



# COMING BACK TO STAY

ADVICE  
FOR PARENTS  
of runaways



# HOW SHOULD YOU REACT IF YOUR CHILD RUNS AWAY? HOW SHOULD YOU ACT WHEN HE OR SHE COMES BACK?

These are questions that you as a parent may have to face. More and more young people aged 12 to 17 who live in urban areas are running away from home.

That's why the **Service de police de la Ville de Montréal** designed this handbook, in cooperation with **Réseau Enfant-Retour, En marge 12-17** and **CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal**. It suggests possible solutions and resources so that you will know what to do and where to get help if your child runs away and when he or she comes back afterwards. The brochure is also intended to give you the tools to prevent your child from running away again.

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## INFORMATION

Service de police de la Ville de Montréal  
[spvm.qc.ca](http://spvm.qc.ca)

Missing Children's Network  
[reseauenfantsretour.org](http://reseauenfantsretour.org)

Volet Familles d'En Marge 12-17  
<https://www.enmarge1217.ca/parents/>  
514 849-5632

# WHAT IS A RUNAWAY EPISODE?

Your child goes out and doesn't come back to their family, foster family or rehabilitation centre where they live. Like many parents who have to deal with this kind of situation, you're worried: have they run away or have they gone missing?

## Difference between running away and going missing

Your child may have run away:

- If your teen has left the place where they usually live;
- If they have expressed a wish to do so, either verbally or through their behaviour;
- If they have left signs indicating that they intend to leave by taking, for example, money, clothing or personal items;  
[As a general rule, you won't find any signs like that if a child has disappeared.]
- If they haven't come back after a planned absence (for example, a visit to a relative or an activity), they may have gone missing. Going missing may involve leaving involuntarily or getting lost.

The difference between running away and going missing lies in the child's intention to leave the place where they are staying for a longer period than planned. There may be several explanations for your teen's prolonged absence.

If you aren't sure whether your child has run away, don't hesitate to call **911** as soon as possible to inform the **SPVM** and start the search process.

If your child has run away, remember that other parents are experiencing a similar situation. Above all, don't keep the problem to yourself: ask for help from your friends and family and other competent resources.



# WHY DO KIDS RUN AWAY?

Running away is a response to one or more needs. Generally, this action sends an important message that should not be treated lightly. Beyond the worry that your child's running away causes you, you need to try to understand their underlying reasons and needs, and decipher the message they are trying to send you. After that, you'll be better able to find ways to intervene to improve the situation. The first step in this direction involves identifying whether this is a spontaneous action or a planned one.

Most runaways will run away again if the situation that triggered their action is not resolved.

## Unplanned, spontaneous departure

Your child may spontaneously decide to run away after experiencing an incident, a failure, a conflict or an intense emotion (such as, fear of facing the consequences of their actions, anger or grief). In these circumstances, running away seems to be the only possible solution; it may even feel like an escape hatch allowing them to avoid facing up to their problems.

## Planned departure

On the other hand, a teen's running away may be well thought out and planned. In such cases, they are often looking for a new way of life that meets their aspirations. Running away becomes a response to one or more needs that are not being met, such as freedom, validation, experimentation, autonomy and adventure. Running away may also be a way of escaping from their problems, an act of defiance or an attempt to find themselves. Running away may also represent a way of asking for help or adapting to a situation that is too difficult or full of suffering to cope with.

## Anticipated departure waiting for the right opportunity

Some kids consider running away without nevertheless having a set plan. They wait, anticipating the right moment to do it (for example, when they go out), and act spontaneously when an opportunity arises. This action may be taken, among others, by teens who have already run away or who are staying in a rehabilitation centre. Whatever the situation, running away meets a need for revolt, change, autonomy and seeking solutions.

As a parent, you feel guilty or overwhelmed... Maybe you even feel like giving up... But you still want to assume your role.

According to the Civil Code of Québec, you have a responsibility for your child: you must ensure that they are looked after, supervised and educated. In addition to this legal obligation, you are one of the most important people in your kid's life. You have a key role to play in resolving the situation with them and preventing them from getting dragged into more serious problems by running away again.

Among other things, teens who run away repeatedly risk ending up on the street or having experiences that could scar them for life. You can really make a huge difference by just being there for your child. And that's true even if you need to get help from other people!



# WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOUR KID RUNS AWAY?

Despite the strength of your emotions, it is important for you to remain calm and save your energy so you can take the necessary steps to find your kid as soon as possible. It is highly likely that your action will help you to find clues as to the reason why your child ran away and see solutions to improve your relationship with your teen and avoid any repeat episode.

## Do some quick checking

First of all, you need to do some checking to find out whether your child has run away, so you can inform the **SPVM** as soon as possible:

- consult your telephone records and voicemail and note down any sign of a call from your teen;
- contact your child's best friends, their parents or a staff member at their school and places where they regularly hang out to find out the last place where they were seen, the places they usually go to and the people they hang out with;
- check their room and the house to identify any items they may have taken with them;
- think about consulting their computer records or social media posts to gather useful information on their most recent searches or planned visits;
- if your teen is living in a rehabilitation centre and is on an authorized outing, remember to call the staff and team of social workers at the centre to inform them about the situation.

## Inform the police

As soon as you have enough clues leading you to believe that your kid has run away, call **911**.

If your child is placed under the Youth Protection Act (YPA), contact the staff to report that they have run away.

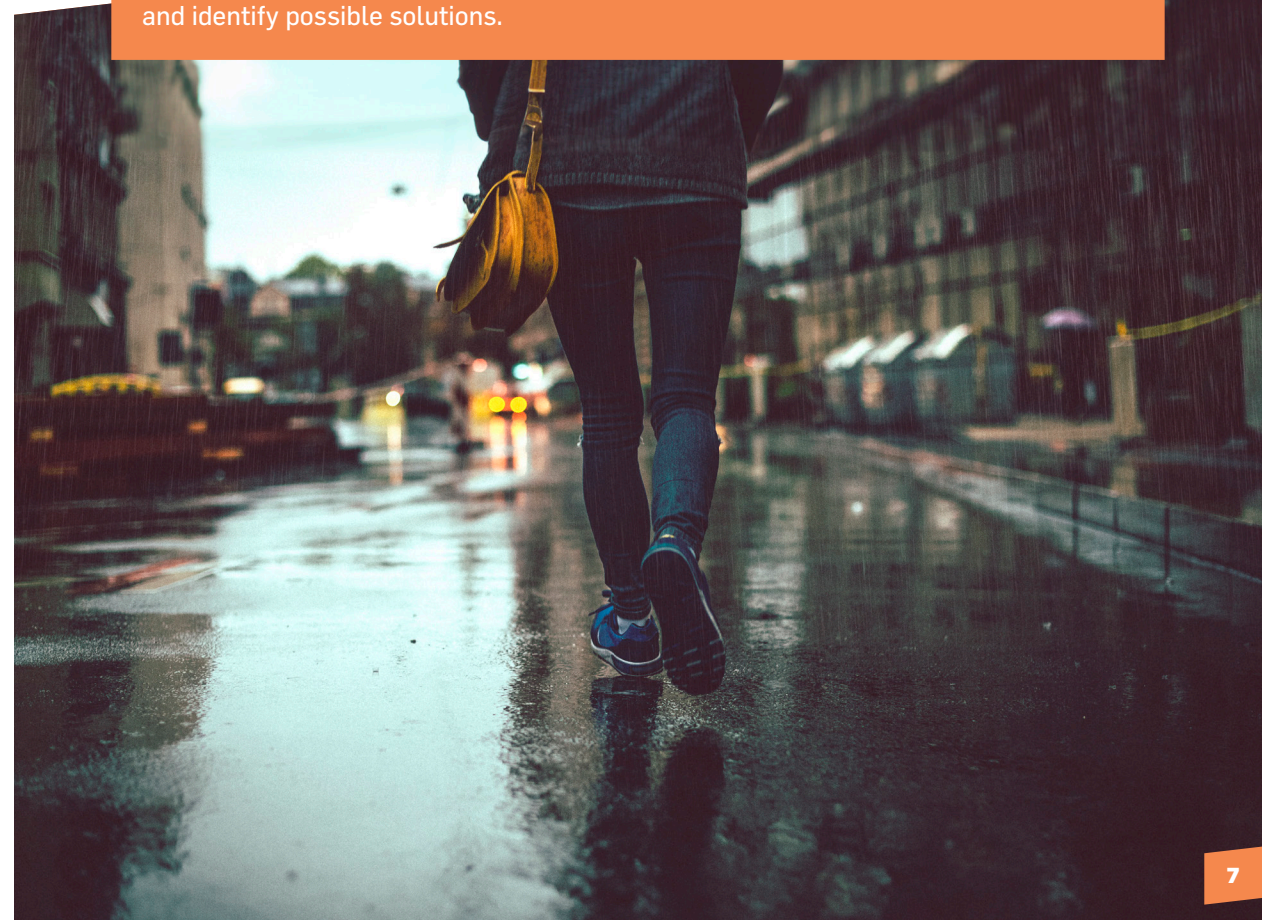
You may fear reporting that your teen has run away or gone missing to the authorities for various reasons, including the fear of seeing the police visit your home. Note that you can also go in person to any **neighbourhood police station** to report that your child has run away or gone missing, which will trigger the search process.

As soon as you have **informed 911**, the police will visit you at home as quickly as possible to collect all the information needed to trace your kid: their description, a recent photo, a message, the names of the people they know, their habits, the addresses of the places where they regularly hang out, the last place they went to, and any other information available to you on their recent calls or social media accounts. Make sure that you have this information on hand if you prefer to go directly to the **neighbourhood police station**.

An event report may be drawn up and will have a reference number that you should use when you contact the investigator assigned to your case. In addition, the **SPVM** will circulate the runaway notice to all police departments in Québec, where necessary.

The distribution of the runaway notice proves that you disagree with your teen's decision and that you won't let them get into situations that could compromise their safety.

Reporting a runaway to the police doesn't necessarily mean that your child will be taken in charge by the **Direction de la protection de la jeunesse (DPJ)**. The DPJ only becomes involved when a child is in a compromised situation, that is, a situation that compromises their safety or development and from which their parents can't or don't want to protect them. The DPJ aims above all to help families overcome difficulties and identify possible solutions.



## Keep searching for clues

You can contribute to the search to find your teen.

## Check your home

You may well find a number of clues to the place where they've gone or the reason why they went. For example, you might find a letter, e-mails or the last caller's telephone number.

## Try to locate your teen

There are applications used by young people or installed by parents, which help to track a person's location using their cell number. All means of geolocation tracking are recommended and may help you find your child.

## Contact their friends and talk to their parents

Sometimes parents will shelter their children's friends without checking their age or making sure that they have permission from their parents to be there. Furthermore, they may find it easier to get information about your kid than you would. Sometimes friends have this information but don't want to betray their friendship. If you talk directly to your child's friends, ask them very clearly to mention, if they are contacted, that you would like to get a phone call from your child.

The more people you mobilize, the more you increase your chances of finding your teen. Don't hesitate to contact resources that can support parents in searching for their child, such as the **Missing Children's Network**, the **Volet Familles at En Marge 12-17** or any other organization. If your kid is staying in a rehabilitation centre, you can also keep in contact with the staff while they are missing to facilitate the search.

## Contact members of your extended family

The first time they run away, most young people go to someone they know: a sister, a brother, an aunt, an uncle, friends of the family, or a parent's ex-spouse, for example. Since your teen may have talked to these people, they might have information about their reason for running away. Ask them to get in touch with you right away if your child contacts them or if they learn anything new.

## Call or visit the places where they hang out

In places such as the school, youth centre or parks, you may find clues to the reason why your child has run away. By talking to the people your teen spends time with, such as their teachers or street workers, you may find out whether they have experienced any problems recently, such as being a victim of bullying or teasing.

## Send them messages

You can send them messages on social media. To prevent them withdrawing further, you should pay attention to the words you use, as it is essential to maintain the connection. By making your kid feel guilty for their action, by showing them your anger, by treating them like a child, you risk breaking the connection.

FOR EXAMPLE:

« Hello, I just want to know if you're OK. »  
« Are you safe? Reply to me when you want. »  
« We just want you to be OK. »

## Contact resources that provide shelter for minor children

You can also contact the staff at **En Marge 12-17** or the **Bunker (Dans la rue)**, two downtown youth shelters that welcome runaways. That way, you'll be able to verify if they've seen your teen or leave a message for them, which will be passed on to them if they use this resource. The message may reassure your kid and help them to think things over, as your concern for them is a crucial factor in the decisions they take.



## Think about the motivations behind them running away

Here are a few things you should think about to help you talk to your kid when the time comes:



- « What is the meaning of this action? Why have they run away? »
- « What needs do running away meet? »
- « What message are they sending or trying to send? »
- « Who is their message aimed at? »
- « In my view, what are the possible solutions to this problem? »
- « What are my limits? »
- « What am I prepared to negotiate with my teen and what's non-negotiable? »



If possible, think about the solutions that your teen might suggest and decide whether you can accept them or not. Let's suppose that they want more freedom. You could, for example, agree to allow them to go out more on the weekend, but in return for them telling you where they're going and with whom. On the other hand, going out on weeknights might not be negotiable.

Finally, make use of your child's absence to think about how you will avoid making promises to them that you won't be able to keep. Then, when they come back, you can have a real discussion with them to solve the problem.

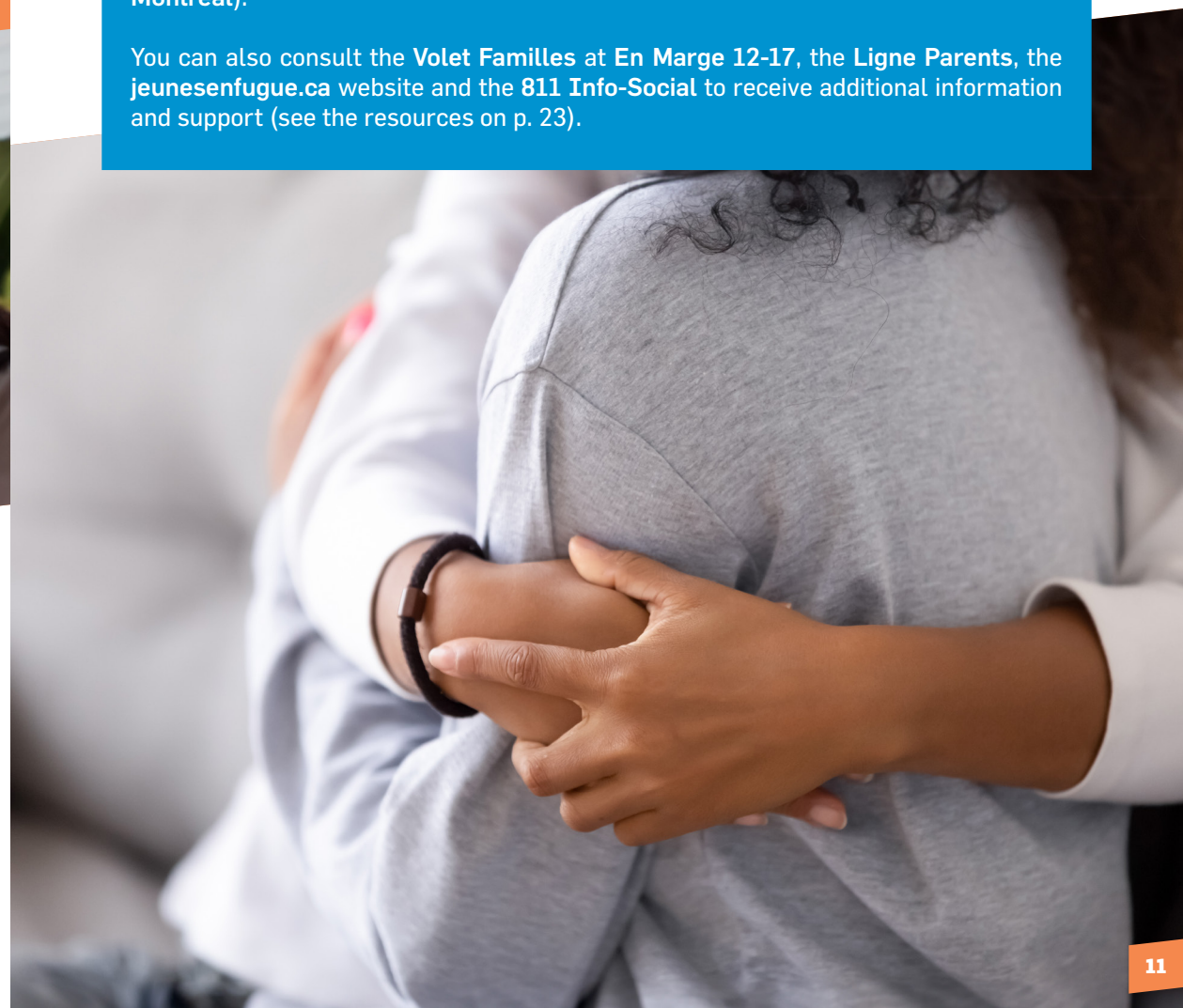
## Take care of yourself and your family

It's important to take care of yourself, since you'll need all your energy to welcome your teen when they come back. So you need to take care of your physical health (sleep, food, etc.). If you feel unwell, don't hesitate to consult a doctor.

It's just as important to take care of your psychological health. You may feel all kinds of emotions such as grief, shame, anger and worry. These emotions are normal, so you shouldn't feel guilty about them. If you try to ignore them, they'll probably get stronger. If you can't talk about them, writing can be a good way of expressing your emotions.

For guidance concerning resources that meet your needs, you can also contact your neighbourhood **CIUSSS**, or get in touch with the **211 (Centre de référence du Grand Montréal)**.

You can also consult the **Volet Familles at En Marge 12-17**, the **Ligne Parents**, the **jeunesenfugue.ca** website and the **811 Info-Social** to receive additional information and support (see the resources on p. 23).



THERE ARE ALL KINDS OF WAYS  
TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.

### Talk to caring loved ones

Don't hesitate to tell them clearly what you expect of them. Do you want them to listen to you, comfort you, help you take your mind off things or give you advice?

### Seek help, if necessary

If you feel that your mental or physical health is deteriorating, it is essential that you seek support from organizations that help young people and their parents or from your local CIUSSS. You will also find the tools to better understand what your teen may be going through. You can also contact the **Ordre des travailleurs sociaux et des thérapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec (OTSTCFQ)** or the **Ordre des psychologues du Québec** to receive personal monitoring, if you feel the need.

### Take time to focus on yourself

A child running away is distressing for the family and friends. Make sure you take care of your essential needs during this difficult time (food, sleep, personal hygiene, socializing). Remember that you will not be able to help your teen if you do not take care of yourself.

### Take time to be with your family

The whole family is thrown into turmoil when someone runs away. If you have other children, it is important that they can continue to rely on your presence despite the situation you are facing, as they need you too. You all need to try to support each other and live a normal life. Happy times with your spouse or the whole family will do you all good and give everyone some positive energy. If all your attention is focused on the runaway, the other family members may act out.

# WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOUR RUNAWAY KID CALLS YOU?

FINALLY: **NEWS FROM YOUR KID!** THEY'RE ON THE OTHER END OF THE LINE.

### Keep in contact and remain calm

Tell them you're happy to hear from them. You need to do whatever you can to maintain the contact with them, no matter what decision they make.

### Name your emotions

Say «**I**» as much as possible. By naming your worry, anxiety or sadness, you'll prevent them from interpreting your calm as a lack of interest on your part. Your kid will feel reassured and the connection will be maintained (in a phone call or message).

### Make sure they are safe

Ask closed («yes-no») questions:



- « Are you safe? »
- « Can you talk freely? »
- « Do you want to talk to someone else? »
- « Are you sleeping well? »
- « Are you eating well? »
- « Do you have a safe place to go? »
- « Do you want me to come and get you? »
- « Can we talk again? »

If your child is in danger, they may tell you so. In this case, ask them for as much information as possible about the danger and the place where they are so you can come and help them. Pass this information on to the **SPVM** by calling **911**. Give the reference number for the event (the one attached to your file) in order to facilitate the police work.

## Try to understand and find solutions

Ask them directly:



- « Why did you leave? »
- « What are you trying to say by running away? »
- « Do you want something to change? »
- « If so, what is it? »
- « What can we do together to make things change? »
- « Do you need to contact youth resources? »

## Suggest telephone appointments or send text messages

If your teen doesn't want to come back, these appointments will encourage them to call you and give you news. The frequency should be clearly determined (every day, every two days, once a week). It is important to not to cut off communication, even though this is sometimes difficult.

## Suggest meeting them in a neutral place

You can suggest meeting them in a neutral place such as a café so that you can talk things over. If your kid accepts, go there yourself – don't send somebody else in your place or you'll lose their trust.

At the end of the meeting, if they refuse to come back, you have the right to tell them that:

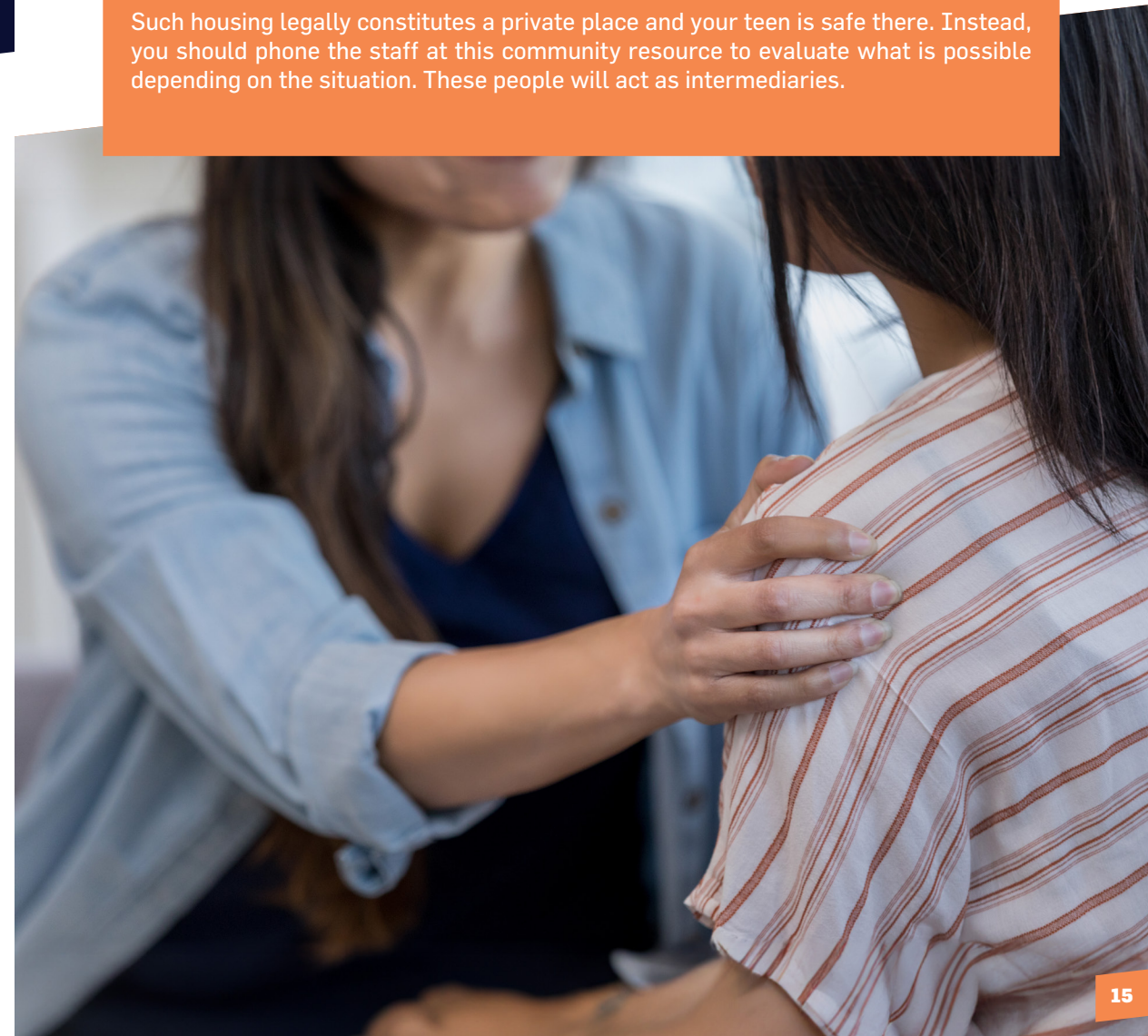
- you think there are other ways of solving their problems and would like to talk about them together;
- you have to tell the SPVM where your kid is currently living and, if they are staying in a rehabilitation centre, contact the staff in charge of them;
- your greatest wish is to protect them and help them find solutions.

Give them the choice of staying or leaving. It's not easy but, by giving them the choice, you won't break your bond of trust.

## Avoid...

- **blaming them** and making negative remarks;
- **making promises** that you won't be able to keep: your teen won't believe you, they'll put pressure on you or blackmail you when they come back;
- **using threats or blackmail** to make them come back, such as threatening to get the DPJ involved or place them in a rehabilitation centre;
- **insisting, if they refuse to tell you where they are**, since they may very well hang up on you;
- **going to look for your child yourself** to force them to come back if they're in a community housing for minors such as **En Marge 12-17** or the **Bunker**.

Such housing legally constitutes a private place and your teen is safe there. Instead, you should phone the staff at this community resource to evaluate what is possible depending on the situation. These people will act as intermediaries.





# WHAT SHOULD YOU DO WHEN YOUR CHILD COMES BACK?

Like many parents, you wonder how you should act when your teen comes back after running away. Obviously, their return may trigger some strong emotions – both theirs and yours.

## Tell the police about the return

If the police weren't the ones who found your child, call **911** to inform the **SPVM** and have the search stopped.

The police will meet with you to confirm your kid's location and close the case. If you do not want the police to visit your home, it is possible when you call to directly make an appointment at your closest neighbourhood police station.

Also think about contacting the rehabilitation centre if your teen is staying in one.

## Control your emotions and take care of yourself

It's best if your discussions with your kid don't get too emotional. Moreover, your reflection process should have given you a chance to express your emotions.

To prepare for these discussions, you can write down your emotions and what you want to say to your child:

- what you have been feeling,
- why you think they ran away,
- the solutions you think are possible,
- your limits and the aspects you're ready to negotiate.

Don't forget to also take care of your fundamental needs to be best prepared to help your teenager.

You can then choose together the best time to discuss your feelings about what you have experienced.

It's normal to fear that your child will run away again and your child may use this feeling to put pressure on you.

Bear in mind that when your child ran away, they may have experienced abuse and need medical care.

Don't forget: the best way of avoiding a new episode of running away is to find a solution to the problems revealed by this one.

## Welcome your teen

Be affable. Tell them how happy you are that they're back. At home, give them time to decompress before starting any more serious discussions. (Do they need to eat, sleep, shower, etc.?) This respite will be beneficial for you both.

## Open the door to communication

Good communication with your child can be your best ally. Remember to speak using "I", meaning expressing your feelings and your needs rather than casting judgement or making accusations saying "you".

If you find it difficult to communicate with them, you can suggest bringing in someone else. The role of this third party will be to take a neutral position and facilitate communication between you and your child.

In addition, you can contact the **811 (Info-Social)** to get help from professionals such as a social worker, psychologist, educator or other competent professional.

Staff at a community resource, social workers or managers of a rehabilitation centre where your teen is staying can also offer you support and communication tools.

And don't hesitate to ask for help from someone you know. But remember that this help has to be the kind you need.

This kind of support could come from a person who:

- **advances your discussions while remaining neutral**, and whom both you and your teen can trust;
- **gives your teen a place to stay for a while after they return**, to give everyone a break, once you have clearly defined the host's responsibilities and the length of the stay;
- **lets your teen visit from time to time**, when they need a break, while following the recommendations mentioned above.

## Look for solutions

The discussions with your teen may take place in one or more stages. Here are a few tips to guide the process:

- **Give them a chance to talk about their experiences while they were gone**

If your child doesn't want to tell you everything (out of fear of being judged, worrying you or putting someone in danger), you need to respect their choice.

- **Validate the reasons why they ran away**

The reasons you came up with may not be their actual reasons.

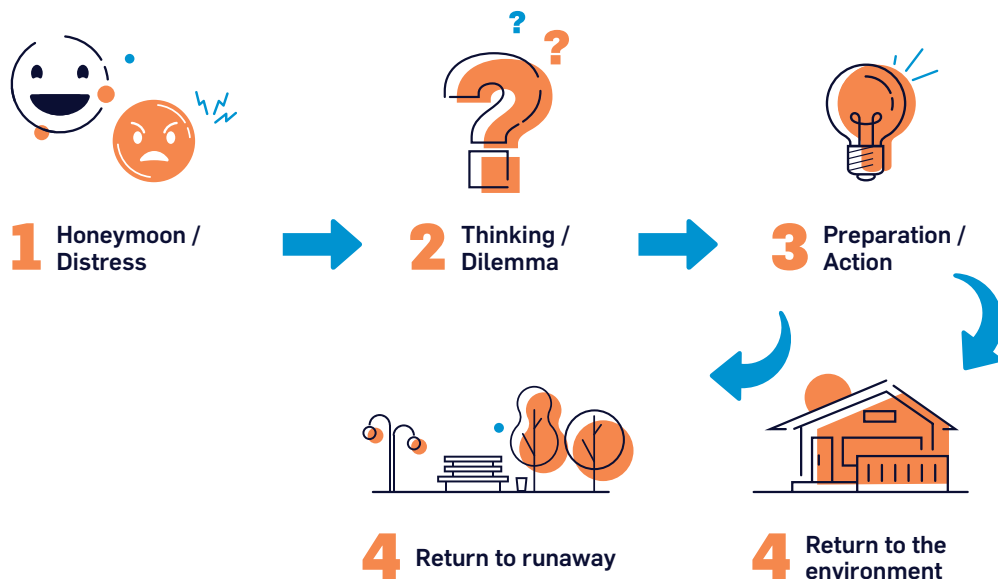
The important thing is to give them a chance to talk about it or suggest some resources if they prefer to talk to somebody else.

- **Set limits on what you want to hear**

Talking about some street activities, such as drug taking or being a victim of sexual assault, can be very hard on a parent. If you can't bear to listen to your kid's answers, don't ask any questions but give them a chance to talk to somebody else.

However, you need to be involved in the discussion of the reason why they ran away and the search for solutions. Together, you need to search for solutions that suit all of you. This is the time when the thinking you did while they were gone will be important, since you'll need to express your limits and what's negotiable for you.

### YOUTH RUNAWAY PROCESS



- **Take preventive action against future runaway episodes**

After the runaway episode, it is essential to continue to communicate with your teen to prevent a repetition of the running-away cycle.

The young runaway is the only person who can decide to break this cycle, which can take time and probably several attempts. As a parent, you play a core role in the process leading to their decision: bear in mind that your action and your words count enormously for them, even if this does not appear to be the case. Don't get discouraged in searching for solutions, as it is important to remain open to different options. Above all, don't hesitate to seek support.



### Take the time you need

If your teen tells you they ran away for a reason you didn't expect, you can tell them that this is new to you and you need time to think about solutions, so you would like to put off your discussion until the next day.

If the discussion becomes difficult and stormy, you can break it off and start it up again when everyone's calmer.

When you make an agreement with your child, you can decide with them that it will be in place for a certain time, and after that you'll assess it together and see how well it's been working. This will give you a chance for a new talk with them and both of you will be able to express how you feel about the agreement. You'll have a chance to congratulate your child on what's going well and show them that discussion can be a better way to solve problems than running away.



## If necessary, think about different options for the return

In some cases, it may be necessary to **take a break and some time to think before your teen can be integrated into the home again**. Letting your child stay with a trusted person can be a good way of letting everyone decompress.

However, it's important to define the length of this stay, the **permissions granted** during the stay and the person's responsibilities right from the start.

In the case of young people who put themselves in serious danger, it may be necessary to place them in an institution. The **DPJ** may decide on external psychosocial monitoring, a quick intensive intervention or a more long-term placement depending on the situation. If you think this approach with the **DPJ** may be necessary, you can contact the **Service de réception et traitement des signalements**, which will evaluate your situation.



In some cases, life at home may become intolerable for the whole family. If your child is over 16 years old, they can stay temporarily at a community shelter organization, such as **En marge 12-17** or the **Bunker (Dans la rue)**. This solution is possible if you and your child agree to it.

# CONCLUSION



If your child runs away, they are calling on you as a parent. Whether they acted on the spur of the moment or after much thought, they are sending a message that you need to try to decode to find long-term solutions to the problem.

This brochure helps you to identify some actions to take to find your teen as soon as possible. You've explored some possible lines of thought so you can express your emotions, prepare to open up the dialogue and encourage their return as soon as possible. In addition, you have identified different ways of keeping in contact with them if they call you while they're gone. You have also been made aware of some resources that can support you when you need help.

When your child comes back, communication will be your best ally to end the standoff and prevent them from running away again. Once the crisis is over, it is important to continue to make a point of having discussions with your child, either about topics of general interest to teenagers, or topics that are important to them personally.

And share some happy times alone with your child or as a family.

Even if the teenage years are filled with conflict, it's important to never cut off the lines of communication with your child. They need to feel that the door is always open so that they can **come back to stay!**



## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOUR CHILD RUNS AWAY?

- Do some quick checking.
- Inform the police as soon as possible.
- Keep searching for clues.
- Prepare to negotiate the return.
- Take care of yourself and your family.

## WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS OF RUNNING AWAY?

- Problems at school or with family;
- Sudden change in behaviour;
- Isolation or change of friends;
- Disobedience;
- Disappearance of objects or money at home;
- Threats to run away.

Maintaining the parental bond is the first protective factor against running away. If you recognize some of these signs, it is all the more important to communicate with your child or to seek help if you are not able to.

## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOUR RUNAWAY CHILD CALLS YOU?

- Keep contact and remain calm.
- Name your emotions.
- Make sure she's safe.
- Try to understand and find solutions.
- Suggest telephone appointments.
- Suggest meeting him in a neutral space.
- Avoid blaming them, making promises, using threats or blackmail, insisting, if they refuse to tell you where they are, or going to look for them yourself if they are in a community housing for minors.

## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO WHEN YOUR CHILD COMES BACK AGAIN?

- Tell the police about the return.
- Manage your emotions.
- Welcome your child.
- Open the door to communication.
- Look for solutions.
- Take the time you need.
- If necessary, think about different options for the return.

At any time, you can contact the nearest CIUSSS or **CIUSSS**. You also can dial 811 (Info-Social) or 211 (Centre de Référence du Grand Montréal) to be guided to resources that can meet your needs.



## SOME RESOURCES

### DIRECTOR OF YOUTH PROTECTION (DYP)

514 896-3100 (French only)  
<https://ciusss-centresudmtl.gouv.qc.ca/>

- Receipt and processing of reports concerning youths less than 18 years old
- Evaluation and quick, intensive intervention service

### BATSHAW YOUTH AND FAMILY CENTRES

514 935-6196 (English only)  
[batshaw.qc.ca](http://batshaw.qc.ca)

- Receipt and processing of reports  
Concerning youths less than 18 years old

### LA LIGNE PARENTS

1 800 361-5085  
[ligneparents.com](http://ligneparents.com)

- Telephone advice service for parents and parenting skills support program

### LE BUNKER (DANS LA RUE)

514 524-0029  
[danslarue.org](http://danslarue.org)

- Emergency shelter for kids aged 12 to 19

### CIUSSS DU CENTRE-SUD-DE-L'ÎLE-DE-MONTRÉAL

[ciusss-centresudmtl.gouv.qc.ca](http://ciusss-centresudmtl.gouv.qc.ca)

- Services from doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, specialized educators
- Youth clinic

### THE INFORMATION AND REFERRAL CENTRE OF GREATER MONTRÉAL (CENTRE DE RÉFÉRENCE DU GRAND MONTRÉAL)

514 527-1388 ou 211

[crgm.ca/en](http://crgm.ca/en)

- Referral to find a resource that meets your needs
- Information on community services related to welfare, health and recreation in Montréal

### JEUNES EN FUGUE (IN FRENCH ONLY)

[jeunesenfugue.ca](http://jeunesenfugue.ca)

- Information for young runaways and their parents

### SERVICE DE POLICE DE LA VILLE DE MONTRÉAL

911

[spvm.qc.ca/en](http://spvm.qc.ca/en)

- Notice of runaway and search

### EN MARGE 12-17 - HÉBERGEMENT

514 849-7117 (in French only)  
[enmarge1217.ca](http://enmarge1217.ca)

- Reception and accommodation for minors

### VOLET FAMILLES D'EN MARGE 12-17

514 849-5632 (in French only)

- Support and referral for parents
- Tools to understand runaway and prepare for the return
- Mediation meetings and information sessions on running away

### MISSING CHILDREN'S NETWORK

514 843-4333

[reseauenfantsretour.org](http://reseauenfantsretour.org)

- Support for parents during research and prevention tools
- Production and distribution of posters

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## Graphic design

Boo! Design

**Geneviève Houde**, graphics coordination

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