



**TEXAS**  
**Department of Family  
and Protective Services**

**Runaway Prevention Resource  
Guide**

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## *Resource Guides*

The purpose of Resource Guides is to provide information that helps you do your job better. This information includes reference material, procedures, and guidelines that help you complete the tasks you are required to do by policy.

It's important to remember that the information in Resource Guides does not substitute for policy. We may sometimes include policy statements, but only to show you the policy to which the information is related. We will highlight any policy that actually appears in the Resource Guide, and will almost always include a link to the actual policy. For example:

Per 4322.2 Re-Allowing Placement:

Any time the caseworker becomes aware of detailed justification for changing the status of and considering placements in a foster family that has been placed on Disallowed Placement status, the caseworker must elevate this consideration through the regional chain of command to the regional director.

The policy in the handbook always takes precedence over what is in the Resource Guide. We try to keep policy and Resource Guides synchronized, but sometimes there is a delay. If you have questions, always follow the policy in the Policy Handbook.

Resource Guides provide important information on a range of topics, for the purpose of assisting and guiding staff to:

- make essential decisions
- develop strategies to address various issues
- perform essential procedures
- understand important processes
- identify and apply best practices

The information in the Resource Guides is not policy (except where noted), and the actions and approaches described here are not mandates. You should adapt the way you perform critical tasks to the individual needs and circumstances of the children and families with whom you work.

State office and field staff are working together to identify Resource Guide topics, define the content, and develop the appropriate guides. CPS will regularly post Resource Guides as they are developed, and update them as needed. Check the Resource Guides page, in the CPS Handbook, to see new or revised Guides.

We hope these Guides provide useful information to guide and assist CPS staff in effectively performing their job tasks. These Guides, combined with clear and concise policy in the Handbook, should help staff provide a high level of service to children in Texas.

Note: If this resource guide is accessed by a Single Source Continuum Contract (SSCC), please note that this guide does not supersede federal and state legislative requirements, Community-Based Care Contract and Statement of Work, SSCC Operations Case Management manual or CBC Joint Operation Manuals. This resource guide is suggested best case practice. SSCCs may have a differing case management approach and may continue to practice in accordance to federal and state law, and their model.

# Runaway Prevention

When children and youth in the conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) have a higher risk of running away, it is important to identify supports and interventions to prevent the occurrence of this behavior. When a child or youth runs away we cannot ensure child safety and mitigate risk of the child or youth experiencing violence, abuse, neglect, or becoming a victim of trafficking.

Senate Bill 781 charged the DFPS to establish strategies to reduce the number of incidents in which a child or youth in DFPS conservatorship runs away from their placement. DFPS recognizes the importance of having strategies in place to prevent runaway incidents for all children and youth in care regardless of where they are placed. This resource guide provides instruction and support to help staff reduce the number of runaway occurrences for children and youth in care.

DFPS defines a Runaway Incident as a type of unauthorized absence where a child:

- has left the placement of their own accord;
- without permission from the caregiver;
- does not appear to have the intent to return; and
- and is unable to be located.

## Children at Higher Risk for Runaway Behavior

Any child can make the decision to run away, but some children are more inclined to run away than others. Below are some factors that might indicate that a child is at a higher risk for running away:

- Children age 14 years and older.
- Children with a history of running away within the past 6 months.
- Children who have recently threatened to run away.
- Children who have been victims of commercial sexual exploitation or human trafficking.

## Notifications

As referenced in Policy 6461.11 Runaway Prevention, the caseworker must ensure that the child's caregiver has been informed of the child's history of running away.

Runaway history must be included in the Application for Placement, Form [2087](#) or [2087ex](#), and the Placement Summary Form, [2279](#).

Information provided to the caregiver should include:

- Past runaway information.
- Any known information regarding triggers for a runaway episode.
- Any known information regarding strategies to prevent runaway episodes that worked in the past.
- If the child has a history of leaving the child's placement without permission for short periods of time and then returning.
- Last date the child ran away.
- Any other important information related to the child's history of running away.

If a child is placed with a relative or kinship caregiver, the caseworker must inform the kinship development worker of the child's history of running away and provide the child's caregiver with a Runaway Prevention Tip Sheet.

## **What to do If a Child is at Risk of Running Away**

The caseworker should talk with the child about any recent desire to run away and take actions the child feels would help the child make the decision not to run away, as appropriate. The caseworker must implement a Runaway Prevention Plan with the child and caregiver as specified in Policy 6461.11.

### **How to Talk to a Child about Running Away**

It is important to talk to the child or youth about relevant personal history or a desire to run away. Help the child or youth feel that it is safe to talk about this and remind them people are available to help and support them. Help them feel validated with their point of view.

If a child or youth is at risk of running away, it is important for the child or youth to feel that they are heard. Talking with the child or youth about their thoughts and feelings is important. It may be appropriate to visit or call the child more often to help them strengthen their connections to the people important to them. Encourage the child's caregiver to also talk to the child about the child's thoughts and feelings.

Helpful tip: Set up regular phone, FaceTime, or other virtual contact with the child or youth if unable to see them face-to-face.

Talk with the child or youth about the dangers of running away and your desire to keep them safe from those dangers.

Be open and honest about their case and what is happening; withholding case information from them can cause them to escalate rapidly. Help them to understand the reason for case updates and changes that are upsetting to them. If necessary, involve the therapist or a person close to the child in these conversations.

## De-Escalation Strategies

- Project empathy, even if you don't agree; understand their perspective
- Discuss runaway episode with the child or youth; confirm compliance/non-compliance
- Ask for behavior to be redirected; people respond better to being asked rather than told
- Give options
  - Voice must be friendly and helpful
  - Give positive first then negative, then remind about the positive
  - Be specific and honest. Do not promise what you cannot deliver
- Explain decisions and set context for making decisions
  - Try to include child(ren) when decision making
- See the good and point it out
- Utilize Reflection Statements:
  - I appreciate that...
  - I hear you...
  - I recognize that you feel...
  - I might feel that way too...
  - I understand that...
- Watch your behavior when addressing child's behaviors
  - No loud speech or shouting
  - No pointing or jabbing with finger
  - No swearing or verbal abuse
  - Do not stand too close or act aggressively
  - Watch your tone of voice
  - Do not walk away upset or discouraged; do not show defeat
  - Do not threaten

## Runaway Prevention Planning for Children in Substitute Care

A Runaway Prevention Plan should be developed to address situations or circumstances that could lead to a child running away. This plan will help to provide accountability and clarity for all parties involved. This plan should be developed in collaboration with the child, caregivers, relatives, and other supportive adults, case management staff, and the child's caseworker. The plan should be strengths-based, realistic, and positive.

It is appropriate to implement a Runaway Prevention Plan with the child and caregiver to help prevent the child or youth from running away in any of the following circumstances:

- The child has a recent history of running away within the last 6 months.
- The child has a confirmed or suspected-unconfirmed human trafficking victimization.
- The child has verbalized a recent serious desire to run away.

### **Prevention planning with kinship and other non-contracted substitute care placements**

The caseworker is responsible for the creation and implementation of the Runaway Prevention Plan for a child or youth who is placed in any type of non-contracted placement or other type of Substitute care placement (e.g. Kinship Homes, FAD Homes, unauthorized placements, children in their own home, or any other non-contracted placement, etc.). The plan must be created and initiated within 2 business days of learning of the behavior that warrants to use of the plan. All of the individuals who participate in the development of the Runaway Prevention Plan should also sign or acknowledge their agreement with the plan in writing, as well as receive a copy of the plan. In this instance on a monthly basis the caseworker should evaluate if any updates to the plan are needed, as well as if the plan should continue to be active based on their assessment of the feedback provided by the child and caregiver.

### **Prevention planning with contracted placements**

For a child or youth who is placed with a contracted residential provider the contractor will take the lead in developing the plan. The caseworker should be invited to participate in the implementation of the Runaway Prevention Plan and should be provided with a copy of the plan within 24 hours of implementation. If the caseworker is not able to participate in the creation of the plan it should not impede the plan's implementation by the contracted residential provider and they should provide support for the plan through alternative means (e.g. by phone, email or text messages). The contracted residential provider will evaluate, on a monthly basis, if any updates to the plan are needed, as well as if the plan should be continued based on their assessment of the child's progress, the caregiver's feedback and the caseworker's recommendations.

### **Documenting and evaluating the prevention plan**

All the individuals who participate in the development of the Runaway Prevention Plan should sign the plan and receive a copy of the plan.

The caseworker is responsible for including a copy of the Runaway Prevention Plan in the child or youth's case file, as well as indicating whether the plan is currently implemented in the child or youth's monthly evaluation. On at least a monthly basis the caseworker must discuss with



the child or youth, the caregiver and any other participant in the implementation of the plan the child or youth's status and progress in meeting any conditions of the plan.

While developing the Runaway Prevention Plan with the child and caregivers, help them identify strengths of the child. Engage the child by asking questions that help them to identify things that have prevented them from running away previously, as well as things that may have triggered them to think about running away. Ask the child to identify reasonable things that their caregivers and others can do to help support them in not running away.

The Runaway Prevention Plan should include clear boundaries and expectations for the child. Those boundaries and expectations can equip the child with an action plan he can use to remain safe if he absconds from the placement. It can also make clear what action the caregiver will take if the child absconds from the placement without intent to return.

For example, this could include, but is not limited to a time limit that the child can be gone before reporting them as missing to law enforcement if the child absconds frequently to cool down when upset.

If a child prone to running away in response to emotional or stressful stimuli, they can identify a specific location they will go to when they run. The caregiver will commit to be there within a specific amount of time to process with them, helping them to feel safe to return. The Runaway Prevention Plan should identify who the child can contact when they are in an unsafe situation or can contact to return from runaway status, including contact information.

### **Considerations for children who have a history of trafficking**

When a child or youth has a history of human trafficking victimization DFPS, as well as the child or youth's caregivers, should know that it is highly likely that the child or youth will run away at some point. The development of the Runaway Prevention Plan, to include a safety plan of action, is a proactive approach to equip a child or youth with resources and steps to take, should they find themselves in danger during a runaway episode.

All the individuals who participate in the development of the Runaway Prevention Plan should sign the plan and receive a copy of the plan.

Services and resources can be found on the [Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation page](#) of the DFPS intranet.

## Constructive Tips for Helping to Prevent a Child from Running Away

If the child runs away:	Then:
To see friends...	Work with the caregivers and other supports to increase the activities the child has with appropriate friends.
To see family...	Increase visits or communications with family, if appropriate, and make all efforts to secure placement with a relative that the child is willing to remain with.
To see parents or caregivers that the child was removed from and reunification was previously ruled out...	Determine if reunification can be reconsidered at this time. This decision should include Family Reunification Evaluations as currently used in practice and necessary approvals should be obtained as required by policy.
To use drugs...	Refer the child to a substance abuse assessment and provide recommend treatment.
Due to issues with school...	Increase educational supports as needed.
Due to conflicts with the caregivers...	Work with the child and caregivers to resolve the conflicts. If the conflicts cannot be resolved, determine if a more appropriate placement may be needed.

## Appendix 1

For a printable tip sheet, see [Runaway Risk Factors](#).

# Runaway Risk Factors

## Tip Sheet

### Children at Higher Risk for Runaway Behavior

Any child can make the decision to run away, but some children seem more inclined to run away than others. DFPS defines a Runaway Incident as a type of unauthorized absence where a child has left placement of their own accord, and without permission from the caregiver, and does not appear to have the intent to return and is unable to be located. Below are some factors that might indicate that a child is at a higher risk for runaway behavior.

- Children age 14 years and older;
- Children with a history of running away;
- Children who have recently threatened to run away; or
- Children who have been victims of commercial sexual exploitation or human trafficking.

### De-escalation strategies

- Project empathy, even if you don't agree; understand their perspective
- Discuss runaway episode with the child or youth; confirm compliance/non-compliance
- Ask for behavior to be redirected; people respond better to being asked rather than told
- Give options
  - Voice must be friendly and helpful
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- Explain decisions and set context for making decisions
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- See the good and point it out
- Utilize Reflection Statements:
  - I appreciate that...
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  - I understand that...
- Watch your behavior when addressing child's behaviors
  - No loud speech or shouting
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  - No swearing or verbal abuse
  - Do not stand too close or act aggressively
  - Watch your tone of voice
  - Do not walk away upset or discouraged; do not show defeat
- Do not threaten

### **What to do if a child is at risk of running away**

Talk to the child about any desire to run away.

Identify with the child or youth things that would help them make the decision not to run away.

Contact the child or youth's caseworker.

Talk to the caseworker about considering the implementation of a Runaway Prevention Plan with the child and caregiver.

When a child or youth has a history of human trafficking victimization DFPS and the child or youth's caregivers should know that it is highly likely that the child or youth may run away at some point. The development of the Runaway Prevention Plan, to include a safety plan of action, is a proactive approach to equip a child or youth with resources and steps to take, should they find themselves in danger during a runaway episode.

### **What to do if the child does run away**

- Call law enforcement and make a runaway report.
- Call the child's caseworker to let them know that the child ran away.
- Contact the school to inform them so they understand the situation if the child returns to school.
- Reach out to parents of the child's friends to see if they have heard from them.