

**TeensHealth.org**

A safe, private place to get doctor-approved information on health, emotions, and life.

My Friend Is Talking About Running Away: What Should I Do?

Many people who decide to run away think they'll find a life that's free of the troubles they have at home, only to discover they're faced with different, bigger problems. Life for runaway teens is hard. They often end up homeless, stealing, or even selling drugs or sex in an effort to make money. Every year in the United States, lots of runaway teens die, often because they are attacked, become ill, or take their own lives.

People tend to run away for a lot of reasons: abuse (whether it's physical, emotional, or sexual), family troubles, or problems with school, bullying, or friends. Some teens run away because of alcohol or drug problems — their own or a family member's. Others run away to be with someone.

If a friend is thinking about running away, talk about why. Try to work together to help your friend find solutions to his or her problems. At the same time, speak with an adult you trust **as soon as possible**. Tell that adult that your friend is talking seriously about running away. If you don't feel comfortable telling your parents, ask another relative, a teacher, coach, school counselor, your family doctor, or a religious leader for help.

A trusted adult might be able to help your friend understand that there are better alternatives to running away. If your friend is still serious, though, make sure he or she has the number of the National Runaway Safeline: **(800) RUNAWAY**, or (800) 786-2929. This service for teens in need is open 24 hours a day, every day of the year. The safeline can help teens find food, shelter, and medical care, as well as provide counseling for homeless teens in crisis. The service will even help runaway teens contact people back home by providing a message service and setting up conference phone calls. Your friend doesn't need to be a runaway to call and ask their advice: Many of the teens who contact the safeline call from home or a friend's house *before* running away.

If your friend does run away, or if you haven't seen him or her in a few days and you think that's what's happened, take action immediately. Talk to a trusted adult and explain that you believe your friend ran away. Don't be shy about sharing any information about where your friend might be going, and don't wait in hopes that he or she might come back after a few days. Your friend's life could depend on it — the sooner it is reported, the more likely your friend will be found safe.

Reviewed by: Jennifer Shroff Pendley, PhD

Date reviewed: October 2016

Note: All information on TeensHealth® is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor.

© 1995-2017 The Nemours Foundation. All rights reserved.

Images provided by The Nemours Foundation, iStock, Getty Images, Corbis, Veer, Science Photo Library, Science Source Images, Shutterstock, and Clipart.com