

March 2009

SAFETY TIP OF THE MONTH

SAFETY OF RUNAWAY CHILDREN

All too often runaways are assumed not to be at significant risk away from home. However, the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Thrownaway Children (NISMART) found that many runaways engage in criminal activity; associate with a "violent" person; use hard drugs (or associate with someone known to be abusing drugs); or are sexually assaulted or engage in sexual activity (for money, drugs, food or shelter) during the course of the "episode".

So as a worker for the Division, how do you determine if a child is thinking of running, and what are you to do when a child runs?

Signs of a potential runaway situation include aggressive verbal exchanges, unexpected outpouring of repressed emotion and a lack of compromise. This aggressive behavior is of increased concern when the child is thought to be interacting with persons



If you have a child on your caseload that runs away, see the CWM, Section 3, Chapter 4, Attachment D for procedures on the Runaway Child Protocol.

involved with drugs and alcohol or lacking supervision.

Some teens will hint, others will outright threaten family; placement providers or workers with running.

Causes of these signs are often associated with forms of child abuse; substance abuse; death; divorce or separation from a parent or sibling; or romantic issues, which could be internet related.

Therefore, children in foster care are more likely to run away than children who live at home. Chances that children will runaway are highest in the first few

months after placement and older children are more likely to run away than younger ones.

To help these troubled youth, workers must be supportive and non-judgmental. Know that most often runaways go to the homes of a friend or family member; however chronic runaways can end up going farther away as they run out of places locally to stay.

For more information or for educational help, check out the National Runaway Switchboard's site online.

Additional Information

- Just in case... Guidelines in case your child is or might someday be a runaway http://www.missin-gkids.com/en_US/publications/NC15.pdf
- Protective Service Alert email information to: DSS.CD.PSA@dss.mo.gov to send statewide or to other state child protective agencies. See CWM Section 3, Chapter 4, Attachment E for more information
- National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) 1-800-RUNAWAY, or www.1800runaway.org
- Missing & Exploited Children Clearinghouse 1-800-Find-Kid (1-800-346-3543)