Martinez, Ruby J. "Teens Run Away to Gain Control of Their Lives." Street Teens, edited by Dedria Bryfonski, Greenhaven Press, 2012. Opposing Viewpoints. Opposing Viewpoints In Context, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/EJ3010773206/OVIC?u=pioneer&sid=OVIC&xid=29912b94. Accessed 29 Mar. 2018. Originally published as "Understanding Runaway Teens," Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing, vol. 19, no. 2, May 2006, pp. 77-88.

**Teens Run Away to Gain Control of Their Lives**

Street Teens. 2012.

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From Opposing Viewpoints In Context.

Despite the many risks and often grievous consequences of habitual run behavior, it remains an acceptable option for too many of our [youth](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true). During the year 2002, an estimated 1.6 million U.S. youth aged 12 to 17 had run away from home and slept on the streets. Teens that runaway from home rarely have an effective support system and lack needed assistance, resources, and coping strategies for problem solving and conflict resolution.

**Running into Risky Situations**

The provocations for running away are diverse and distressing, ranging from running to escape physical, emotional, and sexual abuse to having been thrown out of their homes (termed throwaways) by parents unable to cope with their child's substance abuse or sexual orientation. Runaways leave home in search of safety, independence, or a less restrictive environment, a reality that few successfully achieve. Most of these youth are revictimized on the streets. They attempt to survive while engaging in high-risk behaviors such as unprotected sex, drug use, and survival sex. Such behaviors placed these youth at greater risk for [victimization](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true) by both known (friend/acquaintance) and unknown (stranger) assailants. The often brutal reality of street life is marked by hunger, [violence](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true), [drugs](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true), and exploitation.

Once homeless, teens are at greater risk for substance use. In one study, 43% of the participants were found to have alcohol and [drug abuse](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true) disorders across all age and gender categories. Further, the use of alcohol in the past year [2002] was higher among youths who had run away (50%) than those who had not (33%), and use of [marijuana](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true) and other illicit drugs was higher for runaway youth (27.8% and 23.2%) than those who were not (14.3% and 12.4%).

Mental illness (such as conduct disorder, [depression](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true), dysthymia [chronic depression]) was identified in 50% to 73% of youth in runaway samples and in 53% of teens in a juvenile justice sample. [Suicide](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true) attempts were common (1 in 3) in street youths. [In a 1998 study, B. Molnar, S. Shade, A. Krai, R. Booth, and J. Watters] found that sexual and physical abuse prior to running were independent predictors of suicide attempts. Their study included a pre-run assessment of participants' home life experiences. Seventy percent (70%) of females reported sexual abuse with a mean age of first incident at 9.0 years, half as many reporting physical abuse (35%). Males, on the other hand, reported more physical abuse (35%) compared to sexual abuse (24% with a mean age of first incident at 9.9 years). Seventy-two percent (72%) of females and 51% of males reported suicidal ideation [creating an idea], with 48% of females and 27% of males reporting actual attempts. Their sample showed a clear temporal relationship revealing the abuse occurred prior to the suicidal and runaway behavior.

Runaway teens who were both physically and sexually abused were significantly more vulnerable than those experiencing only physical abuse and suffered with lower self-esteem and personal problems, depression, and suicidal behavior, and engaged in promiscuity and prostitution. Sexually abused female teens were more likely to run at an earlier age and both gender teens engaged in more unprotected sex than those who had not been sexually abused.

Research on runaway teenagers has identified the many dangers these teens faced at home and on the streets. Yet, many teens run repeatedly and it is not clearly known how they provide for themselves day to day while on the run. An exploratory study using a convenience sample of teens incarcerated in a detention center was implemented to better understand run behavior from the teens' perspective and to identify how they maintained personal safety while on the run. Specific research questions included: Why do teens repeatedly run away? How do runaway teens keep themselves safe while on the run? And, how or why do teens stop or end a run?...

**Changing the Situation**

Teens gave clear and specific reasons why they ran from their home or a placement site. All of the teens were attempting to escape an environment or a situation that was unpleasant or dangerous. Many of these young people had grown up with violence and substance abuse in their families, often having to care for themselves or their siblings. Despite the inherent difficulties, the move to the streets was often perceived as being no worse than what they had experienced in their homes. Their memory of what they ran from provided a perspective that helped them to endure hardships while on the run. Changing their situation by running away created many problems for these teens, but their voluntary act of leaving gave them a greater sense of control over their life.

Some teens ran away hoping that running away would somehow change the dynamics at home. By assessing their parents' response to their run, they hoped to find out how their parent really felt about them. Many participants described feeling lonely, unloved, left out, and forgotten. They needed to know if their parent(s) "really cared" for them. JJ explained that he was the middle child and thought that his mother always paid more attention to his siblings. He said, "I just felt I was always left out ... that is why I felt like running ... I just felt that I needed to get away ... that my mom didn't really care about me I wanted to see if she really cared about me if I ran." Josh said he left home when his mother remarried and he did not "get along" with his stepdad. Several teens mentioned wanting to "go party" or "live life on the edge." Lady Adonis ran away with her sister because their mother would not allow them to "party" with friends. When they returned home after being away for a month, their mother not only allowed them to use alcohol and marijuana in the home (as long as they did not use it in front of her), but in some instances, facilitated purchasing them. Lady Adonis reported that her mother "was doing her own thing (with drugs) in the kitchen with her friends and we were sitting in the living room with our friends."

Other teens ran to escape dangerous living situations. Faith said, "The very first time I ran was because my dad was hitting me. There was like drug use and alcohol in my house like almost everyday and I really didn't want to stay there." Starlet said that her mother's life "revolved around drugs" and that her life "revolved around escaping from all that she (her mother) was doing." Vanessa and Haley ran from their homes because of sibling fighting that was getting more intense and violent. Abuse was also reported in the foster home setting. Ceci said that her foster [family](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true) used racial slurs and "put her down." Michael 1 stated that he would rather live on the streets than to live in a placement.

Runs occurred impulsively with little thought about personal safety, and usually after a negative event. Starlet's comments reflected many of the other teens' responses. She runs "because I try to get away from the situation that I am at ... to feel like I'm more in control of myself ... at least I am getting away from that problem ... Running away was like my problem-solving thing." Alyssa described her run behavior as a "natural instinct." She said, "Everybody in my family calls me a runner. I'm just a runner. As soon as something goes wrong, I run. Or as soon as I feel like I'm gonna get hurt, I run." Michael 2 said that when he ran, he went with only the thought of "getting out," and would worry about food and a place to stay later, once he was free. Of all the numerous run events described by the teens in this sample, only one person reported preparing for a run by getting a few of her things together before leaving, confirming the spontaneous nature of run behavior....

**Creating New Affiliations**

Runaway teens engaged in behaviors that created new affiliations with people and substances. These new relationships offered the teen emotional comfort and material assistance for surviving life on the streets. Nicole related a story of a chance meeting in a restaurant with strangers who had a daughter with whom she became close friends. Over time, Nicole was invited to move in with her new friend, and explained, "I've known her (for 10 months) and I seem really close to her and I claim her as my cousin ... I know her whole family now." Another teen, Jade, said that the people she considers her family are not her blood relatives. She said, "My mom wasn't there, my dad wasn't there, they (her new family) were there ... they've accepted me into their families, and now I have nieces and nephews."

Sarah formed a close relationship with a friend when her mother was too focused on work and the chemotherapy treatments that she was taking at the time. Sarah said she was raped one night at a teen party but she did not think she could tell her mother about it. Sarah eventually left home to live with this friend who she regarded as her "sister." "When I just tried to talk to her (the mother) about little stuff she would cut me off and start talking about something totally different, like she was scared to hear what I was telling her. And so it was like when I used to go and talk to this girl—I call her my sister ... every time I talked to her on the phone or something and I would tell her and she would listen to me and all that. So I was like, OK, well, I found somebody that will listen to me. I'm going to stay with her." But too often the initial positive aspects of these new affiliations are replaced with new risks. Sarah was raped a second time when left in a vulnerable situation in her friend's home. Vanessa believed she could turn to her friend's mother, who had also run away frequently as a teen. Vanessa felt she was always welcome to stay in their home when she was on the run but admitted that her friend's mom was a heavy alcohol and drug user.

Gang affiliation was prevalent with this sample of teens. Ten teens in the sample openly admitted membership in a gang, three admitted association with a gang, one teen was "invited to join," and two stated they wanted out of their gang. Only one teen in this sample denied affiliation with a gang. Some have been involved with [gangs](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true) most of their lives and often regarded their fellow [gang members](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true) as family. These relationships were experienced by the teens as both protective and dangerous. Ceci described her mentor in the gang in the following way: "Well, actually I was kind of born into the gang. I have family members who are from my gang. My OG (old gang) is like the older sister that I had always wanted ... she wasn't going to let anybody take me and mistreat me." This teen stated that her gang mentor did not approve of her running away—that she had advised her to stay in school and graduate, but that Ceci did not agree with her mentor and ran anyway. Nicole stated, "When I was around my gang, I felt I had people to trust at the time, and I felt that I could, you know, could trust them more than my father for some reason, like somebody loved me more than my father." Josh said he got into trouble when he started stealing cars and selling drugs with his older gang friends. He was only 14 years old at the time.

Although most teens were able to establish relationships that offered them some level of assistance, support was sporadic. Over time, teens went from home to home, staying with friends or lived on the streets until they were caught or they turned themselves in. Some friends were long-term associates, but there were times when the teen would stay with someone they hardly knew. Alyssa said that she stayed with whoever would accept her for the night. Dana said, "It's not fun to be on your own. And it's not fun to have to struggle and look for a place to stay, move from here to there."

An equally concerning affiliation involved the use and sale of drugs. Teens perceived that drugs helped them endure their different life circumstances. The use of drugs served to mitigate unpleasant feelings and experiences. Problems disclosed by the teens included depression, stress, suicidal behavior, anxiety, bipolar disorder, feelings of anger and rage, conduct disorder, ADHD, and fire-setting behavior. The few teens who had visited a mental health provider often refused to discuss their family problems due to their anger and distrust of the system. They turned instead to drugs to reduce their emotional pain. Nine teenagers reported mental illness, including two who reported suicide attempts.

The sale of [illegal drugs](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true) allowed the runaway to survive financially on the streets. Ceci explained: "The first time when I ran away it was scary. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know where I was gonna go. I didn't have any clothes. I didn't know what I was gonna eat. It was hard and I felt like a loner, sleeping at other people's houses. But as I ran, it got easier and easier. It was to the point where I was selling drugs. I didn't need anybody. I could buy my own food; I could get my own hotel and you know, buy an outfit every day to put on my back. It wasn't hard anymore, even though I was doing wrong, it was easier because I could depend on drugs to help me get money."

The use of drugs to cope with the stresses of street life provided a false and dangerous sense of security. Teens identified the use of drugs as a form of rebellion, a temporary way of forgetting the pain in their lives or as a way to socialize with their peers. Some, like Vanessa and Kitty, used drugs for the first time when they ran away. Kitty said, "I tried a lot of drugs ... I wanted a perfect life but knew I'm not going to get it ... that's why I turned to drugs and everything because I didn't have what I wanted. I wanted to be rebellious and everything." All but one teen reported the use of drugs. In this sample, marijuana and alcohol were most commonly used, but the use of [cocaine](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true), acid, mushrooms, [ecstasy](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true), and nitrous oxide were also reported.

**Learning from Experience**

The final category relates to what the teens learned about themselves through their experiences and how these lessons contributed to their decision to stop running. The youth reported that they could not run from their problems, that problems persisted even after they had changed their situation. One teen expressed that when she was on the run she "was just getting sick of it ... Everywhere I went my problems were still there. I really didn't know what to do." Starlet, who had been in detention five times when she participated in this study, said that she would offer other runaway teens this advice: "Whatever they are running from, doesn't get better until they try to resolve it ... It just always gets worse." She said that she realized over time that "you are hurting other people when you run, but you're mostly hurting yourself."

The studied youth expressed that despite the problems at home, they often missed their mother or other family members and longed to see their home, their pets, or siblings. Jade said that there were a couple times when she stopped by her mother's house. She added, "I broke into the window so I could get my clothes and my belongings—so I wouldn't get so homesick." Tim Garfield said she returned home "at least every other day, to take a shower or dress up." She explained that she knew when her mother was not home and she went home to eat, shower, and visit with her little brother. Alyssa said "I even missed my brother and my hamster when I am gone. You miss your house, your bed, your parents."

Several of the teens in this study were parents. Michael 1 and Krystle spoke about their [children](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true). JJ's girlfriend was pregnant and he expressed a desire to take responsibility to care for his new family. Both Ann and Pam said that they were pregnant and planning to keep their babies. Ann said that having her baby would stop her run behavior. She stated, "I can't have him living out on the street." Pam reported that she turned herself in because of her pregnancy and concern for her baby.

Never knowing who to trust was difficult for teens because making good decisions about who could be trusted was central to survival. Michael 2 said that he made judgments about people he met on the street based upon their looks. Dana said she began to realize over time that her mother was the one person she could count on, "people that claim to be your friends aren't always there for you when you really need them ... you're out there by yourself."

Violence and dangerous sexual encounters were prevalent in the lives of the teens. Pam said that a stranger shot at her and her friends "for no reason" when she first ran at the age of 14, and that when men knew she was a runaway, they would try to take advantage of her situation. Jennifer related a situation in which when she attempted to leave a gang member's home, she was locked in against her will. Lady Adonis reported being beaten and raped by an acquaintance one evening while they were both drunk. She did report the [rape](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true) and although the police did not [arrest](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true) the man, she was confident that her gang would "deal with him." Jerome recalled a time when he was 14 and on the run overnight. "They'd come up to me (people on the street) and say, 'are you working tonight?' ... and fondle me ... I was scared." Jennifer and her girlfriend ran away together and the two [girls](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true) "stripped" for guys they knew, and would "do drugs with them." The two girls had a safety plan that one of the two of them would always "stay a little sober ... in case something bad happens." Jade described her life like this: "I was living with my boyfriend and I was constantly [smoking](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true) weed and I was constantly [drinking](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true). There was a time where the people that were in the household that were there had done a robbery on a liquor store ... and they brought home liquor ... and [cigarettes](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true). At that time, we had like six or seven people who were drug dealers that were coming in and out of the house and the group that I was living in was really bad ...". Despite their many dangerous experiences, runaways tended to minimize the risks omnipresent in their lives. As Tim Garfield explained, "We may put ourselves in situations, but if we get out of it alive, then it's just another experience."

Although there was an awareness that lost time could not be made up, the teens appreciated that their experiences over the past years were valuable lessons in life. Faith said, "I just wanted to go to school, you know, go to my proms and all of that, graduate and do all those other things. But being on the run I really couldn't do all that stuff, so it kind of ruined it for me." Nicole found the transition back to being a dependent teen a difficult one. She said "It's taken me this long to know what I was doing wrong in the past ... I am still a kid and I have to listen to other people." Jade said that runaway teens have experiences that they could not have as adults. She said "when you step over that boundary of turning 18 years old, you can't be a runaway anymore."

**Changing Family Dynamics**

This study found that running, at least initially, is an impulsive behavior set in motion with little regard for personal safety. The act of running is triggered by the desire to achieve immediate relief from an overwhelming physical or emotional burden. The choice to run is an attempt to exert control over what the teen perceives to be an intolerable situation. Teens feel frightened during the first run, but learn quickly that survival depends upon forming relationships with others who will assist them. With practice and the development of street sense, the run experience becomes less frightening, more habitual, and their connection to and comfort with countercultures grows. Runs ended when teens voluntarily went home because they were tired of hiding, missed their family, or when it became too difficult or dangerous to stay on the streets. Others turned themselves in to the police or purposefully got caught so that they could return to a detention center, which was viewed as a safe place of refuge....

The runaway teens in this study raised critical questions when they asked why the "system" (which appeared powerful to the teen) was unable to help their family when it was in crisis, expressing their desire/hope that an intervention could have helped maintain the family structure. Even those who were severely abused wanted to retain some ties with their families. Several teens posed the question, "Did you really help me by taking me away from my family?" From their viewpoint, they were in a detention center and had endured hardship and abuse on the streets; a situation that they felt was arguably no better than what they were removed or ran from. The challenge for providers is to create interventions that engage the family in behavioral changes that improve interpersonal relationships and safety for everyone in the home while allowing the family to remain intact. Family-oriented interventions can improve the behavior and psychosocial function of runaways. When families participated in meetings to teach them skills in establishing boundaries and expectations, improving parenting and communication, problem-solving skills and assistance in accessing social support systems, the participating youth had lower rates of subsequent alcohol- and drug-related offenses, total delinquency, and crimes against persons. Screening for neglect or abuse within the family should be a part of all obstetric, pediatric, or adult healthcare encounters, especially in higher risk environments where there are known physical or intellectual disabilities, a family history of mental or addictive disorders, multigenerational [poverty](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010773206&searchId=R6&userGroupName=pioneer&inPS=true), divorce or separation, or a prior history of abuse or neglect. Early identification and intervention with at-risk families is essential.

Runaway teens helped identify potential barriers to the utilization of available services and potential motivators to run again. They cited restrictive rules at shelters, concerns regarding disclosing personal information and it remaining confidential (e.g., reports to child protective services), inadequate segregation into age appropriate groups (leading to revictimization), matching services to special needs (e.g., racial/ethnic differences, gay, lesbian), frustrations with high staff turnover (trust/confidence issues) and the need for increased assistance and support to transition off the streets. Much more needs to be done to provide services, including basic healthcare and mental health assessment and treatment, case management, family support services, crisis intervention, educational and vocational training, and life skills training.

**Books**

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