



The  
Children's  
Society

# What to do if your child goes missing

Practical advice for parents and carers

## Before contacting the police

- Go and check the bedroom and any other place where your child might be within the house or building.
- Check the garden, garage, sheds, grounds and surrounding area.
- Check with your child's friends, school, work, neighbours, relatives or anyone else who may know of his or her whereabouts. Ask them to tell you immediately if they hear from your child.
- Try to contact your child directly via mobile phone, text, or social networking sites (such as BBM, Twitter, Facebook, etc).
- If you know where your child is and you are still concerned for their safety (eg if they are at a house where you suspect criminal activities are taking place) you can ask the police to carry out a welfare check on that house or location.

## Contacting the police

- **Ring 999 or 101 or your local police telephone number** once you have carried out the above checks and you have still not found your child.
- You do not need to wait for 24 hours. Report your child as missing straight away.
- When you first contact the police, record the crime reference number. When an officer attends, record their name, badge number and telephone number. Ask who will follow up the initial investigation.



## Other things you can do

### You will then be asked the following questions:

- When and where was your child last seen? By who?
- When and where did you last see your child?
- What were they doing when last seen?
- What are your most pressing worries and why?
- Are these circumstances out of character for your child?
- Are they taking any medication which they may need immediately?

Further questions may be asked at this time depending on the circumstances.

Your child will then be classified as either MISSING or ABSENT and the call taker will explain the next steps. This is likely to include police officers attending your home to take a detailed missing person report.

- Think about what your child was wearing when you last saw them. Have they taken any extra clothes?
- What have they taken with them, eg mobile phone, money, bank cards, any items of sentimental value?
- Check your home computers for any leads such as online contacts or details of planned meetings.
- After you have completed the above checks, close the door to your child's room and don't touch anything in there.
- Find out if any of your child's friends are missing.
- Have a recent photograph available (the police may need it).
- Keep a record of everyone you contact, including the date and time, the name of person and/or organisation, and any phone numbers received.
- Keep your phone on and keep a record of any calls; this may be the only way your child can reach you.
- Check telephone bills for the past few months for any unfamiliar calls.



## When your child returns home

**Contact the police:** Let them know that your child has returned. If you suspect that a crime has been committed against your child, explain your suspicions to the police, ask them to attend without delay and follow any instructions that they give you.

**Show your child that you're happy to have them back home:** Many children fear the initial meeting with their parents. Remain calm, tell your child you love them and that together you will solve any problems.

**Allow them time to settle in:** Your child may need a meal, clean clothes, or to go to sleep.

**Get medical attention:** Bring your child to your family doctor to address any medical concerns.

**Talk with your child:** Discuss how you can work together to prevent them from leaving again. Acknowledge that some issues take time and effort to resolve.

**Get assistance and support:** An independent organisation may follow-up with your child to see if they need more support. It is important to reach out and take advantage of any help on offer to you, your child and your family.

## Why do young people run away?

Children leave home for a wide variety of reasons, including trouble at school or arguments within the family. They may leave on impulse following a family quarrel, or in protest over a rule or an isolated incident. Sometimes they may be drawn away by something outside of the home such as older friends.

**If you're concerned that your child might be thinking about running away, try taking the following steps.**

**Talk** to your children openly and honestly.

**Listen** to them when they talk about their concerns, feelings and any difficulties they may be facing.

**Respect** their emotional responses in every situation.

**Encourage** them to succeed and to work through their differences and struggles.

**Support** your children's need to gain independence, and develop appropriate relationships with others.

**Create** opportunities for them to learn how to make positive decisions in their lives.

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**Teach** your children to be accountable for their actions.

**Protect** them from feelings of loneliness and isolation.

**Provide** a place of safety for your children, both emotionally and physically.

**Defend** them openly against harassment or verbal abuse of any kind.

**Make** your home a place of trust and support that meets their needs.

## Further information and support

### The Children's Society

[www.childrenssociety.org.uk/runaways-work](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/runaways-work)

[www.makerunawaysafe.org.uk](http://www.makerunawaysafe.org.uk)

### Missing People

[www.missingpeople.org.uk](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk)

24 hour confidential helpline on 116 000

or email

[116000@missingpeople.org.uk](mailto:116000@missingpeople.org.uk)





## About us

The Children's Society has over 130 years' experience of supporting society's most vulnerable children and young people. We work directly with these children, many of whom have nowhere else to turn, to ensure that they are loved, valued and listened to. We transform the lives of many more children by pressurising government and local authorities to protect them, and we challenge the negative attitudes that perpetuate harm and injustice.

We have been a leading provider of specialist services working with children who run away for over 25 years and currently run nine dedicated projects supporting hundreds of children in England. We lead the research, policy and practice agenda to ensure that no young runaway is left to survive on their own.

We can only continue to transform the lives of these children and young people through the generosity of our supporters. If you'd like to find out more about how to help us:

**Email:** [supportercare@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:supportercare@childrenssociety.org.uk)

**Phone:** [0300 303 7000](tel:03003037000)

**Visit:** [www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-you-can-do](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-you-can-do)

Parents of children who have had experience of the issues raised have contributed to the development of this leaflet. We would like to thank them for their help.

