If Your Child Contacts You But Is Unwilling to Come Home

- More love and concern for your child, not anger or fear. Remember the goal is to help work through problems and have him or her return home.
- Encourage your child to contact a local runaway shelter or the National Runaway Switchboard at 1-800-828-0000 for assistance.
- Ask if you can stay in touch with your child. If so, specify plus or minus a form of contact whether it be through a telephone number, mailing address, e-mail, or instant message.
- Determine the best way for your child to go to a temporary residence or runaway shelter while the family works toward resolving its problems. A trusted counselor can help you make this decision.

Preparation...Just in Case
There are several ways families can be prepared in the event that their child runs away. While none of these measures may be more appropriate for a younger child, they all provide valuable information ad insight the quick recovery of a runaway.

- Keep a complete written description of your child including hair and eye color, height, weight, date of birth, and any specific physical attributes.
- Keep color photographs of your child who is under 10 years old. A good portrait at various angles, such as a picture taken by school photographers, are preferable; however, casual photographs are sometimes necessary representations of how your child looks than posed photographs.
- Make sure your dentist prepares full dental charts for your child and updates them each year or when substantial growth has occurred. Also have dental prints taken and update those every two years until your child is 18. If you move, get a copy of those dental records to keep in your files until a new dentist is found.
- 4000 for assistance.

In the United States for those who have information regarding missing and exploited children. The “phone book” number when dialing internationally is (800-802-4636). The “phone book” for children who are lost or have run away.

- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), established in 1984 as a private, nonprofit organization, serves as a clearinghouse of information about missing and exploited children, provides technical assistance to the public and law enforcement agencies, offers training programs to law enforcement and social service professionals, distributes photographs and descriptions about missing children worldwide; creates and coordinates child-protection education and prevention programs and publications; coordinates child-protection efforts with the private sector; serves as a clearinghouse for providers and state clearinghouses regarding missing child cases; and provides information about effective legislation to help ensure the protection of children (501 C.3.; 777-1761.e.; 42 U.S.C. § 10003, and 22 C.F.R. § 64.1.)

For information regarding the services offered by our NCMEC branches, please call them directly in California at 714-508-0150, Florida at 861-845-8000, Kansas City at 816-787-2000, New York at 718-422-6900, and South Carolina at 803-254-2324.

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Note: Only information located in the United States for those who have information regarding missing and exploited children. The “phone book” number when dialing internationally is (800-802-4636). The “phone book” for children who are lost or have run away.

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Guidelines in case your child might someday be a runaway

Running away can be a frightening experience—for both the child and their family. Your child becomes vulnerable as soon as he or she leaves home—potentially falling victim to drugs, alcohol, crime, sexual exploitation, pornography, or prostitution. In the face of such risks, many families may feel guilty, depressed, or even panicked by fear. It is important to be calm and direct with law enforcement concerning the circumstances that may have led to your child running away.

It is also important for families to remain calm and circumstantial when they discover their child has run away. Don’t panic or lose sight of the immediate task at hand—to locate the runaway and return him or her safely home.

Immediate Action

The first hours following the runaway episode are the most important in locating a child. While many runaway children return home on their own, it is critical to take every action available to you to help quickly locate and safeguard your child if he or she should run away. To help locate your runaway child, immediately follow these steps.

• Think clearly and logically about where your child might be and the reasons why he or she might have run away. Try to remain calm.
• Check with your child’s friends, school, neighbors, relatives, or anyone else who may know of or have clues about your child’s whereabouts. Ask them to verify, if you or they hear from your child. If your child has a computer, it should be checked as a source of leads or other information concerning people your child may have been communicating with online. Runaway fliers should light on a planned meeting between your child and someone he or she may “meet” online.
• Report the runaway to the local police or sheriff’s department. Have an officer respond to your home to take the report. Write down the officer’s name, badge number, telephone number, and the report number. Find out who will follow up on the investigation.
• Remember to keep a notebook and record all information about the investigation. This is a good way to keep track of everyone you talked to about your child and the circumstances and issues you discussed.
• Make sure your law-enforcement agency enter your child’s name and description into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) computer. Law-enforcement agencies across the country have access to NCIC. This information will not give your child a record with law enforcement, but it may aid in his or her safe return.
• Provide law enforcement with a recent photograph of your child. Also note fingerprints, deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) samples if you have them, and dental records and prints available to law enforcement. This information may need to be added to the existing NCIC entry. If your local law-enforcement agency won’t enter information about your child into the NCIC computer, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) can. The Missing Children Act of 1982 mandates this. Contact your nearest FBI field office for help.

Remember no matter what you have been told, there is no law requiring a waiting period for reporting a child missing to law enforcement or for entry into NCIC. But because some law-enforcement agency procedures may still involve a waiting period, you may have to go to the FBI yourself to get your child entered into NCIC.

• Make sure that law enforcement passes on the necessary information about your child to the missing children’s clearinghouse within your state.
• Call or visit several local spots that your child may frequent, and check with any hospitals and treatment centers. If your child was employed, call the employer or employer’s colleague.
• If you have not done so, report your missing child to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678). Your call will be received by a trained officer assigned to case management.
• If you have not done so, report your missing child to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) at 1-800-RUNAWAY (1-800-786-2929).

Follow-Up Actions

• Follow up with your child’s friends, school, neighbors, and current employer. Do not overlook your child’s old boyfriends or girlfriends, people from other walks of life including camp, a religious organization, after-school activities, the neighborhood; friends from out of town; friends involved in movies and television; contacts made on the computer; each teacher; guidance counselors; and printed in your child’s school; counselor; anyone who currently watches at the put in work at the place where your child may have run away; and past employers.

• Be sure to explain the seriousness of the situation; ask if anyone else they know is missing; and, in the case of friends, ask to speak to their families to distribute the information given. Attempt to obtain information about your child using his or her Social Security number through the FBI, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Social Security Administration. Check religious cults or cult-awareness groups in your area for information. Children have also been known to follow their favorite musical group across the country or in some other way travel with other runaway children.

• Check with your relatives and be sure to include, if applicable, any relatives, steprelatives, and steprelatives of a noncustodial family member, and members of a foster family. Again, be sure to explain the seriousness of the situation to each relative, and ask if anyone else they know is missing.

• Check with people in your community who may have seen your child before he or she left or may have information about a “favorite” spot where he or she could have gone. Ask people such as employees on day and night shifts in your neighborhood, employees of local businesses, those who work at child-orientational organizations or clubs who may know where kids like to “hang out,” current and past babysitters, mail carriers, and the family doctor. Also check with the armed forces if your child is of age.

• Search for clues in your child’s name, school locker, journal, notes, letters, computer files, electronic mail, current and past telephone bills, bank account, automatic-teller-machine (ATM) transactions, and credit-card bills. Check with the motor vehicle licensing and registration bureau within your state, and other states, if your child is of age to drive. If your child has taken someone’s car other than his or her own, consider reporting the vehicle as stolen.

• Publicize the case by distributing fliers locally, countywide, statewide, nationwide, and internationally, if circumstances warrant, with a current photograph and description of your child along with any known information about the disappearance, using the format provided in the brochure.

• Make certain your fliers include a telephone number along with the area code of the local law-enforcement agency as well as the city and state. Local fliers,