those motivations from occurring again and replace them with motivations for not running. For example, a youth may have been motivated to run to spend time with a sibling who they haven't had contact with in a while. If this was the motivation to run, it could be addressed by providing more time for future sibling visits.
- **Examine the youth's placement** to ensure that it is the most appropriate placement for the youth. Decrease boredom. Identify interests and activities that the youth enjoys and develop a care plan that incorporates those activities. Having a positive relationship with caregivers is one of the motivations expressed by youth for not running.
- **Increase the youth's connections** to agency staff and peers, and ensure that bullying and abuse are not occurring in the placement, in school or other places. Work with school personnel to find ways to better connect youth in the school community. Identify other community opportunities for the youth to feel connected –faith based groups, YMCA, etc.
- **Ensure that the youth has regular visits** with family members and friends when feasible. Many youth worry about parents or siblings that they haven't seen in some time. If this was the motivation to run, it could be addressed by providing more time for future family visits.

Keep the youth at the center of the conversation. Allow the youth to express their feelings and reasons for running without fear of punishment or negative consequences.

- **Be frank with youth who are at risk for running** or who have run in the past about the risks and dangers of running. Don't judge or try to downplay their motivations or desire to run. This is an opportunity to listen carefully to what is making the youth's current situation challenging for them.
- **Be aware of the increased risk for running** of youth who live in group or residential care such as congregate care. Research has shown an increase in the number of youth placed in these settings who run.
- **Work collaboratively with the team to identify motivations for running.** Keep the youth at the center of the conversation. Allow the youth to express their feelings and reasons for running without fear of punishment or negative consequences. The team needs to be on the same page about how to address a running away event in a manner that prevents it from happening again but also empowers the youth to feel that their needs are being heard and appropriately responded to.

BRIGHT SPOT

RESPONDING TO YOUTH WHO RUN AWAY FROM FOSTER CARE, PRACTICE BULLETIN MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES (DHS),

This guide from Minnesota DHS is designed to inform stakeholders of the policies and procedures required when youth, for whom the agency is legally responsible, are reported or believed to have run away.

Recommendations included are relevant for staff and volunteers to consider when making decisions about whether to support the current placement or advocate for a new one. The recommendations below have been adapted for a CASA/GAL audience.³

PLACEMENT CONSIDERATIONS: CURRENT PLACEMENT

- When a youth for whom the runs away from a placement and is still missing after 24 hours, agency staff and caregiver(s) must make a decision regarding continuation of the youth's placement location. CASAs should be able to weigh in on their recommendation as well.
- When deciding whether to return the youth to the last placement, CASA volunteers should ask the caregiver and youth separately to determine why the youth ran away.

- With the CASA supervisor, discuss reasons given by the caregiver and the youth to determine whether the reasons for running away are related to the placement itself, and whether services would be beneficial to stabilize the placement and mitigate future incidents. Consider a new or alternate placement.

PLACEMENT CONSIDERATIONS: NEW PLACEMENT

- Any new placement in a substitute care setting must include a determination of the individual needs of the youth, and the ability of the prospective caregiver(s) to meet those needs.
- If the youth has a history of running away or indicates that s/he will not accept a specific placement, the caseworker and the CASA shall discuss with the youth, and take into account, where s/he wants to live or what type of placement the youth is willing to accept, such as:
 - » A particular relative
 - » A former caregiver or another adult with whom the youth has formed a relationship
 - » Reunification with parent(s), if possible
 - » A group home or congregate care setting

To learn more: <http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/publications/documents/pub/dhs-287675.pdf>

SELECTED RESOURCES

Name	Description
<p><u>Capacity Building Center for States, At Risk for Sex Trafficking: Youth Who Run Away from Foster Care (2015)</u>⁴</p>	<p>This product is provided to prompt conversations about youth who run away from state custody, how data can be used to learn more about this high-risk population, and how this knowledge can inform interventions.</p>
<p><u>Children’s Services Practice Notes, Preventing and Responding to Runaways from Foster Care (2012)</u>⁵</p>	<p>This newsletter directed to North Carolina Children’s Services staff provides strategies and tips to help prevent and address youth running away from foster care.</p>
<p>National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections, <u>Youth Missing from Care: Guidelines for Residential Treatment Facilities and Group Homes</u>⁶ and <u>Residential Runaway Risk Assessment Guide</u>⁷</p>	<p>In 2010, the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections hosted a webinar session addressing youth who run away from residential care, which highlighted a range of approaches and related tools including guidelines for residential treatment facilities and group homes and a risk assessment guide.</p>
<p><u>National Runaway Safeline</u>⁸</p>	<p>This is a resource for youth and teens as well as parents and other providers to use as a resource when there is a run-away event or a youth is considering running away. It provides a hotline number that youth can call.</p>
<p><u>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ACF, Information Memorandum: Serving Youth Who Run Away from Foster Care (2014)</u>⁹</p>	<p>The purpose of this memorandum is to provide guidance on serving youth 18 and under who run away from foster care.</p>
<p><u>youth.gov, Child Welfare (n.d.)</u>¹⁰</p>	<p>This overview highlights the statistics of youth who are homeless and who run away, with some resources identified.</p>

ENDNOTES

- 1 Voices of Youth Count, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago [Website]. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.voicesofyouthcount.org>
- 2 Crosland, K., & Dunlap, G. (2015). Running away from foster care: What do we know and what do we do? *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(6), 1697–1706.
- 3 <http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/publications/documents/pub/dhs-287675.pdf>
- 4 <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/preventing-sex-trafficking/>
- 5 <http://practicenotes.org/v17n3/runaway.htm>
- 6 http://www.nrcpfc.org/teleconferences/4-21-10/BEST_PRACTICE_GUIDELINES.pdf
- 7 http://www.nrcpfc.org/teleconferences/4-21-10/Runaway_Risk_Assessment_User_Guide_.pdf
- 8 <https://www.1800runaway.org/>
- 9 https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fysb/info_memo_rhy_foster_care_20141104.pdf
- 10 <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/runaway-and-homeless-youth/child-welfare-system>