

# When Your Child Runs Away

---

The following list of questions has been prepared to help you decide what steps should be taken in your efforts to find your child who has run away. Every situation is different, and in order to know what approach you should take, you need to first answer some important questions. These answers will not only guide what steps you need to take, but will also help determine the level of police involvement needed.

## KEY QUESTIONS ARE:

- Is your child under the age of 12?
- Is your child at risk of being harmed (i.e. are they suicidal, has someone presented a threat of violence towards them, are they involved with a dangerous person)?
- Does your child have any special needs that place them at a higher risk of being harmed?
- Is your child completely and unusually absent from their daily activities and routines? Is your child completely out of contact with all of their friends, including their usual online activity and cell phone use?

If you answered **YES** to **ANY** of the above questions,  
go to **PART A** starting on the next page (page 2).  
Then continue with **PART C** on page 7.

If you answered **NO** to **ALL** of the above questions,  
go to **PART B** starting on page 6.  
Then continue with **PART C** on page 7.

If you answered **YES** to **ANY** of the questions on page 1:

***If this is an emergency, CALL 911.***

- Report your child missing to the police (call or go to your nearest police station).
  - Have on hand photographs of your child, your child's identification numbers (i.e. birth certificate, passport, etc.), and descriptive information about your child and who they may be with.
  - Provide information to the police in a full and frank manner. Write down:
    - The incident number;
    - The name of the officer taking the report; and
    - The phone number to call for follow up.

If your child has made a suicide attempt in the past, or talked about suicide, it is extremely important that you share this with the police when you call to report your child missing. Also advise the police on any drug or alcohol concerns you may have about your child.

**NOTE:** If you believe your child is in a high-risk situation, are concerned about the people your child is with, and have real concerns that your child may leave the country, contact Passport Canada. Alert them to your concerns and discuss your options for flagging your child's passport or preventing a new passport from being issued.

Ask the police to contact Canada Border Services to verify whether your child has recently travelled and include possible license plate numbers of cars your child may be traveling in.

- Then call 1-866-KID-TIPS or fill out the "A CHILD IS MISSING" form on *MissingKids.ca*.

## GATHER PRIMARY INFORMATION

- Gather the following information:

Recent photograph <input type="checkbox"/>
Eye colour:
Hair colour:
Height:
Weight:
Clothing your child was last seen wearing:
Other physical characteristics (such as braces, glasses, piercings, tattoos, scars, marks, etc.):
Location where your child was last seen:

- Look around the house and your child's room to see if anything is missing. If so, make a list for the police. If nothing is missing, it is still important for law enforcement to know this.
- If the police are sending an officer to your house, it is very important that you do not touch or move anything until the responding officer gets there.
- Does your child have a passport? Did they take it with them or leave it behind? If you have the passport number, get that ready for the police.
- Consider what other types of identification your child may have. Do you have any record or photocopies of them? Are you aware of your child possessing a fake ID? If so, what details about it can you remember? Write the information down for law enforcement.
- If your child does not live with both parents, consider if it is possible that they have run away to their other parent's house. Call that parent if you can.
- Consider your child's current relationships. Is there another family member or person that they are close with who may have information or who may be able to reach out to them on your behalf? What about their friends? Do you know who they are and how to get in touch with them?

## GATHER SECONDARY INFORMATION

- Ask the police if they wish to examine your child’s or your family’s household computer and do not use these computers until you know whether they want to examine them. Sometimes valuable evidence can be destroyed just by using a computer.
- Use another computer, that is neither your child’s nor your family’s household computer to search for your child’s social networking pages (e.g. Facebook®, Twitter®, MySpace®, etc.) to check for activity. If you don’t know how to do this, *MissingKids.ca* staff may be able to assist you.

If you do know, write down your child’s:

Facebook username:	Password:
Twitter username:	Password:
MySpace username:	Password:
Email address #1:	Password:
Email address #2:	Password:
Cell phone number:	Service provider:

If you do not know your child’s usernames or passwords, the police may be able to gain access to the accounts or obtain information about activity on these accounts through other means. This information may be useful for law enforcement.

- Check the search history on your child’s computer and/or the home computer. The most recent searches conducted by your child may give you some clues as to where they may have gone, and may identify additional social networking pages or other websites they visited that you didn’t know about. If you do not know how to conduct a search history, law enforcement and/or *MissingKids.ca* staff may be able to assist.
- Do you have a joint bank account with your child, or have the ability to check on your child’s bank accounts to see if there has been any activity? If not, gather up the information you do have on your child’s bank accounts and pass it on to law enforcement. Consider letting the bank know what is going on.

## AFTER YOU'VE TALKED TO THE POLICE:

### Contact Other People for Information

- Follow up with your child's school, friends, coaches, and counsellors to see if your child has contacted them or been there.
- Check with your child's employer or place where they may have volunteered to see if their employer or colleagues may have seen or heard anything.
- Ask friends of your child for other possible contact numbers to call in search of your child. Make sure your child's friends understand how worried you are for your child's safety. Your child's friends may still be in contact with your child and be able to convince them to come home by passing on information about your concerns.
- Speak to the parents of your child's friends and inform them of the situation. Ask them to call the designated phone number if they hear or see anything.
- Make a list of your child's favourite places in your community, or places where they may turn up (e.g. hospitals, youth hostels, shelters, soup kitchens, skate parks, community centres, etc.). Call or have someone you trust go and visit these locations to verify whether your child is there, and to ask if anyone has seen them. Provide this person with a picture and description of your child and consider having them leave a picture and description at these locations in case your child does turn up there. If there are concerns about publicly displaying your child's photograph and information, remember that your child's photo and description does not have to be posted in a public location — it could just be limited to a location where staff can see it.
- Thoroughly search everywhere you can think of. This includes all areas of your house, your property, nearby places such as playgrounds or parks, schools, cars, favourite activity places, etc. Consider visiting friend's houses, relative's houses, ex-partner's houses, etc. to see if your child may have been there recently.

Use your judgment about how much and what kind of information to share with the school, your family, and your child's friends, coaches, and counsellors.

Go to **PART C** on page 7 for the remainder of the checklist.

## If you answered **NO** to **ALL** of the questions on page 1:

There are a few key steps you can take right away:

- Reach out to your child in any way possible. If your child has a cell phone, consider texting instead of calling them as it gives them a chance to read your message and take it in.
- If your child does not live with both parents, check if they have run away to their other parent's home.
- Reach out to your child's friends (i.e. call or text) or try to connect with their parents to try and engage their support.
- Check Facebook and other social networking pages of your child's or those they hang out with to see if you can find any information as to whereabouts.
- Then call 1-866-KID-TIPS or fill out the "A CHILD IS MISSING" form on *MissingKids.ca*.
- Check the search history on your child's computer or your home computer. The most recent searches conducted by your child may give you some clues into where they may have gone, and may identify additional social networking sites they may have visited that you didn't know about. If you don't know how to conduct a search history, staff at *MissingKids.ca* can help.
- Check with your child's employer or place they may have volunteered, to see if they have been seen or if they have any reason to come to work (e.g. to pick up a paycheque).
- Call your child's school or places they attend regularly to see if they have been seen.
- Make a list of your child's favourite places in your community, or places where they may go (e.g. hostels, youth shelters, soup kitchens, skate parks, community centres, etc.). Have someone you trust visit these locations with a photo of your child to see if your child has been there. Take note of any belongings that your child may have taken with them.
- Use the phone log to take note of all individuals who call the home and try to note who would normally be calling but hasn't.
- Do you have a joint bank account with your child that you are able to check for activity?
- Review phone bills, call display logs and cell phone bills for phone numbers you don't recognize. Call these numbers as well as other recently dialled numbers that you do recognize.
- Consider your child's current relationships. Is there another family member or person that they are close to who may have information or who may be able to reach out to them on your behalf?
- Check in regularly with your child's friends, employer, regular places they may hang out, and online communities (e.g. social networking sites, instant messaging, chat rooms, etc.) to see if your child has made contact.

If at any time you discover information that indicates your child is at a higher risk, you need to **inform police immediately** and **work through the checklist starting on page 2.**

Continue to regularly check in with your child's friends and contacts. If they receive any information or think of something, your call could prompt them to share this information.

Go to **PART C** on page 7 for the remainder of the checklist.

## MANAGE THE PHONES

- Use the phone log sheet to track everyone who is calling. Keep a notepad by the phone to write down any additional information including messages from supports, important contact information, thoughts, concerns, etc. It is also important to consider who is not calling the house that would typically do so.
- Make sure there is someone always available to answer phone calls. It is a good idea to get a close friend or family member to do this for you. Some people calling the house may not have good intentions, or may be looking to exploit your situation. Before acting on any information provided to you, contact law enforcement for guidance.
- Review phone bills, call display logs and cell phone bills for phone numbers you do not recognize. Make notes of any that you think should be followed up on and discuss with the police whether they want the information passed on to them, or whether you should be calling these numbers yourself.

## WHEN YOUR CHILD IS LOCATED:

- Think ahead about how you will respond to your child when they are located. It is important that your initial response is one of concern and support as opposed to anger and frustration. Consider if additional supports (e.g. *MissingKids.ca* caseworker, social worker, child psychologist, law enforcement, etc.) are needed to assist.
- If your child contacts you it is important to stay calm — do not get angry, and do not use fear or threats to convince your child to come home. Tell your child that you love them, miss them, that you are not mad, and just want them to come home. Try to negotiate a reasonable solution. Establishing communication is a key goal at this point.
- If your child will not discuss their plans with you, encourage them to contact your *MissingKids.ca* caseworker, the police, or your local child welfare agency to discuss the possibility of returning home. These organizations can help with the reunification process between your child and your family.
- If your child arrives home spontaneously, advise the police and *MissingKids.ca*. The police and *MissingKids.ca* may be able to assist you in the reunification process between your child and your family.
- Once you have identified the location of your child, consult with the police about the best approach to safely recovering your child.
- Seek advice (i.e. from the police, a crisis or counselling agency, etc.) if you suspect that your child may have been harmed in some way. It is important to first establish your child's safety and sense of security.
- When your child is located, contact *MissingKids.ca* to put you in touch with important support resources.

# PHONE LOG

Caller name:	Time:	Phone # :	Relationship to child/family:	Reason for calling:
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		
		( )		

If a Community Response Plan is in operation, ask your Family Liaison to file this sheet with the Historian daily.