

### RUNNING AWAY: A DEAD END

**RUNNING AWAY: A DEAD END** brings the runaway, throwaway, and homeless statistics to life and makes them real. Actual testimony of runaways expresses the loneliness, fear, and hopelessness of life on the streets.

The video, purchased by the Community Resource Development program from Syndistar, notes that adolescents who run away from home present a major problem in the U.S. today. Statistics show that over one million youth, ages nine to eighteen, leave home each year, and most of these head for the big cities - New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New Orleans, Chicago, Atlanta, and Miami. For the typical runaway, living on the streets is a dead-end experience that often results in drug-dealing and addiction, prostitution, disease and injury, and even death. Surveys show that 85 percent of prison inmates started out as runaways.

Children run away from home for a variety of reasons. Many have suffered severe crises at home, such as drug-abusing or alcoholic parents. Thirty-six percent have been victims of physical or sexual abuse. About one in three are throwaways who have been forced out of homes or abandoned by parents.

The presentation documents a desperate teenage girl who hitchhikes to the city to escape problems at home, unaware of the problems that lie ahead. Alone and vulnerable, she is taken in by a pimp and quickly goes downhill into a life of drug-abuse and prostitution. The video also shows a young boy lying dead on the street. Flashing police car lights reveal officers examining the body just before it's loaded in the ambulance. This youth will be listed with the other 4,000 unclaimed bodies of teenagers who end their lives in morgues each year.

As the film ends, a disillusioned youth sees death as a promising relief to his pain. The message is clear: "Running away to the streets is a dead end — often the dead end."



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**SUGGESTED USES:**

To provide select audiences with accurate, current knowledge as to the problems of runaway teenagers. To provide an educational program to serve as an introduction piece for audience discussion.

**RECOMMENDED FOR:**

Community crime prevention and rehabilitation programs, schools, colleges, 4-H youth programs, and other youth support organizations.

**PRODUCERS:**

Syndistar, Inc.  
125 Mallard Street  
St. Rose, LA 70087  
1-800-841-9532

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- Q. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE DANGERS AND CONSEQUENCES INVOLVED WITH TEENS WHO RUN AWAY FROM HOME?**
- A.** Not having a way to earn a living, most youth eventually turn to prostitution or drug-dealing to survive. Pimps and dealers like to get their kids (or "packages") addicted to drugs so they will have to work to sustain their habits. Many youth are assaulted, raped, or murdered. Some get in cars with the people who pick them up and are never seen again. Many young people who live on the streets are eventually drawn into criminal acts -- stealing, etc.
- Q. WHAT ARE THE LIVING CONDITIONS FOR MOST KIDS ON THE STREETS?**
- A.** Kids sleep anywhere they can find a place to sleep: park benches, bus stations, under bridges. Cold weather presents special problems. Food is often obtained by searching garbage cans or stealing from supermarkets. This makes runaway youth easy targets for pimps and drug-dealers.
- Q. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE REASONS YOUNG PEOPLE RUN AWAY FROM HOME?**
- A.** Kids run away for a variety of reasons: 44 percent of long-term runaways have suffered severe crises at home such as drug-abusing or alcoholic parents. Thirty-six percent of them have been victims of physical or sexual abuse. About one in three is a "throwaway" who has been forced out of his or her home or abandoned by parents. Many young people flee from problems at home, thinking they will improve the situation by running away.
- Q. WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON TIMES OF THE YEAR THAT KIDS RUN AWAY FROM HOME?**
- A.** In warmer weather, just after school closes or reopens, the first hot weeks of spring when report cards are issued, and right after Christmas holidays are favorite times for teens to run away.

**Q. WHAT ARE SOME ALTERNATIVE CHOICES THAT TEENS CAN MAKE INSTEAD OF RUNNING AWAY?**

**A.** Teens can talk to someone before deciding to run away -- a friend, relative, teacher, guidance counselor, or clergyman. If a teen is having trouble getting along with parents, it helps to get advice from someone outside the immediate family. If he/she has been beaten or sexually abused, the teen has an absolute right to protection under the law and may call the local child protection agency, law enforcement agency, or community mental health center.

**Q. WHY DOES STREET LIVING OFTEN LEAD TO CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR AND EVENTUAL CONVICTION OR IMPRISONMENT?**

**A.** Street living gradually introduces kids to a life of crime (stealing, drug-dealing, prostitution, etc.). The kinds of people to whom kids are introduced on the streets are most often the types who make their way through illegal activities. Surveys show that 85 percent of prison inmates started out as runaways.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the purpose of **RUNNING AWAY: A DEAD END** is to present a graphic and realistic picture based on true accounts of typical runaway teenagers who are forced to live on the streets of a big city. The Community Resource Development program staff at Virginia Tech feel that young people who watch the film will get a vivid impression of the disastrous consequences of making the choice to run away. Teachers discuss openly the problems of runaways and what can be done to prevent this recurring series of tragedies that happen every day on the streets of major cities. The video presents an effective setting for discussing alternative choices that troubled teenagers can make when faced with a home situation that may lead to running away.

Detailed questions concerning teenage runaways or any form of crime prevention should be directed to your local police or sheriff's department. Please consult your local Extension office for additional crime prevention resources made available by the Community Resource Development program.

**NOTES:**

**COMMUNITY RESOURCE  
DEVELOPMENT**



A Public Service Program  
of Virginia Tech  
and the  
Virginia Cooperative Extension Service

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