



Runaway Intervention Working Group

Missing Youth 101

Missing Child: A child under the age of 18¹ whose whereabouts are unknown to the legal custodian, including youth who leave home or foster care placement without permission.²

Why Do Youth Go Missing?

Running FROM Something:

- Lack of understanding and acceptance, especially for LGBTQ+ youth
- Inadequate attention to mental health needs
- Abuse or neglect
- Perceived or actual strictness of parents/caregivers
- Conflict with parents/caregivers

Running TO Something:

- Sense of independence or normalcy
- Friends/family
- Promises (of money, success, support, etc.)
- Romantic relationships
- Substances/alcohol

Key Facts

- Black youth and LGBTQ+ youth have a higher incidence of missing episodes..
- Youth aged 14-16 have the highest rate of multiple missing episodes (5+).³
- Youth in the child welfare system, including those in foster care, also have higher incidence of missing episodes.
- Youth placed in residential group homes are more likely to go missing than those in foster homes.

Risks Faced by Missing Youth

- Homelessness
- Exploitation due to sex and/or labor trafficking
- Dropping out of school
- Future involvement in the juvenile justice system
- Substance use

Resources

- [Missing Persons Clearinghouse](https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/missing/#/) <https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/missing/#/>
- [OCFS](https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/youth/rhy/find-help.php) <https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/youth/rhy/find-help.php>
- [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](https://www.missingkids.org/gethelpnow) <https://www.missingkids.org/gethelpnow>
- [National Runaway Safeline](https://www.1800runaway.org/) <https://www.1800runaway.org/>
- National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888 <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en>

¹ 34 U.S.C. § 11292

² N.Y. Penal Law § 837-e. Additional protections are provided to youth over 18 and under 21 if they are receiving child welfare services. The legal definition includes being taken or concealed by a person who has no legal right to do so.

³ Latzman, N. & Gibbs, D. (2020). Examining the link: Foster care runaway episodes and human trafficking. OPRE Report No. 2020-143. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.