

Parents – When Your Child or Teen Returns from Running Away

A child or teen often runs away as a ***means of managing a current conflict or stressful situation***. Remember that the current conflict or stressful situation is just as important to resolve (if not more important) than the fact that your child has run away. Do not make unrealistic expectations for your child's return. Get your child home and then take the time to evaluate the complete situation.

The return of your child can be a very emotional time, your child may be feeling guilty or humiliated for his actions. He may also be filled with fear of anticipated punishment. As a parent, you may feel great relief, sadness or gratitude for having your child returned safely. Be careful not to reward runaway behaviour. You may express disapproval for your youth's actions. Express the fact that you are relieved that he/she is home safely. Also, remember to affirm your love and care for him/her as a person.

You may also feel overwhelmed by other emotions such as anger, humiliation, disgust and/or a desire to punish. Do not appear to be so filled with anger that you do not want your child to return home. If your child returns to a home filled with anger, there is little reason for him/her to stay. Remain open to the return of your child. Despite what you are feeling, some or all of the following steps may help ease the transition period.

- seek medical help if warranted
- show your child love and concern
- **communicate.** Listen to your child: his/her messages are extremely important & must take priority to reestablish your relationship
- Contact schools, police etc., to let them know your child has returned
- Develop a plan with your child to work on problems that exist in your home. Involve professionals as needed to assist you in determining the best way to strengthen family relationships
- Maintain communication & view the identified changes as the "new" family traditions.

Adapted from, The Problem of Runaway and Homeless Youth @ www.childinc.com/runaway.htm

- **Be happy your child is back home.** Many teens fear the initial meeting with their parents. Remain calm. Express relief and tell your child you love him/her and that together you can solve any problems.
- **Make follow-up phone calls.** Let all your contacts, including police, know your child has returned home. Police may need to speak or meet with your child.

- **Allow time to settle in.** Your child may need a shower, meal, clean clothes or sleep.
- **Get medical attention.** If appropriate, visit your family doctor to address any medical concerns.
- **Talk with your teen.** Discuss how you can work together to prevent his/her leaving again. Acknowledge some problems take time and effort to solve. Be sure you resolve the problems safely and reasonably.
- **Look for assistance and support.** People & Organizations in your community can help counsel your family. Asking for help is a sign of strength and shows you are taking the issue seriously.

Adapted from Focus Adolescent Services – Runaways and Missing Children
www.focusas.com/Runaways.html