



A GUIDE: WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR TEEN IS FOUND

Your child's return is a step toward healing.

Progress may be slow, uneven, and emotional.

What matters most is continued presence, patience, and unconditional love.

Healing is not linear. Hope is always real.

MISSING PERSON RESOURCES BY MISSING IN AMERICA NETWORK

A non profit dedicated to managing missing person campaigns, fostering online awareness, and engaging communities to reunite family with their missing loved one.

We are not trained counselors or mental health professionals. We are simply sharing suggestions that have worked for other families in similar situations. If your teen is in crisis, we encourage you to seek professional help from a qualified expert or mental health provider.

MissingInAmericaNetwork.org

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A GUIDE

For Families After a Teen Has Been Found or Returns Home



If your teen has been missing and is now safely recovered, it's important to take the right steps to support their well-being and prevent future incidents. This guide provides key actions to help your child feel safe, heard, and supported.

You Are Not Alone

When a teen runs away and is later found, the entire family has experienced stress, fear, and uncertainty. Your child may be carrying trauma, confusion, shame, anger, or exhaustion. Healing is a process, not a single moment. This guide is meant to support safety, stability, and connection during the days and weeks ahead.

Immediate Priorities (First 24–72 Hours)

- Ensure your child is physically safe
 - Provide food, hydration, clean clothing, and a safe place to rest
 - Schedule a medical check-up if needed
- Limit overwhelming questions
 - Avoid interrogations
 - Let your child know they are safe and loved
- Offer calm reassurance
 - “I’m glad you’re here.”
 - “You’re safe.”
 - “We can figure this out together.”
- Maintain privacy
 - Do not post details of what happened on social media, only they are now home safe. You do not owe anyone an explanation.
 - Protect your child’s dignity

Emotional Safety & Support

Your child may not be ready to talk right away. That is okay.

Helpful approaches:

- Listen more than you speak
- Validate feelings even if you do not understand them
- Avoid blaming, shaming, or minimizing

Examples of supportive statements:

- “Thank you for coming home.”
- “I care about what you’re feeling.”
- “You don’t have to go through this alone.”



What Not To Do

- Do not threaten or shame
- Do not force detailed explanations
- Do not use the return as punishment leverage
- Do not isolate your child

Connection heals more than control.

Access Immediate Risks

Discuss gently and without pressure:

- Are you feeling safe right now?
- Have you had thoughts about hurting yourself?
- Did anyone hurt you or pressure you while you were gone?
- Are you afraid of anyone?

If your child discloses abuse, exploitation, trafficking, or serious harm:

- Contact law enforcement or child advocacy professionals
- Seek a trauma-informed counselor or therapist
- Visit our [website](#) for local resources to help you.

If your teen ran away, try to understand why- there may be underlying issues that need attention. If your teen left due to family conflict, consider allowing them to stay with a safe, neutral family member or friend as a cooling off period allowing everyone to work through the conflict in a healthy manner.

Create a Family Safety Agreement/Plan

Work together to create expectations and supports using our **Youth Safety Plan** at the end of this guide.

- Establish a check in routine (text messages, location sharing, or calling at set times.)
- Teach your teen where to go if they feel unsafe and who they can call for help.
- Discuss online and in-person safety, including the risks of running away or meeting strangers.

Digital and Online Safety

- Review privacy settings on social media
- Discuss online grooming and exploitation risks
- Encourage blocking and reporting suspicious contacts
- Consider parental controls if appropriate

Important reminder: Teens are often targeted online during vulnerable moments.

Using tracking technology can help parents ensure their child's safety and provide peace of mind. Many apps allow location sharing while respecting your teen's privacy and independence.

- Apple's "Find My" App: Allows real-time location sharing with family members on iPhones.
- Life360 App: A family safety app that provides location tracking, alerts, and emergency features.
- Google Maps Location Sharing: Enables real-time location sharing with trusted contacts.

Make Location Sharing a Family Effort

- Instead of making tracking feel like surveillance, consider a family-wide approach where everyone shares their location, including parents.
- This can foster mutual trust and safety rather than making your teen feel singled out.
- Explain that this isn't about control—it's about ensuring everyone knows where to find each other in an emergency.
- Set expectations for when and how location sharing will be used.

Mental Health & Healing Supports

Your teen may feel scared, ashamed, or confused. Reassure them that they are loved and safe. If your child is hesitant to talk to you, encourage them to speak with a trusted adult or therapist.

Consider connecting with:

- Trauma-informed therapist or counselor
- School counselor or social worker
- Youth support groups
- Family counseling

If in crisis:

- Call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline – U.S.)
- Go to the nearest emergency room or behavioral health urgent care facility

Many resources are available on our [website](#) to support your needs.

ARIZONA: If You Need Urgent Mental Health Support:

Mind 24/7 is an urgent care facility specializing in mental health. They provide immediate assessments and crisis support for teens and families. If your teen is struggling emotionally or mentally, they can help determine the next steps.

Mind 24/7 Locations:

- Mesa: 1138 S. Higley Rd., Mesa, AZ 85206
- Phoenix: 2423 W. Dunlap Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85021
- Open 24/7, No Appointment Needed

Daily Stabilizing Practices

Small routines create safety.

- Regular meals
- Consistent sleep schedule
- Light physical activity
- Time outdoors
- Creative outlets (music, art, writing)

Signs Your Teen May Need More Support

- Withdrawal or isolation
- Sudden mood changes
- Nightmares or insomnia
- Substance use
- Self-harm behaviors
- Talking about wanting to disappear

If challenges persist, consider long-term counseling or mentorship programs or if you notice these signs, seek professional help promptly.

Family Self-Care Matters Too

Caregivers are impacted by this experience.

- Take breaks when possible
- Reach out to trusted friends or support groups
- Consider counseling for yourself

You cannot pour from an empty cup.

Arizona: Helpful Resources

- National Runaway Safeline: 1-800-RUNAWAY (1-800-786-2929)
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children: 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)
- Arizona Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-877-429-8477
- National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888 or text "HELP" to 233733
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
- Arizona Statewide Crisis Hotline by Solari:
 - Phone 1-844-534-HOPE (4673)
 - Text: 4HOPE (44673)
 - Chat: [Chat with a Crisis Specialist](#)
- Tohono O'Odham Nation dedicated crisis line: 1-844-423-8759
- Gila River and Ak-Chin Indian Communities: 1-800-259-3449
- Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community: 1-480-850-9230
- Northern Arizona Tribal Communities: 1-833-990-6400
- Tribal Warm Line: 1-855-728-8630



YOUTH SAFETY PLAN

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Instructions for Parents: Completing the Youth Safety Plan Together

This safety plan works best when it is completed with your teen, not for them. Use this as a guided conversation focused on listening, collaboration, and trust-building. This plan is designed for families, by families who have went through similar experiences. It is not meant to replace professional support and guidance.



BEFORE YOU BEGIN: Choose a calm, private time

- Sit side-by-side rather than face-to-face when possible
- Keep a neutral and supportive tone
- Remind your teen:
 - “This is not a test.”
 - “You won’t get in trouble for being honest.”
 - “This plan is to help keep you safe, not to control you.”



HOW TO INTRODUCE THE SAFETY PLAN

You might say:

“I care about you and I want to understand what helps you feel safe. Let’s fill this out together so we know how to support you better when things feel hard.”

While Completing Each Section About Me

- Let your teen write in their own words
- Avoid correcting or debating their answers

Warning Signs

- Ask gentle questions:
 - “What do you notice in your body or thoughts when things start to feel too much?”
- Validate their responses

Things That Help Me Calm Down

- Encourage practical, realistic ideas
- Praise healthy coping skills

People I Can Reach Out To

- Help brainstorm safe adults
- Make sure phone numbers are correct

Safe Places I Can Go

- Confirm these places are truly safe and available

How I Prefer Adults to Support Me

- Listen carefully
- Try not to take preferences personally

Triggers or Things That Feel Unsafe

- Thank your teen for sharing
- If something involves past harm, consider professional support

Plan If I Think About Running Away

- Collaborate on steps
- Emphasize reaching out before leaving

Important Reminders for Parents

- Stay calm even if answers are hard to hear
- Avoid punishment-based responses
- Focus on problem-solving, not blame
- Reassure love and commitment
- Set boundaries together rather than imposing strict rules without discussion.

After the Plan Is Completed

- Review it together
- Ask if anything needs changing
- Keep a copy in a safe place
- Revisit monthly or after major changes
- Stay involved in their daily life—know their friends, activities, and struggles.

Date:

SAFETY PLAN For: _____

This plan is about helping you feel safe, supported, and heard. There are no right or wrong answers. Share only what you feel comfortable sharing.

1

WHEN I START TO FEEL OVERWHELMED, STRESSED OR UNSAFE MY WARNING SIGNS ARE:

**These can be thoughts, feelings or behaviors that indicate you are at risk.*

I want to be alone I feel angry I feel sad or numb I feel trapped I want to run away Other:

2

MY EFFECTIVE COPING STRATEGIES ARE:

**These are things you can do to help lift your mood.*

Meditation Exercise Music Drawing Walking Breathing Shower Writing Being with a pet Other:

3

PEOPLE I CAN REACH OUT TO FOR DISTRACTION:

Person 1: Contact No.

Person 2: Contact No.

Person 3: Contact No.



4

PEOPLE I CAN REACH OUT TO FOR HELP:

Person 1:

Contact No.

Person 2:

Contact No.

Person 3:

Contact No.

5

STEPS I CAN TAKE TO MAKE MY ENVIRONMENT SAFER:

1:

2:

3:

4:

5:

6

HOW I PREFER ADULTS TO SUPPORT ME

Examples: listen without interrupting, give me space, check in later, sit with me quietly

7

THINGS THAT MAKE ME FEEL UNSAFE OR TRIGGERED

Examples: yelling, blaming,



8

MY PLAN IF I START THINKING ABOUT RUNNING AWAY

First I will try: _____

If that doesn't work I will contact:

9

IN THE EVENT OF A CRISIS:

Call Emergency Contact #1: _____

Call Crisis Hotline: _____

Call Emergency Services: _____

10

PLEDGE

I agree to tell a trusted adult before leaving home. If I ever feel like hurting myself, or am in crisis I will reach out to one of the contacts listed above.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

You are so loved and we can get through anything and everything together!





WHAT I WANT FOR MY FUTURE:



One goal I have right now:



One thing I am good at:

One thing I hope gets better:

