

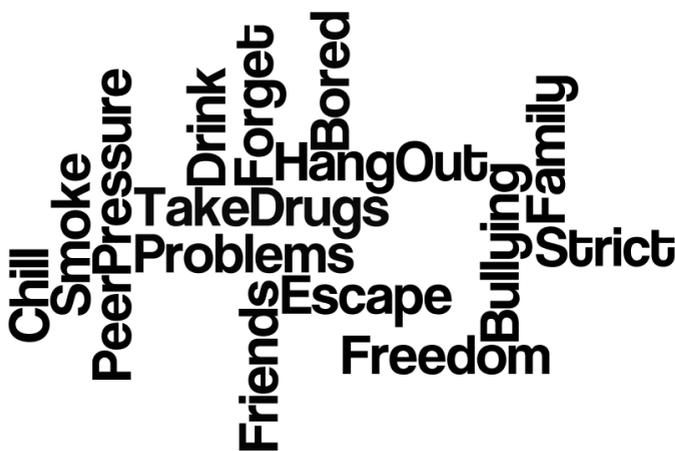
# Running away – what we say!

If you are a young person who is thinking about running away or going missing, this information is for you. This guide will help you think through your options, includes information about where you can get support and gives you advice on staying safe.

This guide is based on the experiences and advice of young people who have either thought about running away or who have run away, and who are members of [What Works for Us](#) a group of young people who have experience of sexual exploitation<sup>1</sup>. These young people worked with the charity [Missing People](#) to write this guidance. Missing People provide free, confidential and 24/7 help to thousands of young people through their helpline which you can call or text on 116 000.

In the guidance you will see word clouds – these show the main issues young people talked about when they shared their experiences to help develop this guidance.

## Why are you thinking about running away?



You might be thinking about running away for LOTS of different reasons. You might want to go because

- Your mum and dad are fighting
- You think your family is messed up
- You want to be with your boyfriend or girlfriend but your parents/carers don't like them
- Things at home are so bad that you can't go back there
- You think your parents/carers are too strict or that they treat you unfairly.

Maybe you are planning to leave home to be with your FRIENDS. They may be encouraging you to stay away from home so that you can do what you want. Your friends may be older than you are and have more freedom than you. You might feel that your parents/carers treat you like a child and that if you run away then you can smoke, booze, take drugs and do things that they won't let you. Perhaps you are bored and just want to chill out with your mates and have a laugh. You might want to leave home to be with someone you have met online.

1. "Child sexual exploitation is illegal activity by people who have power over young people and use it to sexually abuse them" (Barnardo's: [Child sexual exploitation](#))

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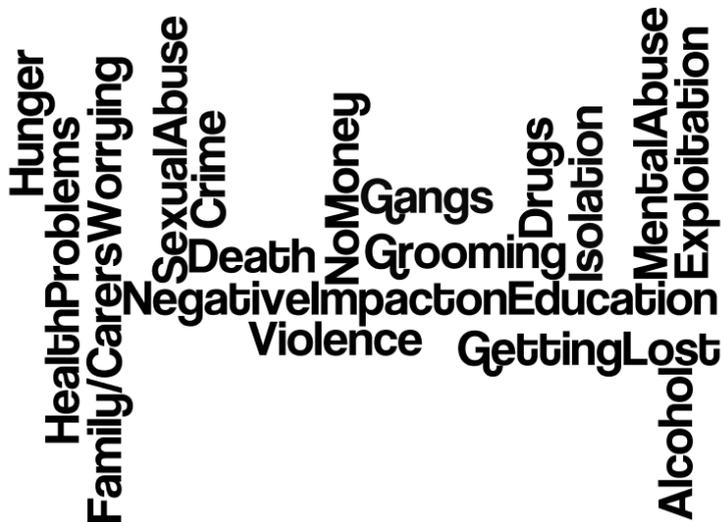
You might also have other PROBLEMS and feel like running away is a good way to escape them. You may have tried to get help from someone about a problem but they didn't believe you or didn't take you seriously.

### Our experiences

*"Mine and my mum's relationship was very volatile and still is. Her drug habit put a lot of pressure on me to care for my two younger brothers, but once my brother turned 13 I knew I would be OK. I just couldn't stand living with her!"*

*"I go out and stay all night with friends. Some of my friends ask us to stay out all night and say only come with us if you can stay out all night. Some of my friends can only come out late at night as they say they are very busy during the day. Sometimes we don't go home because we are in a bit of a state. Sometimes we just drive around in cars all night."*

## Do you know about the dangers linked to running away?



Sometimes running away can be RISKY. You might end up in a situation that you don't want to be in.

- You may go to an older person's house where people are taking drugs and drinking alcohol
- You may talk to someone online who you arrange to meet but then find out that they are older or different than they said they were, and don't treat you well
- You might run away to go and meet someone who is nice to you but who then expects you to have sex or do sexual things in return for food or clean clothes or a roof over your head
- Sometimes there are risks from other people on the streets– drunks, people fighting, being attacked, drug addicts and people with mental health problems who scare you
- You could get cold or get ill with things like hypothermia or pneumonia
- You could have to break the law to survive, like stealing food if you're hungry
- You could feel lonely with no-one to talk to.

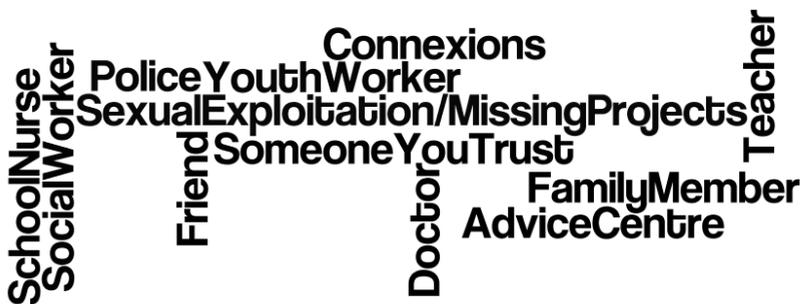
### Our experiences

*“When you first go missing it’s like a honeymoon, a relief. But then you have to fend for yourself and the reality sinks in and the novelty wears off.”*

*“When you first go missing, you feel like it’s a big adventure – but it’s NOT an adventure. Sometimes when it comes down to it you end up with MORE restrictions through running away.”*

*“Look – I have been through this and you think your mates are your mates, but they’re not – trust me. They’re using your trust.”*

## Have you thought about your other options?



Sometimes running away feels like it is your ONLY option but it is not always a good thing to do. There may be someone you can talk to first, like a teacher at school who could help. Find someone you can trust, who you think will help you without wanting anything in return. There are lots of projects and services (see list at the end of this guide) who will listen to you, give you help and support and who will try to sort out the things that are making you want to run away.

You can call or text Missing People on 116 000 (even if you have no credit on your phone). It is free, 24/7 and confidential which means your call or text can’t be traced and you don’t have to give your name. Missing People’s [website](#) has lots of information and advice for young people, including information about lots of projects that can help all around the country. You could also talk to [Childline](#) on 0800 1111 who will talk to you about any problem you have, at any time.

### Our experiences

*“At the time I thought running away was the only option. But looking back there were people I could have spoken to – like a teacher or somebody who would have helped me.”*

*“Running away is not the best way of dealing with things because the more you try to run away from your problems the more problems you cause to yourself. The more vulnerable you are; the easier a target you are. It is good to find help from an agency.”*

## What should I think about if I do decide to run away?

If you DO DECIDE to run away then there are things you can do to try and avoid ending up in a RISKY situation. You could tell someone you trust where you are going, like a friend.

If someone is encouraging you to run away, it's a good idea to think through whether you can trust that person. Be careful of trusting someone who wants something in return for their help. If you are planning to run away to meet someone you have met online, before you decide to meet that person you should try and find out more about them, use Google to do some research about them or something- remember that they might be lying about who they are and how old they are. Talk to someone you can trust about what might happen and how to stay safe— you can contact Missing People (116 000) for free at any time, and someone will talk things through with you. If you decide to go ahead, DON'T go and meet someone you have met online on your own, always meet them in a public place, take your phone and make sure someone else knows where you are.

Try not to hitch hike if you need to go somewhere as this is not safe. You don't know the person in the car and they may do something really bad to you. Use the bus or the train instead. It's good to have money with you so that you can get a taxi if anything happens.

You can make sure you carry a phone and write down or memorise important numbers in case you lose your phone, or the battery goes flat - or someone steals it. You can put 999 in your phone so you can call the police really quickly if you need to. Take a phone charger and always keep your phone with you. Make sure you have change in case you need to use a phone box or you could call someone from a phone box by reversing the charges – just call 100 for free.

You could go to stay with a family that you trust or friends. If you are going to stay with a friend at someone else's house then try to leave the house when your friend does. Don't stay somewhere without your friend because the other people there are not YOUR friends.

You might be able to stay in a hostel or shelter or get help from a church finding somewhere to stay. Some areas have lots of projects and services that can help you, in other areas there aren't enough. It's worth looking though as there might be projects that you don't know about. If you call or text Missing People on 116 000 they will be able to tell you about safe places to stay and other help in your area. You can also find out about local projects through the [Turn2 Directory](#).

If you decide to stick it out on the street because it is better than going home then try and stay in public areas, don't talk to strangers and don't get into anyone's car, although it can be really difficult to follow this advice and do these things if you don't want to be found. Make sure you KNOW the area

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where you are running to. If you end up in an area that you don't know then try and find out about safe places to go by asking in a supermarket or a train station. Watch out for SIGNS that other young people or adults could put you at risk of harm. Listen to the advice that your friends give you about other people. Remember that people don't always look their age. Remember that if someone is nice or flirty with you then they may want something in return later on. It is not always possible to trust someone completely and there may be a catch.

### Our experiences

*"No matter how bad things get if no one is listening, try and stay at a friend's house until things are calm again. STAY SAFE!"*

*"When you're missing anything can happen to you, take it from experience."*

*"Don't trust people. They might seem nice but if they are helping you lie to your parents and helping you go missing they just want to use you."*

*"I realised he wasn't who he said he was. Him and his mates hurt me and made me do stuff."*

## How can I get help if I need to?

The longer you stay away from home the more SCARED you may feel about going back - perhaps because you think your parents or carers may be angry about what you have done. You may have turned off your phone to stop people calling you. But it can be good to turn your phone on as you may receive a reassuring text message from your family/carers or someone else who understands.

You might be worried that you may be forced to go home. It can be really hard asking for help but don't be afraid. You might want to be careful about who you ask for help though; use your judgement and don't just trust anyone. There are lots of projects and services who will help you, and listen to you. See if you can find a support worker attached to a project or call a confidential helpline like 116 000 so that you can talk to someone who doesn't force you to open up and who allows you to take your time; someone you feel comfortable talking to. You can also send an e-mail to a support project from a library or something, if you don't have internet on your phone.

You could go to the council for advice on what to do if you are homeless or to the social services office to explain your situation to see if they can help you. You could go to the doctors to get a health check and ask for advice. It might feel scary to call the police, but if you do contact them they will make sure you are safe. They might want to talk to you about what happened when you were missing, but you will not be in trouble for running away. If you're worried about calling the police, you can call Missing People on 116 000 - they will talk to you about what the police might do, and if you do decide to call the police, they can stay on the phone to help you.

### Our experiences

*“Keep in contact with your family, even if it’s just to say you’re OK.”*

*“I just got scared and needed proper advice. I missed being at home, missed my carers and the safe environment I lived in.”*

*“You can get support from people who are nice, help you and don’t ask lots of questions.”*

*“The guy at [my project] never has a go and said he wanted me to be safe.”*

## Checklist – if you are thinking of running away

### Talking through your options before you decide whether to run away

- ✓ Find an adult you can trust, like a teacher and talk to them about your options.
- ✓ Phone or text Missing People on 116 000. It’s free, confidential and 24/7. They will help you think about what to do – and you don’t have to tell them your name, or where you live.

### Ways to help you stay safe if you do run away

- ✓ Memorise or write down important phone numbers in case your phone gets lost or the battery dies.
- ✓ Don’t hitch hike or get into a stranger’s car.
- ✓ DON’T go to meet someone you have met online on your own, always meet them in a public place, take your phone and make sure someone else knows where you are going. Try to find out more about them before you meet them – people are not always like they say they are.
- ✓ Only stay somewhere where you feel safe, and you can trust people. Remember that if someone is nice or flirty with you then they may want something in return later on.
- ✓ Call Missing People on 116 000 and they will help you find somewhere safe to stay and other help in your area.

### If you do need help

- ✓ Remember there are projects and services that will listen to you, and help make you safe.
- ✓ You can call Missing People on 116 000 and they will help you, and can also tell you about other projects that can help, and you don’t need to tell them your name.
- ✓ You can use the [Turn 2 Directory](#) to find projects that will help you in your area.
- ✓ It might feel scary to call the police, but if you do contact them they will help make sure you are safe. If you’re worried about calling the police, you can call Missing People on 116 000 - they will talk to you about what the police might do, and if you do decide to call the police, they can stay on the phone to help you.

### Services that can help

- **Missing People:** call or text 116 000. It’s free, confidential and 24/7. Someone will talk to you in confidence to explain your options and try to get you the help you want.
- **Turn2:** online directory of projects to help young people in your local area.

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- **Childline:** call 0800 1111 - helpline for children and young people to talk about any problems.
- **Samaritans:** call 08457 909090 – confidential helpline to talk about anything that is worrying you.
- **Brook:** call 0808 802 1234 - Free and confidential sexual health advice and services for young people.
- **Shelter:** call 0808 800 4444 - free advice about housing and for young people who need help, but don't know where to turn.
- **Get Connected:** call 0808 808 4994 – free, confidential helpline for young people who need help, but don't know where to turn.

## How this guidance was developed

On a snowy day in January 2013, seven young people from four projects in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland attended a consultation day in Manchester to help develop this Missing People guidance. The young people represented What Works for Us - a national consultation group for children and young people with experience of receiving support from specialist sexual exploitation projects. Another 47 young men and women from projects across the UK also contributed to the guidance by sharing their views through a questionnaire.

What Works for Us is based on the belief that children and young people have a right to be involved in decisions which affect them and have knowledge and expertise about their own lives. It aims to help make sure that young people themselves can influence policy, research and practice. The group is led by a partnership of four organisations: Barnardo's, ECPAT UK, the National Working Group (NWG) and the University of Bedfordshire.

This guidance was produced in consultation with members of the What Works for Us group.

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For further information and guidance on the issues addressed in this guidance sheet, or for support relating to any aspect of someone going missing, call Missing People's free and confidential 24 hour helpline on 116 000 or email [116000@missingpeople.org.uk](mailto:116000@missingpeople.org.uk)

Whilst this information has been provided in good faith, it should not be taken as legal advice. For information tailored to your circumstances, please contact your police force, solicitor or an advisory organisation as appropriate to your query.