



Nineline **1-800-999-9999** it's free!

running away

Are you or a friend coping with thoughts of leaving home, or running away, or are you already homeless?

what is a runaway?

Really, there's no one way to describe young people who run away or who are homeless, or to describe the backgrounds they come from. They are male and female; rich and poor; adults and teenagers. They are sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews and friends.

In most states, a runaway is anyone under 18 who leaves their home (or other residence) for one or more nights without the permission of his or her parents (or legal guardians). A homeless teenager is anyone under 18, who has no home to return to and needs supervision and care. Throwaways or lockouts are kids who have been thrown out by parents or guardians, feel unwelcome at home, or that there is no place for them in the family. When we talk about homeless and runaway youth, we talk about these young people too.

Most kids don't run away simply for adventure. They're running from what they feel are unbearable or unsolvable situations. They're running because they just don't know what else to do - but they know they have to do something. While only about six percent of the kids who leave home stay on the streets or keep returning to the streets, that's still tens of thousands of kids a year!

Many kids, who return home run again and keep running, because usually without help nothing changes.

But things CAN change. Help is available - all over the country.



should I run away?

If you are in immediate danger, call **Nineline** right now! **1-800-999-9999**.

Before you run away, ask yourself these questions:

1. What else could I do to improve my home situation before I leave?
2. What would have to change to make me comfortable staying at home?
3. Who can help me improve my home life?
4. Is running away safe? If you leave, where will you go on the first night? What about the next nights?
5. Where will I go and how will I survive?
6. Who can I count on to help me?
7. What are my other options?
8. If I end up in trouble, whom will I call?
9. If it doesn't work out and I have to return home, what will happen?
10. Is there someone at home who will listen if you can find the right way to let them know there's a problem?
11. Do you know anyone else you can talk to - someone who can help you figure out a way?
12. Is it dangerous to stay at home?

The best thing to do once you've identified how you are feeling is to talk about your feelings with someone you can trust.



how will I support myself?

There are a lot of questions to ask yourself before deciding to leave home like "How will I support myself". And there are a lot of myths about how best to keep yourself safe, clothed and fed.

"If I don't run away, nothing will change. "

Without help for your family, you are probably right. Kids who return home to families who have not dealt with the issues that lead to running away often run away again and stay away longer. But there are places where families can find help.

"One friend already kicked me out. No one's parents will let me stay long. My relatives don't want to get involved. They don't want to get my parents angry at them. "

You might be right about both friends and relatives. Many kids find themselves moving from couch to couch to couch. This is not a long-term solution. But it's worth a try temporarily. Even if you can't stay with anyone for long, at least you'll be safe while you're getting some other help.

"I can get an apartment and a job. I'm old enough to live on my own. "

Landlords won't rent to underage kids. And it will be difficult to pay rent if you are working at a minimum wage job and need to buy food and clothes, too.

"I could probably do this. Sometimes, I used to steal candy bars when I was a kid. I mean I don't like the idea, but I have to eat. I'll pick big stores and rich people so they won't really miss the money. "

No matter what you stole, you'd still be victimizing someone else. Also, the risks of getting caught are high, and the penalty is not worth it.

"I know I can make a lot of money this way. I could just do it until I save some money. Then I'd stop. I mean, I wouldn't DO drugs. It's not hard work. "

Though you might think the money is good, selling drugs is illegal and highly dangerous. Getting arrested is only part of it.

"A guy at school once told me that you can make some quick easy money. He said if you get drunk or high, you don't mind so much. And sometimes you can get a place to stay for the night, dinner and clothes and things. It might not be so bad. I'd just do it for a little while until I could save some money. I wouldn't get hooked on drugs or anything - I'm not that kind. I'd have to be careful about AIDS - well, I can handle that. "

No one can really handle this life. About 300,000 kids are involved in prostitution in the United States. It might seem fine at first, but these kids will tell you how awful it is. They don't feel good about what they are doing.

"I don't belong in a shelter. I've heard about them. I don't want to live with all those strangers. They'll probably make me go to counseling. I don't need that kind of help. "

Many young people just like you find help in shelters, which are located all around the country. It is difficult to go to a new place with new people, but it's far better than



the street. There are people in the shelters who would take care of you and respect you and help you figure out what to do next. They would provide food, clothing, medical care, family counseling, and other kinds of help. Counselors can help you work through problems and deal with your parents.



how do I get help?

Child Help USA, 1-800-422-4453

National Runaway Switchboard, 1-800-621-4000



how can the Nineline help me?

Just call the **Covenant House Nineline** at **1-800-999-9999**; TTY: 1-800-999-9915 or follow this link to the **Nineline Forum on running away**. The Nineline staff is ready to talk with you any time of day. You talk. We'll listen.

We can help you figure out what to do.