

# Missing

*"I was shocked when she ran away although, looking back, she was more of a loner than her brother. I now know that she had been missing school quite a bit. We stopped talking when my partner moved in but had been really close before that."*

- Make time for your child to talk to you about their worries - even when you have to tell them off
- You know how important a good education is - let your child know this
- Only keep them off school if they are too ill to attend - not for days out or shopping trips
- Be honest about things that might be happening in the family
- Look for early signs that your child might not be happy and talk to their school about these
- Help is available - please don't be too embarrassed or afraid to ask

## From home and school

The law says that parents must ensure that their children receive a proper, full time education and they can be prosecuted if their child does not attend school regularly and on time. Children who miss school are much more likely to have problems with their learning and getting the job or college place that they would like. They will often find it harder to make and keep friends and they are at much greater risk of getting into trouble in and out of school. If they are skipping school or lessons, they are more likely to come across adults or other young people who might want to cause them harm.

When children miss school without their parents' knowing, this is called truancy. Children who truant regularly often do this because they are worried about something. There might be something happening on the way to or from school that is causing them concern. They might be being bullied. They might be finding some lessons or subjects too hard (or too easy) or they might be having problems in completing their homework. Sometimes, children will be reluctant to leave home because they are worried that their parent might come to some harm whilst they are at school.

Children from all sorts of backgrounds run away from home for a variety of reasons. Many of us will remember planning to run away when we were younger because we felt unable to cope with our problems, that nobody cared about us or because we had been treated unfairly. Usually, if a child does go missing from home, it will be for a very short period - usually until the child thinks that the parents have noticed. Often, they will turn up at the home of a friend or relative.

When children run away, they are not being naughty - they are trying to tell us that they are unhappy or trying to find out just how much we do care about them.

However, if a child goes missing from home repeatedly, receives unexplained gifts, and possibly has an older 'friend', there is a possibility they could be being sexually exploited.

## WARNING SIGNS

*There may be none but does your child seem to be unhappy? Are you sure that they are not truanting from school? Has anything happened in the family that you haven't talked to your child about?*

## ACTION

*If you think your child might be skipping school, talk to the school or an Education Welfare Officer. Contact the police if your child goes missing and you don't know where they have gone.*

## WHAT TO SAY

*Make sure that your child knows how important they are to you. When you have to tell your child off, tell them that it's their behaviour that's the problem - not them. If something has gone wrong in the family, don't let your child think that it's their fault.*

## PREVENTION

*Be alert to any unexplained changes in your child's behaviour. Spend time with them and be interested in their lives and worries. Do you know who your child's friends are? Be very careful about their access to the Internet and 'chat rooms'.*

## CONTACTS

- Childline 0800 1111
- Missing Persons Helpline (24hrs) 0500 700 700
- Message Home (for young people to get a message to their parents) 0800 700 740
- Wiltshire County Council Children's Services:  
Main Switchboard 01225 713000  
Area Offices:  
North Wiltshire 01249 444321  
West Wiltshire 01225 773500  
South Wiltshire 01722 327551  
Emergency Duty Service (out of hours) 0845 60 70 888
- Wiltshire Police 01380 735735
- Parentline Plus 0808 800 2222

*Check the Wiltshire ACPC website for the latest phone numbers:  
[www.wiltshire.gov.uk](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk)*