

Signs that a child might be thinking about or preparing to run away.

Changes in behaviors or patterns.

Children may suddenly:

- P Stop eating or begin to overeat;
- P Sleep all of the time or never sleep;
- P Spend all of their time with friends or become isolated from family members and friends;
- P Change friends;
- P Never want to leave their room; or
- P Become involved with untraditional religious groups or cults.

Rebellious behavior.

Rebellious behavior may include dropping grades, truancy, breaking rules at home and/or school or being unusually argumentative.

Disclosure.

Some teens will hint that they want to run away. Others will threaten their family with running. Sometimes a family will hear rumors through friends, school or other parents that their child is thinking about leaving home.

Accumulation of money and possessions.

To survive, runaways need money and resources. Some runaways prepare by slowly withdrawing funds from a savings or checking account. Keeping a bag or backpack of clothes in a closet might also mean that they are preparing to run.

It is very important for you to confront suspicions immediately. Reveal your genuine concern, not anger or fear. Take time to discuss your child's viewpoint.

Initial Action

If you are certain that the child ran away:

- ✓ Check with your child's friends, neighbors, relatives, school staff, employer/co-workers (if applicable). Ask them to notify you immediately if they hear from the child.
- ✓ Check locations that your child tends to frequent.
- ✓ If you are not living together, contact the child's other parent to determine if he or she has any information.
- ✓ Check the child's room, school locker and desk for clues regarding where he or she may have gone.
- ✓ Determine if possessions are missing, including withdrawals from bank accounts.
- ✓ Check past telephone bills for unusual long-distance calls.
- ✓ Review information stored on computers and disks. Pay close attention to e-mail, chat and instant messaging activity.
- ✓ Check area hospitals and transportation terminals.
- ✓ Notify a law enforcement agency and provide them with all available details. Ensure that the child's name and biographical information is entered into the New York State and National Crime Information Center computer networks.

✓ Contact the NYS DCJS Missing and Exploited Children Clearinghouse at 1-800 FIND-KID.

✓ Keep a detailed list of people and agencies that you have contacted and steps that you have taken.

✓ If the child has run away before, contact the person that he or she was with during the previous episode. Also, check the location(s) where he or she stayed during the previous episode.

Follow-up Action

✓ Call local runaway hotlines and the *National Runaway Switchboard (1-800-621-4000)*. Ask if your child has left any messages.

✓ Contact runaway shelters in any areas where you suspect that your child may be.

✓ Remain in contact with the law enforcement agency handling the case.

✓ Continue to contact neighbors and your child's friends to determine if they have any pertinent information.

✓ Obtain "caller ID" to determine the origin of incoming telephone calls. If your child or anyone calls collect, ask the operator for "time and charges" before you accept the call. Stay on the line after conversation has concluded.

✓ If your child does call, strive to keep lines of communication open with your child - avoid being judgmental. Provide your child with the *National Runaway Switchboard* telephone number if he or she is not ready to return home. They can also arrange for shelter and transportation home.

When your child returns home

✓ Promptly notify all involved in the search that the child has returned home.

✓ Show genuine love and concern for his or her safety - not anger or fear.

✓ Take time to listen to and discuss your child's viewpoint.

✓ Try to determine what, within or outside of the family, caused the episode.

✓ Make every effort to resolve the problems in or outside of your family that contributed to the child leaving in the first place.

✓ If family problems persist, seek advice or assistance from a family counselor.

✓ If circumstances warrant, take the child for a complete medical exam, including testing for sexually transmitted diseases.

The NYS Missing and Exploited Children Clearinghouse (MECC)

MECC is a strong partner with parents and law enforcement in preventing and investigating child abduction and exploitation.

P *The 1-800-FIND-KID hotline* is maintained 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. Missing child leads and sightings received on the hotline are immediately disseminated to investigating law enforcement agencies.

P *The statewide missing and unidentified person repository* is continually updated by MECC with information submitted by law enforcement agencies.

P *Investigative assistance* is provided to law enforcement agencies and parents. MECC trains law enforcement officers in basic and advanced investigative techniques. To aid in finding missing children, MECC staff members:

- ✓ Offer advice on case management practices.
- ✓ Flag birth and educational records of missing children.
- ✓ Develop missing child flyers and distribute them law enforcement agencies and other entities statewide. The *TRAK (Technology to Recover Abducted Kids)* program allows for dissemination of missing child information to virtually every law enforcement agency in the State in a matter of minutes.
- ✓ Place missing child photographs and biographical information and child safety information on the DCJS web site at <http://criminaljustice.state.ny.us>.
- ✓ Search employment, credit, motor vehicle and other records for leads.
- ✓ Analyze and enter missing person dental and other anatomical information into New York State and National Crime Information Center files.

P *MECC collaboration* with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, other state clearinghouses, other State agencies, non-profit organizations, law enforcement agencies, prosecutors and courts can provide nationwide assistance to law enforcement agencies and family members.



IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT US AT:

**NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services
4 Tower Place
Albany, NY 12203**

1-800-FIND-KID or (518) 457-6326

Missing child photographs and biographical information and additional child safety information can be viewed on our website.

<http://criminaljustice.state.ny.us>

Contributions made to the NYS MECC Fund made reproduction of this brochure possible. Contributions can be forwarded directly to the fund at the address listed above. Also, the NYS Tax Law now allows individuals to donate to the MECC Fund when filing state income tax returns. Every penny of your contribution goes directly to support the work of the Clearinghouse and local efforts statewide.

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RUNAWAY CHILDREN



**State of New York
George E. Pataki, Governor**