National Runaway Prevention Month, YC is Here to Help!

Allyson S, Project Peace

Since 2001, November has been recognized as National Runaway Prevention Month (NRPM) when then, President George W Bush held the landmark White House Conference on Exploited and Runaway Children to raise public awareness and promote the National AMBER Alert act. Providing guidance for parents, police officers and in general community members on the risks and realities of runaway and missing youth, and to provide early intervention is a guiding force to what we do here at Youth Crossroads.

According to the University of Chicago, approximately 4.2 million young people ages 13 to 25 experience some sort of homelessness in the United States each year, with more experiencing crises that put them at risk of facing similar housing insecurity. In Illinois, there are roughly 26,000 homeless youth, and every year, 14,000 are reported as missing or runaways in Chicago. In Chicago, roughly 1,500 young people experience homelessness at any given time. Many youth are pushed out of their homes or run away due to abuse, neglect, and other family conflicts or crises.

Once a young person faces the instability associated with homelessness, whether they are couch surfing, staying in shelters, or sleeping on the streets, the consequences can be detrimental. Young people experiencing homelessness struggle to afford food, care for their mental and physical health, and attend and complete school. Without support from their families and communities, homeless and runaway youth face challenges such as low academic achievement, imprisonment, substance abuse, exploitation, and gang involvement. Some youth, including young people who identify as Black and/or African American, LGBTQIA+, non-White, and/or unmarried and parenting, experience homelessness at significantly higher rates compared to their peers.

Home should be a place for adults and youth to feel safe, loved and supported. When home is not a safe place, it can be hard to make good parenting choices and good life choices for both adults and young people. Parenting is not easy, especially parenting teens. That's why early interventions and supports can be crucial to developing healthy parent child relationships. Creating opportunities for your child to learn and make mistakes that are age appropriate are part of the process of becoming a healthy and secure adult. Young people need to know their parent or caregiver will be there for them when they fall or make mistakes and will allow them to feel heard and supported.

Communication is key and listening is an important skill to role model no matter the age of your child. Hear what your young person has to say, validate their point of view or feelings, even if you do not always agree, then talk through the situation without judgement or just provide support if that is what is needed. Additionally, treat your youth the way you want to be treated. Never call your youth names or label them as they may begin to think or view themselves and / or you in negative terms. Lastly, remember that all emotions are normal, but not all behaviors are or should be. Listen and allow your young person to feel angry, sad, happy or afraid. Set expectations at an early age for

appropriate behavior when strong emotions are present and talk about how to handle those emotions in positive and healthy ways.

When you are struggling, Youth Crossroads is here to help. We provide individual counseling and mental health therapies for young people ages 9 to 24 and their parents and caregivers. We also offer family therapy to help strengthen the relationship between caregivers and their young person. Don't wait, get help today. We are here to Guide, Support and Inspire everyone to be the healthiest and happiest they can be!

Additional Tips for Parents:

https://cdn.1800runaway.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/TIPS_FOR_PARENTS.pdf

Sources:

https://www.1800runaway.org/prevention-education/youth-hope-month

https://www.yos.org/services/child-welfare/homeless-youth-programs/