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Problem-Oriented Guides for Police
Problem-Specific Guides Series
No. 37



Juvenile Runaways

Kelly Dedel

www.cops.usdoj.gov



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Kelly Dedel Johnson

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About the Problem-Specific Guide Series

The *Problem-Specific Guides* summarize knowledge about how police can reduce the harm caused by specific crime and disorder problems. They are guides to prevention and to improving the overall response to incidents, not to investigating offenses or handling specific incidents. Neither do they cover all of the technical details about how to implement specific responses. The guides are written for police—of whatever rank or assignment—who must address the specific problem the guides cover. The guides will be most useful to officers who:

- **Understand basic problem-oriented policing principles and methods.** The guides are not primers in problem-oriented policing. They deal only briefly with the initial decision to focus on a particular problem, methods to analyze the problem, and means to assess the results of a problem-oriented policing project. They are designed to help police decide how best to analyze and address a problem they have already identified. (A companion series of *Problem-Solving Tools* guides has been produced to aid in various aspects of problem analysis and assessment.)
- **Can look at a problem in depth.** Depending on the complexity of the problem, you should be prepared to spend perhaps weeks, or even months, analyzing and responding to it. Carefully studying a problem before responding helps you design the right strategy, one that is most likely to work in your community. You should not blindly adopt the responses others have used; you must decide whether they are appropriate to your local situation. What is true in one place may not be true elsewhere; what works in one place may not work everywhere.



- **Are willing to consider new ways of doing police business.** The guides describe responses that other police departments have used or that researchers have tested. While not all of these responses will be appropriate to your particular problem, they should help give a broader view of the kinds of things you could do. You may think you cannot implement some of these responses in your jurisdiction, but perhaps you can. In many places, when police have discovered a more effective response, they have succeeded in having laws and policies changed, improving the response to the problem.
(A companion series of *Response Guides* has been produced to help you understand how commonly-used police responses work on a variety of problems.)
- **Understand the value and the limits of research knowledge.** For some types of problems, a lot of useful research is available to the police; for other problems, little is available. Accordingly, some guides in this series summarize existing research whereas other guides illustrate the need for more research on that particular problem. Regardless, research has not provided definitive answers to all the questions you might have about the problem. The research may help get you started in designing your own responses, but it cannot tell you exactly what to do. This will depend greatly on the particular nature of your local problem. In the interest of keeping the guides readable, not every piece of relevant research has been cited, nor has every point been attributed to its sources. To have done so would have overwhelmed and distracted the reader. The references listed at the end of each guide are those drawn on most heavily; they are not a complete bibliography of research on the subject.
- **Are willing to work with others to find effective solutions to the problem.** The police alone cannot implement many of the responses discussed in the guides. They must frequently implement them in partnership with other responsible private and public bodies including other government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private businesses, public utilities, community groups, and individual citizens. An effective



problem-solver must know how to forge genuine partnerships with others and be prepared to invest considerable effort in making these partnerships work. Each guide identifies particular individuals or groups in the community with whom police might work to improve the overall response to that problem. Thorough analysis of problems often reveals that individuals and groups other than the police are in a stronger position to address problems and that police ought to shift some greater responsibility to them to do so. Response Guide No. 3, *Shifting and Sharing Responsibility for Public Safety Problems*, provides further discussion of this topic.

The COPS Office defines community policing as “a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies, which support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.” These guides emphasize *problem-solving* and *police-community partnerships* in the context of addressing specific public safety problems. For the most part, the organizational strategies that can facilitate problem-solving and police-community partnerships vary considerably and discussion of them is beyond the scope of these guides.

These guides have drawn on research findings and police practices in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. Even though laws, customs and police practices vary from country to country, it is apparent that the police everywhere experience common problems. In a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected, it is important that police be aware of research and successful practices beyond the borders of their own countries.

Each guide is informed by a thorough review of the research literature and reported police practice, and each guide is anonymously peer-reviewed by a line police officer, a police executive and a researcher prior to publication. The review process is independently managed by the COPS Office, which solicits the reviews.



For more information about problem-oriented policing, visit the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing online at www.popcenter.org. This website offers free online access to:

- The *Problem-Specific Guides* series,
- The companion *Response Guides* and *Problem-Solving Tools* series,
- Special publications on crime analysis and on policing terrorism,
- Instructional information about problem-oriented policing and related topics,
- An interactive problem-oriented policing training exercise,
- An interactive *Problem Analysis Module*,
- Online access to important police research and practices, and
- Information about problem-oriented policing conferences and award programs.



Acknowledgments

The *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police* are very much a collaborative effort. While each guide has a primary author, other project team members, COPS Office staff and anonymous peer reviewers contributed to each guide by proposing text, recommending research and offering suggestions on matters of format and style.

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Cynthia Pappas oversaw the project for the COPS Office. Katharine Willis edited the guide. Research for the guides was conducted at the Criminal Justice Library at Rutgers University under the direction of Phyllis Schultze.

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The Problem of Juvenile Runaways

This guide begins by describing the problem of juvenile runaways and reviewing its risk factors. It then identifies a series of questions to help you analyze your local juvenile runaway problem. Finally, it reviews responses to the problem and what is known about them from evaluative research and police practice.

Juveniles run away from home and from substitute care placements, such as foster care or group homes. Most juveniles decide to leave on their own or choose not to return when expected, but in some cases, their parents or guardians tell them to leave or do not allow them to return.[§] A runaway episode refers to an overnight stay away from home, except in the case of young children who can be in danger after a much shorter time. Runaways were once believed to be juveniles seeking adventure or rebelling against mainstream values and the authority of their parents; more recently, runaways have been regarded as victims of dysfunctional families, schools, and social service institutions.

Estimating the number of juveniles who run away is difficult because:

- Researchers do not agree on the definition of “running away”
- Juveniles tend to hide their runaway status when talking to adult authority figures
- Many runaways do not access services and, therefore, are not included in service utilization data.

§The term “runaway” typically refers to juveniles who are absent from home or care without permission. The term “throwaway” refers to juveniles who have been forced to leave their homes by a parent or guardian. Recognizing that the distinction between these statuses is blurred, this guide uses the term “runaway” to refer to both situations. The phrase “missing children” often includes runaway and throwaway juveniles, along with juveniles who have been abducted by a non-custodial parent or stranger. This latter group of juveniles is not discussed in this guide.



These difficulties notwithstanding, there were approximately 1.7 million juvenile runaway episodes in 1999.¹ Only about one-third of these juveniles were actually “missing,” meaning that their parents or caretakers did not know where they were and were concerned about their absence. Only about one-fifth of all runaway episodes were reported to police.² Some parents do not report runaway episodes to police because they know where their children are or because they do not think the police are needed to resolve the issue.³ Others do not report runaway episodes because they want to avoid police involvement or because they had a negative experience when reporting a previous runaway episode to police.⁴

Most runaways are older teenagers, ages 15 to 17, with only about one-quarter ages 14 and younger.⁵ Juveniles of different races run away at about the same rates and boys and girls run away in equal proportions. Although juveniles from all socioeconomic statuses run away, the majority are from working-class and lower-income homes, possibly because of the additional family stress created by a lack of income and resources.⁶ Blended families also experience additional stress, which may explain why juveniles living in these settings are also more likely to run away.⁷ Runaway rates are similar for juveniles in urban, suburban, and rural settings.⁸

Runaways have higher rates of depression, physical and sexual abuse, alcohol and drug problems, delinquency, school problems, and difficulties with peers than juveniles who do not run away.⁹ Many runaways have been exposed to high levels of violence, either as victims or as witnesses.¹⁰



Juveniles in substitute care (e.g., foster care, group homes) are more likely to run away than juveniles who live at home with a parent or guardian. The chances of juveniles in care running away are highest in the first few months after placement, and older juveniles are more likely to run away than younger juveniles.¹¹ Juveniles who run away from substitute care are more likely to run away repeatedly than juveniles who run away from home.¹² Although they are only a small proportion of the total number of runaways, those who run away from care consume a disproportionate amount of police time and effort.¹³ Those who run away from care also tend to stay away longer and travel farther away than those who run away from home.¹⁴

Police encounter runaways, whether reported missing or not, through a number of activities: while patrolling areas where runaways congregate, while investigating missing persons reports, or during criminal investigations in which juveniles were either perpetrators or victims. In 1999, 150,700 juveniles were arrested for running away, less than 10 percent of all runaways that year.¹⁵ Runaways are also arrested and charged with prostitution, curfew violations, truancy, and drug and alcohol offenses. Police have wide discretion in handling runaway cases depending on whether the children were reported missing, the level of parental or caretaker concern, and the seriousness of the risks the juveniles are believed to face.

Very few runaways are homeless and living on the street. Most stay in relative safety at a friend or family member's home. However, some runaways lack safe living arrangements and stay on the street, in the company of a predatory adult, or in another situation lacking responsible adult supervision. Police and policy makers are most concerned about this group of juveniles, commonly referred to as "street kids," because of the potential for victimization and criminal activity.



The problem of juvenile runaways is particularly complex because it suggests other social problems, such as family dysfunction and child abuse. As a result, police will be able to affect only a segment of the problem directly. Although many things can be done to address the underlying causes of the problem, police are primarily concerned about reducing the harm that comes to or is caused by runaways when they are absent from home or care. For example, some runaways are:

- Involved in criminal activity, either as victims or perpetrator
- Exploited by predatory adults
- Engaged in risky behaviors such as drug use and unsafe sexual activity.

Despite their interest in protecting children's safety, police often assign a low priority to runaway cases for a number of reasons:

- Few jurisdictions have appropriate facilities for placement once runaways are taken into police custody.¹⁶
- Processing paperwork and transporting juveniles consume significant amounts of time.¹⁷
- Most police have competing demands from more serious public safety threats.¹⁸
- Some police believe parents and substitute care providers want police to act as disciplinarians or security guards.¹⁹
- Runaway cases can be frustrating when juveniles do not want to return or parents do not want the juveniles to return.²⁰
- Juveniles often run away again shortly after police return them home.²¹



Running away is a status offense; consequently, juveniles can be held in secure facilities only in limited situations.[§] Unfortunately, the resources available to this population generally amount to a collection of loosely affiliated services and shelters of varied quality and quantity. As a result, police often have limited options for responding to runaways and ensuring their safety.

Related Problems

Police encounter juveniles for many reasons related to their running away from home. Some of these issues are covered in other guides in this series, all of which are listed in the back of this guide. These related problems require their own analyses and responses:

- Child abduction by non-custodial parents
- Child abduction by strangers
- Child abandonment
- Child abuse and neglect
- Disorderly juveniles in public places
- Underage drinking
- Child sexual exploitation
- Prostitution
- Truancy
- Curfew violations
- Panhandling
- Shoplifting
- Drug dealing
- Problems relating to transient persons (e.g., sleeping, bathing, depositing human waste in public).

[§]The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 made it illegal to hold status offenders in secure facilities. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA), reauthorized in 1992, created alternatives to the juvenile justice system by funding community-based organizations to provide services to runaways including outreach, counseling, shelters, aftercare, and referrals to social services. The RHYA also includes the Transitional Living Program, which provides services for homeless juveniles ages 16 to 21 to increase independent living skills.



Factors Contributing to Juvenile Runaways

Understanding the factors that contribute to your problem will help you frame your own local analysis questions, determine good effectiveness measures, recognize key intervention points, and select appropriate responses.

Why They Run: Reasons and Triggers

Runaways' home and family situations suggest that the stereotype of juveniles running away to experience a carefree and rebellious lifestyle is misguided and potentially dangerous. Runaways are usually "running away from" a problem they do not know how to solve, rather than "running to" an environment they imagine to be more relaxed and exciting. Triggers for running away from home include:

- Recurrent arguments about typical parent-child issues such as autonomy, spending money, staying out late, permission to attend a party or concert, arguments with siblings, choice of friends, appearance, showing respect to parents, criminal behavior, alcohol or drug use, and school problems (truancy, suspension, grades)²²
- Physical and sexual abuse²³
- Tension or rejection because of lifestyle or sexual orientation²⁴
- Efforts to avoid a difficult encounter with parents, e.g., revealing a pregnancy, reporting failing grades²⁵
- Rigid rules or expectations that do not account for normal developmental changes, punishments perceived as excessive, and authoritarian parenting styles²⁶
- Seeking fun or adventure, to be with a boyfriend or girlfriend, or to do something parents will not permit²⁷
- Parents' inability to cope with stress, poor boundaries failure to set limits, neglect, substance use, or depression²⁸
- Parents' disharmony, arguing, and domestic violence²⁹
- Tension with step-parent or problems adjusting to a split or blended family.³⁰



In general, juveniles run away from families that tend to retreat from, rather than work through, difficult situations. Lacking other coping mechanisms or communication strategies to resolve problems, juveniles often run away when they feel they have no other option. In particular, juveniles run away when the pattern of conflict escalates, the risk of physical harm increases, or family life becomes intolerable.

The triggers underlying a runaway episode from foster care or a group home may be different from those underlying a runaway episode from home. When juveniles in care do not have strong emotional ties to their caretakers, they often find it easier to leave. Juveniles run away from care to:

- Return home or to their neighborhoods to spend time with friends, boyfriends or girlfriends, and family³²
- Get attention or provoke a reaction, to confirm that caretakers care about them and that they are wanted³³
- Escape crowded facilities or to seek privacy³⁴
- Protest inadequate service or attention from
- Social workers³⁵
- Protect themselves from bullying or sexual harassment by other residents³⁶
- Escape abuse by staff³⁷
- Resist imposed limits, particularly given that many juveniles in care come from homes with few limits.³⁸



Juveniles in the foster care system are often shuttled among multiple placements. These disruptions can cause juveniles to feel disempowered and detached and may lead to runaway episodes.³⁹ The substitute care placement's culture or environment may also create an incentive to run away. Placements lacking structure and activities and those with overwhelmed staff who do not exercise their authority properly have higher rates of runaways than facilities with strong leadership, staff support, and juveniles involved in activities and setting rules.⁴⁰

When They Run: Seasonal and Temporal Issues

Some evidence suggests that, in some communities, juveniles run away more often in the summer and during the afternoon or evening, while in other communities, there are no clear patterns with regard to season, day of the week, or time of day.⁴¹ Local practices surrounding curfew and truancy enforcement may cause police to come into contact with runaways more often on particular days of the week or times of day.

How They Go: Methods of Departure

Most juveniles leave home or care spontaneously amid emotional or physical conflict. Their departure is generally poorly planned and impulsive, and they usually do not take any food, clothing, or money to sustain them while away. Other juveniles carefully calculate the timing of their exits, leave notes announcing their departures, and take money, food, clothing, and objects of sentimental value with them.⁴² Juveniles use many modes of transportation: walking, taking the family car, organizing a ride with friends, using public transportation, or hitchhiking. Obviously, some of these involve serious risks to juveniles' safety.



Discovering that a child has run away can be very emotional for parents. They may blame themselves and feel guilty, remorseful, or inadequate, or they may blame the juvenile, feel angry, and plan to punish the child.⁴³ Some parents are less affected by their child's departure, believing the juvenile went to a safe location and will return shortly.⁴⁴ Parents try to locate the juvenile by calling friends and relatives, searching places the juvenile frequents, or filing a missing persons report with the police.

Where They Go: Destination

Most runaways do not go far. Only about one-quarter leave the local area and few of these leave the state.⁴⁵ Juveniles who run away from care tend to travel farther and are more likely to leave the state.⁴⁶ The cities of New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles attract large numbers of out-of-state runaways.⁴⁷

Very few runaways identify "the street" as their initial destination when they run away from home or care. The most common intended destinations are the homes of friends or relatives. Often, parents or caretakers know where juveniles are staying.⁴⁸ Juveniles who stay away for longer periods of time tend to cycle through a series of temporary stays with friends and relatives, a practice called "couch surfing." Only when these resources are exhausted do they move out to the street. Although the proportion of runaways who live outside, in a public place, or in an abandoned building is relatively small, these juveniles are often in great peril and at risk of falling prey to predatory adults, drugs, and violent crime.⁴⁹ Police are most likely to encounter these juveniles, and they are the ones who inspire the greatest concern.



http://be.blogs.com/photosuncategorized/22612942850_468.jpg



Only about one quarter of runaways leave their local area. Those who choose to leave tend to be attracted to larger cities such as New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

How Long They Stay: Duration

About one-fifth of runaways return within 24 hours, and, after one week, three-quarters of all runaways have returned home or to care.⁵⁰ Less than 1 percent of runaways never return. Although many absences are short, the juveniles involved are not immune to the risks faced by those who spend longer periods of time away from home, particularly if they are not staying in a safe location.



What Happens While They Are Gone: Consequences

Once juveniles have left home or care, the variety and seriousness of harms they face depend on several factors, including:

- The juveniles' level of maturity
- The availability of safe accommodations
- The juveniles' companions and associates.

Survival and safety issues are fairly minimal for the large majority of juveniles who stay with friends or relatives.⁵¹ Over time, friends and relatives may become less willing to provide for the juveniles and the juveniles either return home or move to the street. Those living on the street face hazards that are self-imposed (substance use, consensual high-risk sexual activity), inflicted by others (victimization and exploitation), or driven by the need to obtain food, shelter, and money.

Juveniles living on the street develop survival strategies. Sometimes they access shelters or emergency care facilities; other times they are forced to settle for riskier arrangements such as staying with strangers who have apartments or living in abandoned buildings or on rooftops. Juveniles may shoplift, panhandle, steal, threaten, or use violence to get money from others.⁵² Although there is no consensus on whether the practice is widespread, some juveniles also engage in "survival sex," meaning they trade sex for food, shelter, drugs, or protection.⁵³ Sometimes, survival sex involves statutory rape, which has obvious implications for police.

Some acts of "survival sex" are consensual; however, some runaways living on the street are exploited by predatory adults and become involved in prostitution, pornography, and drug dealing.⁵⁴ In addition to being a precursor to running away, juveniles are often victims of physical and sexual assault while they are living on the street.⁵⁵



Runaways living on the street jeopardize themselves by using drugs. Illegal drugs are very accessible to those on the street, who tend to use them both as social lubricants and to self-medicate. Large numbers of juveniles on the street also engage in unprotected sexual activity.⁵⁷ These behaviors, coupled with the harms inflicted by others, create serious physical and mental health issues. Physical illnesses result from poor nutrition, poor hygiene, and exposure to the elements.⁵⁸ Given their high levels of intravenous drug use, shared drug paraphernalia, and high-risk sexual behaviors, juveniles on the street are vulnerable to HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases.⁵⁹ Finally, their stressful lives coupled with their troubled backgrounds make them susceptible to suicide, depression, and other mental illnesses.⁶⁰

Many runaways living on the street constantly fear victimization and struggle to meet their basic survival needs. Very little is known about the experiences of runaways who do not spend time on the street. In general, runaway experiences are not all bad. Some juveniles feel independent, autonomous, and free and are relieved to escape the pressures of family conflict and school. Being away from home often provides time to think and is useful for sorting out problems. Unfortunately, running away does not improve juveniles' emotional lives nor does it address the issues that made them want to leave home.⁶¹



How or If They Return

Most runaways eventually return to their homes, placements, or another safe alternative. Sometimes juveniles return on their own; sometimes they are located by a parent, guardian, friend, or relative and convinced to return; sometimes they are apprehended by police and brought home; and other times, their return is negotiated by runaway shelter or other social service working on their behalf. They may return with the hope of reconciling or because they are tired of their stressful life on the street.⁶²

Although shelters and other social services may negotiate the juveniles' return, families rarely receive the comprehensive services needed to resolve the issues causing the juveniles to flee in the first place. Some juveniles do not want to return home and avoid contact with services and authority figures so they are not forced to do so. Similarly, some parents blame the juveniles for running away and do not recognize their own contributions to the problem. In these situations, automatic or immediate reunification may place the juveniles at risk of continued harm.



Understanding Your Local Problem

The information provided above is only a generalized description of juvenile runaways and runaway episodes. You must combine the basic facts with a more specific understanding of your local problem. Analyzing the local problem carefully will help you design a more effective response strategy.

Asking the Right Questions

The following are some critical questions you should ask in analyzing your particular problem of juvenile runaways, even if the answers are not always readily available. Your answers to these and other questions will help you choose the most appropriate set of responses later. Most research on juvenile runaways is based on information reported by juveniles; very few studies examine parents' or caretakers' perspectives.⁶⁵ Both perspectives are needed to understand the local problem's dynamics, the available resources and barriers to using them, and the types of police responses most likely to impact the problem.

Many police contacts with runaways are not recorded systematically because they do not involve criminal behavior or are considered too minor. Unfortunately, information from these contacts is needed to craft effective responses. As a result, you should first determine what types of records are being kept and, if needed, develop additional procedures to capture the information needed to fully understand the interactions among police, runaways, and their parents or caretakers. Engaging social service partners in information gathering can help to mediate any negative reaction to police questioning.

Further, many runaways never encounter police, so you will need to collaborate with local social service providers and schools to answer many of the analysis questions. Although police will be directly involved with only a segment of the runaway population, complete information is required to develop a comprehensive array of responses.



Juveniles Who Run Away

- How many runaway episodes were reported to police in the past year? How many weren't? Why weren't they?
- Aside from investigating missing persons reports, how do police come in contact with runaways? How many juveniles are contacted by each method?
- What are the characteristics of juveniles who run away from home and care? How old are they? (There are important differences in maturity and independent living skills of juveniles ages 14 and younger, ages 15 and 16, and those ages 17 and older.) What race or ethnicity are the juveniles? What gender are they?
- What reasons do juveniles offer for running away?
- How many juveniles have run away multiple times?
- What prior contacts have police had with runaways, either as crime victims or suspects?

Parents

- What are the demographic and social characteristics of parents who report their child's runaway episode to police?
- What types of assistance do they expect police to provide? What other types of assistance (e.g., social services) are requested?
- What strategies do parents use to locate their children?
- How many of the missing persons reports are for repeat runaway episodes?
- What prior contacts have police had with parents of runaways?



Foster Parents/Facility Staff

- What proportion of runaway episodes is reported by substitute caretakers (e.g., foster parents, group home staff, etc.)?
- Are the reports evenly distributed across the various homes or facilities in the area, or do certain ones account for a larger share of missing persons reports?
- What are the homes' and facilities' policies for reporting juveniles who go missing?
- What prior contacts, related to runaways, have police had with foster parents or juvenile facility staff?

Runaway Episodes

- How far do runaways travel from home or care?
- Do they have an intended destination when they depart? What is it? Do they go there?
- What modes of transportation do runaways use?
- What proportion stays at the homes of friends or relatives?
- What proportion stays on the street? In what locations do they congregate? Do they try to avoid contact with adults?
- What times of the day, days of the week, or season are runaway episodes most likely to occur? Are there any peaks in police contacts?
- What kinds of experiences do runaways have? What are the key sources of danger?
- How do pimps or drug dealers approach juveniles living on the street? How can juveniles safely decline their offers to be involved?
- What proportion of runaways use illicit drugs? Which drugs? What purpose does their substance use appear to serve?
- Are runaways involved in selling drugs?
- What proportion of runaways is sexually active? Do they practice safer sex? If not, why not?



Offending

- What degree of involvement do runaways have in criminal behavior? What types of offenses do they commit?
- How many runaways are arrested? For what types of offenses?
- What reasons do juveniles give for their involvement in criminal behavior?
- What time of the day or day of the week are runaways most likely to commit crime?
- Are any businesses adversely affected by runaways?

Victimization

- To what extent are runaways crime victims while absent from home or care? How many are victims of property crime? How many are victims of violent crime?
- Who are the perpetrators?
- When and where do these victimizations occur?
- Are the runaways alone or in groups when victimized?
- Are there any locations that juveniles consider to be particularly dangerous?

Return

- What proportion of runaways is willing to return home or to care?
- What needs to happen for them to agree to return home?
- If they do not want to return home, what kinds of alternative arrangements do they prefer?
- What proportion of parents is not willing to allow their children to return home?
- For what proportion of juveniles is returning home a risk of harm?
- Of the juveniles who return home, how long were they absent?



- How did they return (e.g., returned on their own, escorted by police or other adults, etc.)? Was their return voluntary?
- What proportion of runaways report being punished upon their return?

Current Responses

- What is the police department's current policy for dealing with runaways? Are runaways ever held in secure detention facilities?
- What are the procedures for taking reports, attempting to locate runaways, and following up upon return?
- Once located by police, are juveniles permitted to refuse to return home?
- Other than taking juveniles into custody, how do police respond to runaways? Are any of these responses particularly effective?
- What social services are available to runaways? What role do police have in linking juveniles and families with these services?
- How many runaways use services designed to protect them from harm while on the street (e.g., outreach, shelters, etc.)? Which services? What are the barriers to access? Do juveniles think the services are credible?
- How many runaways use services designed to resolve the underlying family and personal conflicts that led to running away (e.g., counseling, family mediation or reunification services)? Which services? What are the barriers to access? Do juveniles think the services are credible?
- How satisfied are juveniles with the police response? What would they like police to do differently?
- How satisfied are parents with the police response? What would they like police to do differently?
- How satisfied are social service providers with the police response? What would they like police to do differently?



Measuring Your Effectiveness

Measurement allows you to determine to what degree your efforts have succeeded, and suggests how you might modify your responses if they are not producing the intended results. You should take measures of your problem before you implement responses, to determine how serious the problem is, and after you implement them, to determine whether they have been effective. All measures should be taken in both the target area and the surrounding area. (For more detailed guidance on measuring effectiveness, see the companion guide to this series, *Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers.*)

The problem of juvenile runaways is unlike other problems confronting police because the behavior indicates complex family troubles. Making a measurable impact on these underlying causes will require interventions that go far beyond those implemented by police. Police responses are unlikely to impact the underlying causes and instead are likely to focus on mitigating the harm that comes to or is caused by runaways while they are absent from home or care. Police are also likely to seek to shift responsibility for addressing the problem to social service agencies that are better equipped to offer such assistance.

The following are potentially useful measures of the effectiveness of responses to juveniles who have run away from home or substitute care. You can use the following “outcome” measures to determine the impact of the responses on the level of the problem:

- Reduced number of juveniles who run away from home or care
- Reduced number of repeat runaway episodes reported by parents or caretakers
- Increased number of runaways staying in safe locations (e.g., home of a friend or relative)
- Reduced number of runaways staying in dangerous locations (e.g., streets, abandoned buildings)



- Increased number of runaways accessing crisis services designed to reduce the harms associated with living on the street (e.g., shelters)
- Decreased number of runaways who report being victimized while absent from home
- Decreased number of runaways involved in criminal activity while absent from home
- Decreased number of runaways admitted to secure detention facilities
- Increased number of juveniles successfully reunited with parents or caretakers or increased number of juveniles placed in safe alternative living arrangements.

You can use the following “process” measures to identify the extent to which selected responses have been implemented as designed:

- Increased number of families who have participated in support or mediation to prevent runaway episodes
- Increased number of juveniles using hotlines and other counseling resources instead of running away
- Reduced number of runaway episodes reported to police by parents or caretakers (increased reports may be a positive indicator initially if you determine that parents have been reluctant to report episodes in which their children are at risk of harm)
- Decreased number of inappropriate missing persons reports from foster care homes or group homes
- Reduced number of police hours spent processing or transporting runaways once they are located
- Increased number of juveniles who receive follow-up services after they return from a runaway episode.



Responses to the Problem of Juvenile Runaways

Your analysis of your local problem should give you a better understanding of the factors contributing to it. Once you have analyzed your local problem and established a baseline for measuring effectiveness, you should consider possible responses to address the problem.

The following response strategies provide a foundation of ideas for addressing your particular problem. These strategies are drawn from a variety of research studies and police reports. Several of these strategies may apply to your community's problem. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem. Do not limit yourself to considering what police can do: carefully consider whether others in your community share responsibility for the problem and can help police better respond to it.



§Refer to “Shifting and Sharing Responsibility for Public Safety Problems” for more information.

General Considerations for an Effective Response Strategy

Although more likely to focus on minimizing the harms that come to or are caused by runaways while they are absent from home, police can also be effective advocates in efforts to address the reasons juveniles run away (e.g., physical and sexual abuse) and to improve the quality of services designed to respond to juveniles upon their return (e.g., family mediation and preservation). Most researchers and practitioners agree that social service providers, rather than police, are primarily responsible for addressing this issue. Therefore, part of the police response may be to shift responsibility to other agencies better equipped to render services to runaways and their families.[§]

That said, police have a legitimate role in locating juveniles reported missing and in ensuring runaways’ safety when they spend time on the street.⁶⁶ Police receive missing persons reports from parents, foster care providers, and group home staff. Further, their 24-hour street presence means they are most likely to encounter runaways, whether reported missing or not. Police should partner with other agencies to address the issue effectively, and a variety of agency-level responses will be required.

Agency-Level Responses

1. **Appointing a local runaway coordinator.** Given the overlap in responsibility between the police department and social service providers, some state and local jurisdictions have found it helpful to appoint a runaway coordinator. The coordinator convenes interagency meetings, plans and coordinates services, manages service delivery contracts, and monitors outcomes. Although they may or may not craft formal interagency protocols, the coordinators build bridges for these agreements to evolve.



2. **Collaborating with social service agencies.** Although police may locate and secure the return of juveniles who have run away, collaborating with other agencies can reduce the amount of police time spent on runaways and can ensure juveniles receive appropriate services.[§] A framework should be developed for each agency's response to reported runaway episodes, along with procedures for assisting runaways who are identified through other means. Such collaborations have helped jurisdictions comply with federal mandates prohibiting the secure detention of status offenders. Involving social service agencies in returning juveniles to their homes or placements can also defuse potentially volatile domestic situations.^{§§}

These agreements should be formalized into memorandums of understanding between police and social service agencies. In addition to specific protocols for transporting youth and providing services, these agreements can also create specific protections for confidentiality and privacy, when appropriate. Formalizing these agreements will also promote sustainability so the interagency relationships and protocols are not dependent on the individuals who created them.

3. **Developing joint protocols with foster care providers and group homes.** Those providing substitute care are sometimes quick to contact police when juveniles have not returned to the facility by a specified time.^{§§§} Many times, juveniles are simply late, rather than missing. Further, staff may not assess juveniles' level of risk before identifying the event as an emergency. To avoid overwhelming police resources, some jurisdictions use protocols specifying a threshold for police contact when juveniles do not return to the facility as expected (e.g., call police only after midnight, only when juveniles have left the center without permission, or only after staff have failed to locate the juveniles). The protocol should categorize the various types of absences and state required procedures for each situation.⁶⁷ The circumstances surrounding the absences should be monitored and re-categorized as necessary.

[§]The Phoenix Police Department and the Tumbleweed Center initiated an outreach program designed to reduce police time spent managing runaways and to provide immediate and long-term assistance to runaways. When police come in contact with runaways, they connect with Tumbleweed staff using a crisis line, pager, or special police radio call received by staff monitoring the radio channel. Tumbleweed staff meet juveniles at the precinct and provide emergency shelter, transportation home, and follow-up services with the family. See www.tumbleweed.org and Posner (1994) for more information.

^{§§}See Posner (1994) for a more complete discussion of the many forms, benefits, and considerations for police-social service collaborations.

^{§§§}Through an analysis of call-for-service data, the Fresno Police Department found that 40 substitute care providers made a total of 1,024 calls in a single year. Five providers were responsible for 50 percent of the calls. Joint protocols and training from centers who manage juveniles' absences without police contact were employed to reduce the high utilization rates of the five providers (Fresno Police Department 1996).



§Adapted from Florida Department of Children and Families (2002).

Linking foster care providers and group home staff with community police officers also has benefits:⁶⁸

- Police get to know the juveniles informally and possibly having more leverage in discouraging them from running away.
 - Police develop a greater appreciation for the types of problems juveniles and staff face.
 - Police respond to requests for assistance more consistently and follow up more meaningfully.
4. **Cross-training staff from multiple agencies.** Impacting the trajectory of runaway episodes—the triggers, the departure, the potential risks, and the return—will involve coordinated interaction between police and social service providers. This interaction should rest on mutual understanding and respect for each agency’s objectives and core philosophy. Multidisciplinary training sessions help staff understand the complexity of the issue and the need for a partnership to address it. Training topics should include:[§]
- Reasons why juveniles run away from home and substitute care
 - Police investigative techniques and available tools,
 - Child abuse reporting laws
 - Policies surrounding confidentiality
 - Situations when secure detention may be required to protect the juveniles from harm
 - Juvenile-centered treatment philosophy and advocacy,
 - Locally available resources and services
 - Procedures for interagency communication.



5. **Sharing information.** Agencies must share relevant information about the juveniles, precipitating factors, associates, and companions for an effective response. Interagency agreements should specify the types of information needed to ensure the safety of juveniles who have run away and should develop procedures for efficient interagency communication. These interagency agreements can be difficult to negotiate when agency partners have different confidentiality standards.

Parents are important partners in information sharing. They have the right to access information that agency staff may not be able to obtain. Some jurisdictions obtain parents' written consent to access records from schools, social services, and other agencies.[§]

[§]Takas and Bass (1996) provide a sample parental consent form that features clear, simple language and specifies the types of records police may use. Police should work with local agencies to ensure the form meets their requirements for accessing information. Guidelines for approaching agency staff to request information are also provided.

^{§§}Refer to National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (2005) for a sample policy incorporating these risk factors.

6. **Assessing risk.** If the primary role of police is to reduce the harm that comes to or is caused by runaways, they need a reliable way to assess the risks facing juveniles who are absent from home or substitute care. Cases should not be classified based solely on age or where the juvenile stays, but rather using a set of locally defined conditions that, when met, will trigger a priority police response. Common risk factors include:^{§§}

- *Ages 13 and younger.* Children ages 13 and younger have less sophisticated decision-making skills and cannot protect themselves from exploitation and older juveniles.
- *Out of safety zone for age, physical, or mental condition.* This zone will vary depending on the juveniles' characteristics. Juveniles with cognitive impairments may have difficulty communicating their needs and providing information required to access help. They are particularly at risk of exploitation.
- *Alcohol or drug dependent.* Substance use compromises judgment and the ability to protect oneself from harm.



- *At risk of foul play or sexual exploitation.* The risk level will depend on the types of illegal activity occurring in the community, where the juveniles are believed to be staying, and the juveniles' past experiences and maturity level.
- *Believed to be in life-threatening situation.* This assessment will vary depending on the places the juveniles frequent and their experiences during past runaway episodes.
- *Absent more than 24 hours before reported to police.* A delay in reporting may indicate parental neglect, but could simply be a misunderstanding of the law. Many parents believe missing persons reports require a waiting period.
- *In the company of dangerous companions.* Some juveniles stay with older adults who may exploit their vulnerability; others associate with peers who use drugs or are involved in criminal activity.
- *Inconsistent with normal behavior patterns.* An out-of-character departure may signal acute distress or the possibility of foul play.

Classifying juveniles accordingly enables police to focus their resources on those juveniles at highest risk of being harmed and those most likely to commit crime while absent from home or care. Agreement from local partners about the types of cases to which police will dedicate resources also helps to promote a positive police image.



Specific Responses to Reduce Juvenile Runaways

The specific responses to juvenile runaways are organized according to time sequence—before the juveniles run away, when the juveniles depart home or care, while the juveniles are absent, and when or if the juveniles return. Many things can be done to address the reasons juveniles run away from home or care, such as offering support and guidance to parents and improving the quality of institutional care. A vast research base details the variety of family counseling, case management, and social work strategies that are effective in preventing runaway episodes, assisting juveniles and families with underlying dysfunction, and easing conflict upon return. These social service-based strategies are not reviewed at length here because police will have little direct involvement in such things.

Before They Run

- 7. Providing prevention materials when responding to calls for service.** Analyzing local call-for-service data may reveal that certain families have high levels of parent-child conflict. Responding officers can provide these families with information on conflict resolution strategies and resources for additional parent and juvenile support.[§] Referrals should include parent support services, advice and counseling programs and school-based support for juveniles, and family preservation and mediation services. The officer who responds to missing persons reports can provide similar information, along with guidance to help parents locate their children. Police efforts to generate awareness can be supplemented by school-based information campaigns designed to reach the larger audience of families whose children may run away but for whom police contact is not initiated.^{§§}

[§]See National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (2004), New York State, Missing and Exploited Children Clearinghouse (2001) for examples of brochures that police could offer when responding to calls for service or to a missing person report. See www.ontario.childfind.ca for an additional example. Click “Programs & Services” and then click the “Teen Runaway Prevention Program” link.

^{§§}The National Runaway Switchboard has developed a prevention curriculum for use in schools that covers coping strategies and a frank discussion of the risks juveniles commonly face when they run away. See www.nrscrisisline.org and click the “Training & Prevention” link. Then click the “Runaway Prevention Curriculum” link to download the full curriculum.



www.nomads1800.com/streetart/images/confidential.gif



Hotlines refer juveniles to social services to shield them from the harms involved in living on the street. If desired, they also help runaways to contact their parents.

8. **Using respite care.** Runaway episodes are often triggered by escalating conflict at home that could be soothed if the family members were temporarily separated. Rather than using expensive detention facilities, police may transport juveniles to a respite care facility (e.g., a host home or small respite center).⁷⁰ During a short stay (a few days to a few weeks), juveniles and their parents participate in counseling to begin to resolve the source of conflict and prevent future crises. Because of the short length of stay, respite care is considerably more cost-effective than placement in other juvenile institutions.⁷¹

When They Run

9. **Using “Missing From Care” forms.** When local protocols dictate that juveniles’ absences from care should be reported to police (see response #3 above), substitute care staff can provide police with information designed to help locate the juveniles and to highlight relevant risk factors. Relevant information includes:⁷²
 - physical description
 - recent photograph
 - distinguishing marks, tattoos, or piercings
 - date and time last seen
 - suspected destination and companions



- address of family and other known contacts
- pertinent details from previous runaway episodes
- other relevant risk factors.

§See Simons and Willie (2000) and Steidel (2000) for detailed discussions of investigation techniques useful for making this determination

www.criminaljustice.state.ny.us

MISSING

 Nancy Jo Beaumont Date of Birth: 4/27/75 Missing From: Amherst, NY Date Missing: 7/17/88 Unknown Circumstances	 Suzanne Lynn Date of Birth: 10/27/78 Missing From: Albany State University Albany, NY Date Missing: 3/27/88 Unknown Circumstances	 Karen Wilson Date of Birth: 3/13/83 Missing From: Albany State University Albany, NY Date Missing: 3/27/88 Unknown Circumstances	 Mary Anne Wessowski Date of Birth: 6/24/85 Missing From: Chateaufort, NY Date Missing: 9/15/77 Unknown Circumstances
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< < Long Term Cases > >

 **NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services**
Missing & Exploited Children Clearinghouse
1-800-FIND-KID
www.criminaljustice.state.ny.us

George E. Pataki
Governor

05/10/92

Missing person's posters can help to locate juveniles

10. Determining whether absences are voluntary or involuntary.

Sometimes it is not clear whether juveniles' departures from home or care were voluntary, whether juveniles were abducted, or whether an injury prevented juveniles from returning home when expected. Some departments require police to assume juveniles are in jeopardy until they can confirm significant facts to the contrary.⁷³ A variety of investigation techniques can be used to determine whether voluntary departures are consistent with children's behavioral patterns.[§] This classification allows police to respond to cases with an appropriate level of urgency.



11. Diverting cases to a community-based organization.

Following a missing persons report, police can refer parents to a program that provides support during runaway episodes and that negotiates the juveniles' return when appropriate. Using contact information provided by police, program staff initiate contact with parents. Twenty-four hour availability and free services may encourage parents to use the resource.⁷⁴ Similarly, when runaways are apprehended, police can escort the juveniles to the program facility and notify the parents. Program staff receive the juveniles, await the parents' arrival, and negotiate the return and follow-up care, allowing police to return to duty.

While They Are Absent From Home or Care

12. Referring juveniles to appropriate social service providers.

Police encounter juveniles who have run away from home or care under many conditions. Those living on the street are at particular risk of harm and should be encouraged to access a variety of services to address their immediate and long-term needs. Outreach efforts should inform juveniles about the range of available services, which should include:

- Short-term shelter programs that provide safe overnight accommodations
- Drop-in services that provide food, clothing, crisis counseling, and medical attention
- Services that help juveniles contact their parents, if desired
- Counseling services for special issues such as sexual orientation, pregnancy, substance abuse, and mental illness
- Long-term counseling for family mediation and reunification
- Independent living programs for juveniles who cannot return home.



Juveniles who have run away from home or care often do not trust adults and authority figures and are easily deterred from seeking the services they need. Therefore, program credibility is essential and can be enhanced by:⁷⁵

- Involving juveniles in the design and operation of programs
- Ensuring staff honor their commitments to juveniles,
- Confronting juveniles with the consequences of running away and challenging them to take responsibility
- Ensuring confidentiality
- Avoiding labeling and blaming juveniles.

13. **Implementing specialized patrol.** Runaways who spend time on the streets are generally at higher risk of victimization and criminal involvement. Increasing the visibility of patrol in locations where juveniles congregate may deter criminal activity and also create an opportunity for police to contact and refer juveniles to services as needed.[§] Specialized runaway units can also handle runaways contacted by other officers who lack the training or resources to intervene effectively.⁷⁶ Further, specialized runaway officers can coordinate with other units investigating those who exploit runaways.

14. **Providing safe locations for juveniles.** Local agencies and businesses (such as fire departments, libraries, community centers, convenience stores, and restaurants) can provide a temporary safe location for runaways who want to escape the street and other dangerous situations. A quiet and secure place to make contact with local services can mitigate the harms juveniles face while on their own.^{§§}

15. **Using secure placement when appropriate.** In a limited number of circumstances, secure placement may be needed to protect juveniles at immediate risk of serious harm. Suicidal juveniles or those engaging in high-risk behaviors (e.g., prostitution, reckless drug use, etc.) may benefit from short-term secure placements until appropriate long-term services can be mobilized. Secure placements can be found in the juvenile justice (e.g., juvenile detention center) and mental health (e.g., hospital) systems and should be extremely time limited.

[§]The Port Authority Police's Youth Services Unit patrols New York City's bus terminal in search of runaways traveling by bus (Eliques 1984). The team includes a plainclothes officer is supported by a uniformed officer and a social worker who connect juveniles with a variety of services operated by social services and community-based organizations. In 2004, the Youth Services Unit made over 4,500 contacts with juveniles found loitering in the bus terminal, 225 of whom were determined to be runaways (Port Authority Youth Services Unit 2004). Rather than tying up police time to transport the juvenile, the Youth Services Unit works in cooperation with Children's Services staff who provide transportation as needed.

^{§§} The YMCA's Project Safe Place is a national network of businesses and agencies committed to providing a comfortable and secure place for juveniles to make contact with runaway service providers. Juveniles walk into a location displaying the "Safe Place" logo and are immediately put in contact with Safe Place volunteers who come to the location and help juveniles plan their next steps. Nearly 14,000 Safe Place locations nationwide have provided services to nearly 80,000 juveniles since 1983. See www.safeplaceservices.org/index.shtml for more information.



When or If They Return

§Greyhound's Home Free program operates in partnership with the National Runaway Switchboard. Juveniles access the services by calling the toll-free switchboard, where staff coordinate issuing the ticket. See www.nrs Crisisline.org/youth-teens/home_free.html for more information.

§§The Alternative Solutions to Running Away (ASTRA) program operates in partnership with Gloucestershire, U.K. police, who refer families who made missing persons reports to the local program provider. The goal of the program is to reduce the incidence of repeat runaway episodes, which is accomplished by providing confidential, individual support to juveniles upon their return home and creating an action plan to help resolve the underlying problems (Great Britain, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2002).

16. **Using transportation aides and free transportation services.** Police can conserve valuable time and resources by using civilian volunteers to transport juveniles to runaway shelters and other services. These resources are most useful when volunteers are on call 24 hours a day and when multiple volunteers located throughout the jurisdiction are on call at any given time.⁷⁷ A few national airlines and bus companies offer free tickets to runaways from out of state who want to return home but cannot afford to do so.[§]
17. **Referring to aftercare services as needed.** Despite the likelihood that family problems triggered the runaway episode, most juveniles and families do not use any services when the juveniles return home.⁷⁸ When police transport juveniles home or back to care, active referrals for follow-up services can help to resolve family problems and prevent subsequent runaway episodes. Rather than depending on the families to initiate contact, police can submit families' names to a local service provider who makes contact with families and offers services.^{§§} Parents who receive such contacts often express relief and gratitude for the offer of help.⁷⁹
18. **Interviewing juveniles upon return.** Interviews with juveniles upon their return can reveal important information for addressing family problems and preventing subsequent runaway episodes. Providing juveniles opportunities to talk and to have their feelings taken seriously sets an important example for parents about including juveniles in making decisions. Most practitioners agree that police should not conduct these interviews.⁸⁰ Juveniles often do not trust authority figures, may be reluctant to disclose important facts, and are unlikely to feel that police can be impartial. Staff from local runaway programs are ideally suited to fill this role.



Sample Questions for Follow-Up Interviews with Runaways

1. How many times have you run away? (ask for details of events, experiences, interactions, and relationships while absent from home or care)
2. What has gone on at home that contributed to your running away?
3. Does anyone drink or use drugs?
4. Does anyone fight?
5. What is a good day for the family? What is a bad day?
6. Does anyone ever hurt you? (carefully question about physical and sexual abuse)
7. How much control do you or other people have over the things that made you run away? (ask how predictable this type of behavior is, who is responsible for the situation, how changeable those behaviors or events are)
8. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the safest, how safe is it for you to return home?
9. What would have to be different for you to want to stay home? (ask if things have always been this way at home and if not, when they changed and what made them change)
10. What would you need to do to make this change happen?
11. What would other people have to do to make this change happen?
12. How possible are these changes?
13. What do you want most for yourself?
14. What do you think you need first to get what you want?
15. If you were in my place, what is the most important thing to say or do for a juvenile like you?

Adapted from Janus et al. (1987)



§Connecticut state law requires police to confer with a juvenile before informing parents or guardians of the juvenile's location. Police can transport a juvenile home only with his or her permission (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2003).

Responses With Limited Effectiveness

19. **Handling cases over the telephone.** An accurate assessment of the risks involved in juveniles' absences is required for a sound response. This assessment is best made in person, where access to juveniles' parents, siblings, and personal effects can help police discover the nuances of each situation.
20. **Confining juveniles in secure detention facilities.** The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 prohibits the secure confinement of status offenders, except in extreme circumstances to ensure their safety. Not only is the routine confinement of runaways illegal, it also does not address the underlying issues and can inflame tensions between the juveniles and their families.⁸¹ Secure detention is expensive and bed space is limited; therefore, it should be used only in response to a legitimate public or individual safety concern.
21. **Forcing juveniles to return home.** Given the serious family dysfunction underlying many runaway episodes, forcing juveniles to return home may place them at further risk of harm and subsequent runaway episodes. Professionals agree that reunification is realistic for only a portion of runaways.⁸² Blanket policies requiring juveniles to be returned to their homes can be dangerous. § Their absence from home is not necessarily their most serious or important problem, and an exclusive focus on reunification may conceal their real needs.⁸³
22. **Restricting privileges upon return.** Responding to a runaway episode with harsh restrictions and punishment is likely to exacerbate the problem, particularly among those who run away from substitute care placements.⁸⁴ Instead, foster care parents and group home staff should negotiate new boundaries and privileges (e.g., additional weekend home passes) that address the issues underlying the runaway episode (e.g., desire to maintain ties with biological parents).



Appendix: Summary of Responses to Juvenile Runaways

The table below summarizes the responses to juvenile runaways, the mechanism by which they are intended to work, the conditions under which they ought to work best, and some factors you should consider before implementing a particular response. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem.

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
General Considerations for an Effective Response Strategy					
<i>Agency-Level Responses</i>					
1.	24	Appointing a local runaway coordinator	Fortifies interagency connections, ensures action plans are implemented	...the coordinator has contacts at each agency and specific expertise in runaway issues	Building relationships and establishing credibility takes time; may not reflect current staffing priorities
2.	25	Collaborating with social service agencies	Attends to immediate safety issues as well as more complex issues underlying runaway behavior	...social service agencies take responsibility for negotiating the return of juveniles' and agency confidentiality policies are compatible	Crafting formalized agreements takes time; protocols lose their effectiveness if they are not supported by a range of follow-up services; differing treatment philosophies among agencies make consensus difficult to achieve; most programs have limited service capacities that may not be able to absorb increased referrals



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
3.	25	Developing joint protocols with foster care providers and group homes	Classifies absences according to severity; determines appropriate threshold for police involvement; conserves police resources	...substitute care providers and police agree on the appropriate priority level for each type of absence, inexperienced staff and officers are trained to classify cases accurately, and a risk assessment protocol is used	If absences are misclassified as a low priority, may fail to protect juveniles from harm and may create a liability issue; protocols require consistency across a potentially large number of partners
4.	26	Cross-training staff from multiple agencies	Increases quality of interaction with runaways and families; encourages mutual respect for differing agency objectives and mandates	...the training curriculum is jointly developed by representatives from agencies involved	Training is not effective as a stand-alone strategy
5.	27	Sharing information	Improves ability to serve juveniles and families appropriately	...agencies balance need for information with respect for confidentiality	Staff and officers must have a strategy for dealing with a potentially large volume of information; agreements to share information may deter some juveniles from revealing important information
6.	27	Assessing risk	Classifies juveniles according to risk of harm and deploys limited police resources accordingly	...police obtain interagency agreement on the types of cases to which resources will be dedicated and responding officers are trained in risk assessment procedures	Juveniles who do not meet the threshold for police intervention may also be in jeopardy or may also threaten public safety



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
Specific Responses to Juvenile Runaways					
<i>Before They Run</i>					
7.	29	Providing prevention materials when responding to calls for service	Offers assistance to families who are at risk of a runaway episode	...a sufficient array of resources is available to support parents and juveniles	Family engagement with services is not guaranteed; information does not reach families in need who do not come in contact with police
8.	30	Using respite care	Gives family members a break from each other so immediate crisis can be resolved without a runaway episode	...professional counselors help family develop coping strategies to avert future crises and there is political support for placement alternatives to juvenile hall	Respite care must have 24-hour availability; family reunification is not always safe or desirable
<i>When They Run</i>					
9.	30	Using "Missing From Care" forms	Improves quality of police investigation by highlighting relevant facts	...the form is promptly submitted to correct police department representative	Staff time spent completing may be unnecessary if juveniles return shortly after departure
10.	31	Determining whether absences are voluntary or involuntary	Ensures time-sensitive responses to abduction are implemented when necessary	...police are well-trained in investigating missing persons reports and parents or staff are able to provide sufficient information about juveniles' disappearances	If absences are misclassified, may fail to protect juveniles and may create liability issues



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
11.	32	Diverting cases to a community-based organization	Transfers responsibility for family services to an agency better equipped to provide them; addresses underlying causes of problem	...program staff are available 24 hours a day, services are free, and program staff handle all processing and paperwork	Staffing 24-hour programs can be difficult and expensive
<i>While They Are Absent From Home or Care</i>					
12.	32	Referring juveniles to appropriate social service providers	Transfers responsibility for juveniles and family services to an agency better equipped to provide them; addresses underlying causes of problem	...full array of services is available, services are credible and easily accessible, and confidentiality is maintained	Adequate funding for services is difficult to ensure; police involvement may deter juveniles from using services



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
13.	33	Implementing specialized patrol	Increases likelihood of detection for juveniles involved in criminal activity; may deter those wishing to exploit juveniles; provides opportunity to refer juveniles to services that can address underlying problem	...police approach juveniles in non-threatening manner or allow social service workers to take the lead, runaways are easily identifiable and tend to cluster in certain locations, and sufficient resources are available to divert juveniles from juvenile justice involvement	Specialized patrols consume police manpower that could be used to address more serious threats to public safety; police involvement may deter juveniles from using services
14.	33	Providing safe locations for juveniles	Removes juveniles from dangerous locations; encourages contact with services that can address underlying problems	...program is well publicized and service staff respond immediately	Services will reach only juveniles who actively seek help, and many runaways do not; must include follow-up services with families for meaningful change to occur
15.	33	Using secure placement when appropriate	Removes juveniles from dangerous locations or situations	...the placement is not within the juvenile justice system and stabilization is achieved quickly so juveniles can be released to long-term care	Secure placements are expensive; overly broad use of secure confinement violates federal status offender deinstitutionalization mandates



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
<i>When or If They Return</i>					
16.	34	Using transportation aides and free transportation services	Transports juveniles home without consuming police resources	...services are easily accessible to police and program staff respond promptly	Workload is sporadic; recruiting volunteers can be difficult; process to secure free transportation can be cumbersome
17.	34	Referring to aftercare services as needed	Transfers responsibility for juveniles and family services to an agency better equipped to provide them; addresses underlying causes of problem	...police have range of referral options, multiple efforts are made to engage family in treatment, and both juveniles and parents have advocates working on their behalf	Parents who are not particularly concerned about their children's absence are not likely to engage with services
18.	34	Interviewing juveniles upon return	Gathers information that can be helpful when responding to subsequent runaway episodes; gives juveniles an opportunity to voice concerns	...interviews are not conducted by police, interviewer takes time to establish rapport, juveniles are interviewed shortly after their return, and multiple interviewers are available so juveniles can select someone with whom they are comfortable	Juveniles may not disclose relevant information; information revealed must be acted upon for process to remain credible



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
<i>Responses With Limited Effectiveness</i>					
19.	37	Handling cases over the telephone	Assumes quality investigation can be accomplished without personal contact		Information may lack important details required for accurate risk assessment; suggests to parents that case is not being taken seriously
20.	37	Confining in secure detention facilities	Assumes all runaways are a danger to themselves or public safety		Most juveniles are not a threat to themselves or others; secure detention bed space is limited and expensive; does not address underlying issues; can inflame family tensions
21.	37	Forcing juveniles to return home	Assumes reunification is safe and appropriate for all juveniles and that all parents will welcome their children home		Returning home may place the juveniles at further risk of harm; may increase the likelihood of subsequent runaway episodes
22.	37	Restricting privileges upon return	Assumes juveniles will obey new rules		Punitive responses can exacerbate the problem and trigger subsequent runaway episodes; may reinforce juveniles' perception that parents or caretakers do not take concerns seriously; does not address underlying issues



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