

JUVENILE FIELD TIPS

Runaway & Incurable Youth

This resource should be used in accordance with your department policies and criminal justice training. Please treat it as a guide and remember that each situation may require a unique response.

Responding To and De-escalating Runaway & Incurable Youth

- **SAY I'M NOT ANGRY WITH YOU.** Youth have trouble accurately reading facial expressions and sometimes see anger where there is none. Verbally say that you are not angry with the youth and you just want to talk to them.
- **SEPARATE YOUTH FROM OTHERS.** If possible, separate youth from other people such as parents, siblings and peers. They are more likely to cooperate in a one-on-one environment.
- **ASK THEIR NAME.** Ask the youth their name and call them by that name to begin establishing rapport and show you are concerned.
- **EXPLAIN WHAT IS HAPPENING.** Explain what is happening and why you're doing what you're doing. Youth are more likely to be calm and cooperative if they understand the motives of others.
- **REMEMBER YOUTH MAY BE YOUNGER THAN THEY LOOK.** Youth may look older than they are or have developmental delays. Assume youth are younger than they appear.
- **GIVE YOUTH EXTRA TIME TO RESPOND.** Youth may need more time to process information and respond than adults. Give them extra time to respond.
- **OFFER YOUTH CHOICES.** Youth respond more positively when given choices than when told what to do. Offer them options when possible, even if they are very limited. Help them identify options that fix mistakes and allow them to avoid humiliation or embarrassment.
- **ALLOW YOUTH TIME TO VENT.** When possible, let youth vent and give clear directions. Youth may vent and show stress by pacing, talking back, or acting tough. Respect their personal space to give them time to cool off.
- **DON'T TAKE THINGS YOUTH SAY PERSONALLY.** Youth like to challenge and debate authority figures in general. Don't take this personally, because it can allow them to engage you in a power struggle. Do not threaten to take them into custody. Model good behavior by staying professional to encourage them to calm down.
- **USE EMPATHY WHEN LISTENING TO EACH SIDE.** Allow each side to share their account of the incident privately when possible.
- **AVOID PHYSICALLY TOUCHING WHEN POSSIBLE.** People who have experienced physical or sexual abuse may have an aggressive response if they are touched without warning. Avoid touching individuals unless necessary. If physical touch is needed, give the person notice that you are about to touch them and the reason for the physical contact when possible.
- **USE POSITIVE STATEMENTS.** Make statements that focus on keeping the family safe and getting them help, without placing blame. You might say to a youth, "I know you are frustrated, but since I was called out here, I need to investigate to make sure everyone is safe." You might say to a guardian, "It seems like you are trying your best to get help. We may be able to identify someone more appropriate to help your family get back on track."
- **DON'T TAKE SIDES.** The youth may be as reliable a source of information as the adult. Do not appear to side with the guardian or with the youth. Stay impartial and professional when diffusing family situations.

Tips for Responding to INCORRIGIBLE Calls

- **DEFINITION OF INCORRIGIBLE.** State law only defines incorrigible as “beyond control of parents,” leaving discretion for determining whether a youth is being incorrigible. § 63-19-20(9).
- **FACTORS TO DETERMINE IF INCORRIGIBLE CHARGE IS APPROPRIATE.**
 - **Does this behavior, although frustrating or annoying, fall within normal adolescent behavior?** Remember that some behaviors parents or guardians see as obnoxious and incorrigible are within the normal expected behaviors of adolescents.
 - **Is the problem solely due to the youth, or do other individuals or guardians contribute to this behavior?** Consider whether family dynamics, poverty, poor parenting skills, or lack of access to resources may have contributed to the youth’s behavior.
 - **When did this behavior begin?** Was there an incident that caused this, or is it chronic incorrigible behavior? Ask whether there have been any recent traumatic events in the family such as death of a loved one, witnessing a violent event, or losing their home.
 - **How often is law enforcement appropriately called for issues related to this youth?** Does this appear to be an isolated event, or are calls regularly made?
 - **Has the family tried to address the issue before calling law enforcement?** Ask the guardian if they have sought assistance from the child’s school, faith community, extended family, or counselors to address the behavioral issues. Consider sharing information about the incorrigible call with the SRO or Student Services coordinator in the youth’s school.
 - **Does the behavior appear to be the result of mental health issues, substance abuse, or a developmental disorder?** Consider whether the behavior is purely defiant or seems to be influenced by mental health issues, developmental delays, substance abuse problems, or past traumatic events.
- **FINDING THE APPROPRIATE RESOLUTION.**
 - **Option 1: Diffuse the situation and provide information to the family.** If there is no physical safety risk, document the incident without removing the youth from the home or charging the youth with an offense. Provide contact numbers for appropriate services, such as counseling referrals and juvenile justice programs. Set expectations for each member of the family, and explain the consequences for not complying. Tell them what they need to do, explain why, and give them a time frame.
 - **Option 2: Adult involved in the conflict voluntarily leaves the home.** If there is another responsible caregiving adult in the home, the adult involved in the conflict should be encouraged to temporarily leave the home and stay with a relative or friend to allow a cooling-off period.
 - **Option 3: Youth leaves the home.** Encourage the parent or guardian to allow the youth to temporarily stay with a responsible family member or friend. Assist the family in identifying such a person. If no options can be identified, contact the local DJJ office for a Short-term Alternative Placement (STAP) home for the youth, which may be a foster home or group home. This will avoid using jail, while still diffusing the situation and ensuring everyone’s safety.
 - **Option 4: Place youth in EPC, or arrest parent or guardian due to abuse or neglect.** A youth who is engaging in incorrigible behavior may be the victim of abuse or neglect. Avoid taking the youth into detention if underlying abuse or neglect in the home is contributing to the youth’s behaviors. In these situations, you may opt to take the youth into emergency protective custody (EPC), or arrest the parent or guardian for abuse or neglect.
 - **Option 5: Place youth in secure detention.** Detention should be a last resort. State law allows detention of an incorrigible youth for no longer than a 24-hour time period (or a 72-hour time period if a judge has issued a prior court order warning the youth of this possibility). § 63-19-820(E).

Tips for Responding to RUNAWAY Calls

- **DEFINITION OF RUNAWAY.** State law does not define running away and does not give a length of time or distance requirement. You **must** enter any youth reported missing into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database. However, you are not required to file a petition and charge the youth as a runaway to do so. Before making the determination to charge a youth with the offense of running away, consider the possibility that the youth may be trying to escape abuse, neglect, or other harm.
- **FACTORS TO DETERMINE IF RUNAWAY CHARGE IS APPROPRIATE.**
 - **Youth's history as given by others.** In addition to basic information such as the last known location of the youth, length of time they have been gone, and physical description, the person making the report should be asked other questions. Ask about the youth's history of:
 - Trauma, abuse, or neglect
 - Mental health diagnoses and medications
 - Substance abuse
 - Running away prior to this incident
 - **Youth's explanation of reason for leaving.** When a youth is located, more information may be needed to determine whether a runaway charge is appropriate. Consider the need to take the youth to a children's advocacy center for a forensic interview. If that is not needed, and the youth is willing to speak to you about why they ran away, consider whether the youth:
 - Appears fearful of returning home, or gives you other reason to suspect abuse or neglect
 - Shows signs they may be engaged in prostitution or be the victim of human trafficking
 - Has been victimized while on runaway status
 - Is running away from something or is running to something
- **FINDING THE APPROPRIATE RESOLUTION.**
 - **Option 1: Return the youth to their home.** If there are no concerns of abuse or neglect, the youth may be returned home.
 - **Option 2: Youth temporarily stays with other responsible adult.** If there are no concerns of abuse or neglect, and the youth does not want to remain in the home of their guardian, assist the family in identifying a relative or friend's home where the youth can stay temporarily. Contact DJJ so they may assist with determining appropriate services for the youth and family.
 - **Option 3: Youth is placed in STAP home.** If you determine out-of-home placement is necessary and take the youth into custody, DJJ may be able to place the youth in a short-term alternative placement (STAP) such as a group home or foster home. Contact DJJ so they may find out whether an appropriate STAP is available.
 - **Option 4: Place youth in EPC.** Youth who run away often have complex reasons for this behavior, which may include sexual or physical abuse, neglect, mental health issues, and family dysfunction. If you determine the youth may be in imminent danger due to abuse or neglect, take the youth into emergency protective custody and notify DSS.
 - **Option 5: Place youth in secure detention.** Detention should be a last resort and is never appropriate for a child who has been taken into EPC. State law allows detention of a runaway youth for no longer than a 24-hour time period (or a 72-hour time period if a judge has issued a prior court order warning the youth of this possibility). § 63-19-820(E). Detention should not be utilized as a runaway shelter and should not be used as a placement for youth who are victims of abuse or neglect.

Tips for Responding to RUNAWAY Calls

- **RUNAWAY YOUTH IN STATE CUSTODY & RUNAWAY YOUTH FROM OTHER STATES.**
 - **Runaway from DSS or DJJ custody.** When responding to a runaway from DSS or DJJ, first contact the appropriate agency and speak with the case worker for the child so they can give background information and assist with de-escalation.
 - **DJJ:** Law enforcement is immediately notified if a youth in DJJ custody runs away. Contact the DJJ office in the county where the youth resides to determine the appropriate place to transport the youth upon pick-up.
 - **DSS:** Foster parents are instructed to contact law enforcement, then DSS, if a youth in their care runs away. DSS policy is that once a runaway youth is located by law enforcement, law enforcement should contact DSS and the DSS case worker will pick up the youth. The DSS worker may ask for help from law enforcement if there are safety issues or other specific concerns.
 - **Runaway from another state.** If a youth has run away from another state, consult NCIC for the youth's status and additional information. South Carolina participates in the Interstate Compact for Juveniles. Once you take the youth into custody, either DSS or DJJ will handle the case.

Local & National RESOURCES

Local Phone Numbers (fill in for your county)

- Solicitor:
- Department of Juvenile Justice:
- Department of Social Services:
- Department of Mental Health:
- Substance Abuse Treatment Providers:
- SRO or Juvenile Division:

Domestic Violence- Resources for Victims

- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (1-800-799-7223) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY for deaf and disabled persons), <http://www.thehotline.org>
- SC Domestic Violence Organizations by county: http://www.scag.gov/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Domestic-Violence-Organizations-2011_1.pdf

LGBT- Resources for Youth

- Harriet Hancock LGBT Center of South Carolina: (803) 771-7713, <http://harriethancockcenter.org>
- The Trevor Project: 866-488-7386, <http://www.thetrevorproject.org>

Runaway and Homeless- Resources for Youth

- The National Runaway Safeline: 1-800-RUNAWAY (786-2929), <http://www.1800runaway.org>
- National Safe Place: Text the word SAFE and your location (address/city/state) to 69866 for help. <http://nationalsafeplace.org/safe-place-teens>



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