

Why youth run

Many youth are trying to become more independent. Relationships with friends are very important and they spend less time with family or adults. Youth may not feel a sense of connection to their caregivers and a sense of loss regarding the biological family. He or she may be confused about who to connect with and may not feel safe. These youth often are at risk of running away. For specific characteristics of youth who are at risk of running see; “Who Is at Risk for Running Away” tip sheet.

What you can do

Engaging the youth in simple, everyday activities can reinforce the connection between you and the teen and can be key in preventing runs. Make special times a part of the daily schedule, but take advantage of routine activities that show you care.

- **Develop a youth run prevention plan:** You as a caregiver will help the social worker and youth design an individual plan which focuses on the youth’s run triggers and provides interventions that will break the behavior cycle that leads to running. As part of this plan you will develop a run prevention plan that could include regular check-ins with the youth throughout the day. The check-ins may help the youth to process feelings and discuss any thoughts of running.
- **Provide sense of normalcy:** Foster youth should be treated the same as biological children. An example could be including the youth in family vacations and gatherings. Encourage the youth to participate in social functions at school, community centers, and other activities.
- **Support a sense of belonging and safety:** Include foster youth in family activities. Have clear house rules that apply to all children in the home. Promote an environment of caring and support.
- **Have family meals:** Try to sit down and have family meals nightly. If not, include one weekly family dinner night that accommodates the youth’s schedule.
- **Share ordinary time:** Look for everyday opportunities to bond with the youth. This could be while driving to appointments or walking dogs. Offer the youth a chance to talk about what’s on his or her mind.
- **Get involved, be involved, and stay involved:** Attend the youth’s school activities such as sports, events, or practices. Ask about homework and school projects and help when needed. Look for chances to learn and support the youth’s hobbies and interests.
- **Be interested:** Show the youth you care about their ideas, feelings and experiences. If you listen to what they say, you’ll get a better sense of the guidance and support they need. Get to know the youth’s friends and friends’ parents when possible.
- **Set clear limits:** Youth need guidance, but remember to involve them in setting rules and consequences. Make sure consequences are related to the behavior and be consistent in following through. Choose your battles. Try to provide choices in the matters that are less important.
- **Let youth have a voice and choice:** Let the youth express their opinions and whenever possible make decisions regarding their life. Be flexible and increase their responsibilities when appropriate.
- **Provide meaningful activities and opportunities:** Helping youth gain skills he or she will need in the future shows you are invested in their life and achievements. Be supportive and involved in their Independent Living Plan.
- **Safety Plan:** Provide youth with resources to use if they decide to run. Include a hotline number to call, place to go to be safe, sleep, eat. (See Resources For Youth Who Run Tips)

Your words and actions help youth feel secure. Don’t forget to say and show how much you care.