



SEXUAL EXPLOITATION EDUCATION

RUNAWAYS AS TARGETS

by WALKING WISE



NOTE TO PRESENTER

Log in to WalkingWise.com and refer to the Implementation Toolkit for classroom teaching tips.

Most importantly:

DEFINE SCHOOL POLICY

Establish a sexual exploitation reporting protocol with a trauma-informed response. The Walking Wise Implementation Toolkit provides a sample protocol.

AGE & AUDIENCE

This presentation can be edited by following the procedures on page 3 to align with your school policies, specific age groups, and the involvement of at-risk audiences.

SUPPORT PROCEDURE

Provide your students with guidance on how to access immediate help or arrange a private meeting with a social worker, counselor, nurse, school resource officer, or another trustworthy staff member to report concerns about themselves or a peer.

SECOND SAFE ADULT

Ensure a second trustworthy adult, such as a teacher, is present in the learning setting to observe student reactions and identify those who may benefit from a follow-up meeting. This person should remain focused and free from other duties during the presentation.

NOTE TO PRESENTER

This PDF contains the same content as the PowerPoint presentation but has been condensed into fewer pages for easier reference. For live presentations, please use the PowerPoint version. It reveals bullet points one at a time.

Meaningful learning takes time. By introducing topics gradually over several years, educators can create steady growth in awareness and understanding.

Our recommended teaching plan offers a long-term path for middle and high school students to build knowledge and confidence.



6-YEAR TRACK

PARENTS & STAFF

#1 Myths & Reality

6th GRADE

#2 Trustworthy vs. Unsafe Adult
#3 Grooming Process

7th GRADE

#4 Pornography Link
#5 Sextortion Scheme

8th GRADE

#6 Male Victims
#7 Runaways as Targets
#8 Rural Risks

9th GRADE

#9 Human Traffickers
#10 Female & Peer Recruiters

10th GRADE

#11 Family Secret

11th GRADE

#12 Hidden Buyers

NOTE TO PRESENTER

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3

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For revision requests, please email us at: support@WalkingWise.com.

SENSITIVE TOPICS WILL BE DISCUSSED

CONTENT NOTICE

We'll be discussing serious safety issues today.

Some topics may be difficult to hear.

If you ever feel uncomfortable, you can step out and speak with a trustworthy adult for support.

You're not alone—help is available.

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4

NOTE TO PRESENTER

Trauma-Informed Delivery Guidelines

To support a safe and effective learning environment, please follow these guidelines:

- Present the information in a calm, matter-of-fact way and avoid sensational or alarming language.
- Avoid graphic details. Focus on helping students understand behaviors, risk, and ways to stay safe.
- Never blame victims. Responsibility always belongs to the person who caused harm.
- Maintain a steady, composed tone. Students often mirror the presenter's emotional cues.
- Do not ask students to share personal experiences or disclosures.
- If students laugh or react awkwardly, respond neutrally and gently redirect the focus.
- Pair all risk information with needed resources, practical solutions, and support options.
- Reinforce that students are not alone and that trustworthy adults are available to help.

STATISTICS

Why Study Results Can Vary

- **Some crimes are never reported, making it hard to reveal the entire issue.**
- **Studies collect information in different ways, leading to different results.**
- **Small studies may not represent everyone.**

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5

In this presentation, we'll discuss statistics, but it's important to note that while statistics provide valuable insights into an issue, they cannot be relied upon entirely.

Here are a few reasons:

UNREPORTED

Victims often do not report the crimes committed against them due to fear, shame, retaliation, or manipulation. Also, many don't realize that what is happening to them is a crime.

INCONSISTENT COLLECTION

Areas may define sexual crimes in various ways or use different methods to collect data, making it hard to compare information.

FOCUS GROUPS

Small or specific focus groups participating in a study or survey may not accurately reflect the diversity or experiences of the broader population.

WHY LEARN ABOUT THIS



KNOWLEDGE serves as a powerful defense against sexual predators.

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6

Education is one of the strongest tools for prevention.

When young people understand how predators operate, they are better able to recognize manipulation and avoid dangerous situations.

Reinforce that awareness increases safety.

PREVENTION EDUCATION



SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

includes grooming,
sextortion, pornography
& sex trafficking.

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7

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Taking advantage of another person for their own benefit, especially in a sexual way, often using pressure, tricks, or control.

Below are different forms of exploitation:

GROOMING

Building trust, dependency, or an emotional connection to manipulate someone.

SEXTORTION

Threatening to share embarrassing or sexual images, videos, or information to pressure someone into following demands.

PORNOGRAPHY

Involving someone in creating sexual images who is under 18, or someone who is pressured, or unable/unwilling to give consent.

SEX TRAFFICKING

Manipulating or forcing someone into sexual activity in exchange for money or something of value.

Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 (Legal Definition):

SEX TRAFFICKING is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person under the age of 18 for the purpose of a commercial sex act.

TVPA link: Retrieved April 14, 2026, from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-106hr3244e nr/pdf/BILLS-106hr3244enr.pdf>

VOCABULARY



Words to Understand

- **Missing Child**
- **Runaway**
- **Basic Need**
- **Trauma**
- **Target**
- **Prey**
- **Disorient**
- **Survival Sex**



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8

Understanding vocabulary terms related to the behaviors of sexual predators can empower young people to recognize warning signs of harmful situations.

Knowing these terms helps them identify manipulative tactics that unsafe people (predators/traffickers) use to build trust and exploit vulnerabilities.

With this knowledge, young people are better equipped to spot red flags, understand that these behaviors are abusive, and feel more confident reporting predators to trusted adults or authorities, potentially preventing further harm.

VOCABULARY

MISSING CHILD

A child (under 18) whose whereabouts are not known to their parent or caregiver and who is reported missing.



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

About how many U.S. children (under 18)
go missing every year?



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

About how many U.S. children (under 18) go missing every year?

- A) 30,000 children
- B) 130,000 children
- C) 330,000 children
- D) 530,000 children

ANSWER

About 330,000 U.S. children (under 18)
go missing every year.

Source

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2025). 2024 NCIC missing person and unidentified person statistics (Table: Missing Person Circumstances – Runaway). Retrieved January 18, 2026, from <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/cjis/2024-ncic-missing-and-unidentified-person-statistics.pdf/view>

VOCABULARY

RUNAWAY

A child (under 18) who leaves home without permission and whose location is unknown to their parents or caregivers.



CONSIDER THE RISK

Sometimes teens think about leaving home without fully understanding the risks.



CONSIDER THE RISK

Understanding Running Away

- Why would someone want to leave?
- What might they be trying to escape?
- What could they be hoping to find?
- What are they running to?
- What risks and challenges could they face?



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Young people may sometimes think about running away when they feel overwhelmed, but may not fully understand the risks involved.

Running away may seem like a solution, but we will learn that it often introduces new risks and challenges, especially regarding safety and basic needs.



This 3-minute Walking Wise animated video series teaches how sexual predators use manipulation, intimidation, and coercion to exploit young people.

NOTE

Log in to Walking Wise.com to watch the three-minute animated video with audiences.

Is animation appropriate for teens?

Businesses worldwide use explainer-style animation as a training tool for their employees.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Of the U.S. children reported missing,
what percent ran away?



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Of the U.S. children reported missing, what percent ran away?

- A) 35%
- B) 55%
- C) 75%
- D) 95%

ANSWER

About 95% of U.S. missing children
are runaway youth.

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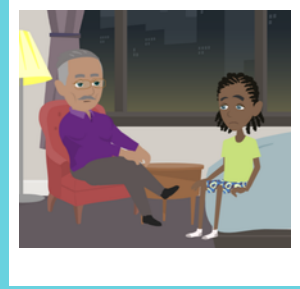
Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2025). 2024 NCIC missing person and unidentified person statistics
(Table: Missing Person Circumstances – Runaway).

19

Source

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2025). 2024 NCIC missing person and unidentified person statistics (Table: Missing Person Circumstances – Runaway). Retrieved January 18, 2026, from <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/cjis/2024-ncic-missing-and-unidentified-person-statistics.pdf/view>

REASONS FOR LEAVING



Why do some young people run away from home?



REASONS FOR LEAVING

Feeling Unsafe

- **Fear:** Worried about threats or punishment.
- **Abuse:** Experiencing harm or neglect.



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21

Some young people may feel unsafe in their home environment due to fear of harm, punishment, or ongoing abuse or neglect.

Safety is a basic need, and when it is not met, a young person may consider leaving home to protect themselves.

VOCABULARY

TRAUMA

A very upsetting experience that can affect a person's thoughts, feelings, behavior, and how their body responds to that stress.



REASONS FOR LEAVING

Family Challenges

- **Conflict:** Not getting along with parents or caregivers.
- **Family Stress:** Such as divorce, a death, or substance use.
- **Rejection:** Not feeling accepted by family.

Ongoing conflict, major changes, a parent losing their job, abuse by a parent/guardian, or instability within a family, such as divorce, loss, or substance use, can create stress for young people.

These challenges may lead some teens to feel disconnected or unsupported, increasing the desire to leave home.

REASONS FOR LEAVING

Emotions

- **Feeling anxious, overwhelmed, or depressed**
- **Feeling shame or guilt**
- **Feeling unheard or unsupported**

Strong emotions like feeling overwhelmed, anxious, depressed, or ashamed can influence decision-making.

When emotions build up, and a young person feels unheard or unsupported, running away may seem like a way to escape the issues.

REASONS FOR LEAVING



How can school or social pressure cause a young person to want to run away?



REASONS FOR LEAVING

School or Social Pressure

- **Peer Conflict:** Experiencing bullying or cyberbullying.
- **Stress:** Feeling overwhelmed by school or activities.
- **Rejection:** Feeling left out or not accepted by peers.

Experiences at school, such as bullying, peer conflict, learning challenges, or academic stress, can impact a young person's well-being.

Feelings of rejection or not being accepted by peers can increase emotional distress and contribute to thoughts of leaving.

VOCABULARY

TARGET

A person chosen by someone who intends to take advantage of them.



VOCABULARY

PREY

A person who is seen as vulnerable and easier to manipulate, control, or harm.



MANIPULATION

How can others influence a young person to run away?



MANIPULATION

Outside Influences

- **Peer Pressure:** Being encouraged by friends to leave home.
- **Lured:** Being convinced by promises of a “better life.”
- **Sextortion:** Being threatened with exposing private images.

Friends, peers, or individuals online (predators) may influence a young person’s decisions.

Some young people may be encouraged or convinced to leave home by others who promise a better situation or offer support.

Others may cause a young person to feel at risk of humiliation due to exposure of embarrassing private images. They may see running away as their only option when in a state of panic.

MANIPULATION

Outside Influences

- **False Promises:** Promises of love, adventure, or protection.
- **Online Tricks:** An online stranger pretends to be trustworthy.
- **Criminal Pressure:** Being pressured to join a gang or commit a crime.

Some predators often use manipulation, pressure, or threats to influence a young person to leave home.

This may include false promises, coercion, or sextortion to gain control over vulnerable youth.

VOCABULARY

BASIC NEEDS

The things a person needs to live, stay safe, and be healthy.



FINDING BASIC NEEDS

What are some basic needs that may be hard to access after running away?



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POSSIBLE ANSWERS

- o Money
- o Food
- o Shelter/Showers
- o Electricity for cell phones
- o Protection
- o Friends
- o Education
- o Job

FINDING BASIC NEEDS

Hard to Find When Homeless

- Money
- Food
- Clean Water
- Clean Clothes
- Shelter
- Hygiene Products
- Restroom
- Electricity/WiFi
- Phone/Computer
- Friends
- Transportation
- Protection
- Medical Care
- Education
- Employment



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34

When a child runs away, the sudden loss of access to basic needs, such as food, shelter, and transportation, can quickly create economic dependency on others. Sometimes, this may include unsafe adults.

Predators often exploit this state of homelessness as a lure, initially offering help, which later becomes a means of control.

RISKIER LOCATIONS



What locations can cause young people to be more vulnerable?



RISKIER LOCATIONS

High-Risk Locations

- **Transportation Hubs:** Bus stations, train stations, airports
- **Unstable Housing:** Shelters or staying with friends
- **Abandoned Buildings:** Empty or unsafe buildings
- **Lodging:** Low-cost hotels and motels



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36

TRANSPORTATION HUBS: Bus stations, train stations, and airports are where youth may be waiting for a ride or trying to reach another location.

UNSTABLE HOUSING: Homeless shelters, where traffickers may target vulnerable youth in need of a place to stay, and makeshift living spaces where traffickers can exploit vulnerable individuals.

ABANDONED BUILDINGS: Empty or unsafe buildings that youth may seek refuge in when they have nowhere else to go.

LODGING: Low-cost motels or hotels, especially in areas with high levels of human trafficking activity.

RISKIER LOCATIONS

Other Risky Areas

- **Public Places:** Malls, truck stops, libraries, juvenile courts
- **Crowded Events:** Concerts, festivals, fairs
- **Online:** Social media, gaming platforms, dating apps
- **Isolated Areas:** Rest areas, parks



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Anywhere young people hang out:

PUBLIC PLACES: Remote or isolated areas where youth may go to hide or rest, exposing them as easy targets for traffickers.

CROWDED EVENTS: Concerts, festivals, and other public events are where traffickers can easily blend in and target isolated youth.

GATHERING SPOTS: Nightclubs or Bars: Places where young people may be invited by traffickers to work, leading them into exploitation. Also, 24-hour diners, where food is typically served throughout the night.

ONLINE PLATFORMS: Social media, dating apps, gaming platforms, and other online sites where traffickers can contact young people to make false promises.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What percentage of children who run away are at risk of sex trafficking?



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What percentage of children who run away are at risk of sex trafficking?

- A) 1 in 7 children
- B) 1 in 27 children
- C) 1 in 47 children
- D) 1 in 67 children

ANSWER

About 1 in 7 children who run away are at risk of sex trafficking.

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NCMEC Cyber Tipline Report (2024). Child Sex Trafficking, MissingKids.org.

40

Source:

NCMEC Cyber Tipline Report (2024). Child Sex Trafficking. Retrieved December 30, 2025, from https://www.missingkids.org/ourwork/impact#:~:text=Table_title:%20Reports%20by%20Type%20Table_content:%20header:%20%7C,Active:%2066%20%7C%20Grand%20Total:%200836%20%7C

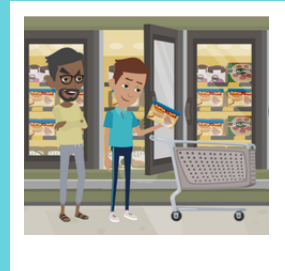
VOCABULARY

DISORIENT

To confuse someone so that they have difficulty thinking clearly or making safe decisions.



GAINS TRUST



How do traffickers gain a runaway youth's trust?



GAINS TRUST

Common Tactics

- **Kind:** Predators can offer to help resolve problems.
- **Generous:** They can offer food, housing, showers, & money.
- **Protective:** Can offer protection from dangerous people.
- **Inclusive:** Can invite youth to parties & offer drugs/alcohol.

Although force and threats may be used at later stages, traffickers typically start by manipulating and building trust, making it difficult for young people to recognize the exploitation as it unfolds.

KIND & GENEROUS: Predators can seem genuinely concerned about a vulnerable youth and offer to help solve the young person's problems. They often pretend to be kindhearted people who want to help by providing food, shelter, and other necessities.

PROTECTOR: Unsafe people can pretend to offer protection from gangs or other dangerous people.

HOSPITABLE: They often invite runaway youth to parties to partake in drugs and alcohol, or they may offer substances to help soothe a young person's stress and pain.

SURVIVAL



What is survival sex and why is it dangerous?



SURVIVAL

Exploiting Basic Needs

- **Survival sex is a form of human trafficking**
- **Vulnerable people are often tricked or manipulated**
- **Involves the exchange of basic needs for sexual activity**
- **Food, housing, substances, clothing, protection**

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Polaris Project (2019). Freedom happens now. Sex Trafficking and LGBTQ Youth.

45

When a young person runs away, they often lose access to basic needs like food, shelter, and transportation. This can make them depend on others for help, including people who may not be safe.

Some predators take advantage of this situation by offering help at first, such as a place to stay or food. Over time, that help can turn into control.

In some cases, a young person may feel pressured to trade sexual activity in order to receive basic needs. This is called survival sex. It is a form of exploitation and is considered child sex trafficking under the law.

Source

Polaris Project (2019). Freedom happens now. Sex Trafficking and LGBTQ Youth.
<https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/LGBTQ-Sex-Trafficking.pdf>

VOCABULARY

SURVIVAL SEX

Being pressured, tricked, or manipulated into sexual activity in exchange for basic needs like food, shelter, or protection.



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How long should an adult wait before reporting their child missing to the police?



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How long should an adult wait before reporting their child missing to the police?

- A) Wait 12 Hours**
- B) Wait 24 Hours**
- C) Wait 48 Hours**
- D) Report Immediately**

ANSWER

Report immediately. An adult should never wait to report their child is missing.

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U.S. Department of Justice (2023). When Your Child Is Missing: A Family Survival Guide, p. 7. ojjdp.ojp.gov.

49

The first few hours matter most—never wait.

There is no required waiting period to report a missing or overdue child.

Parents and caregivers should not delay notifying authorities while conducting their own searches for missing children.

Law enforcement has specialized tools to conduct thorough, efficient investigations.

Source

U.S. Department of Justice (2023). When Your Child Is Missing: A Family Survival Guide, p. 7. ojjdp.ojp.gov. Retrieved December 2, 2024, from <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/publications/family-survival-guide.pdf>

GOING HOME



Transportation Back Home

If wanting to RETURN home, contact the National Runaway Safeline:

FREE bus ticket from Greyhound Buses

1-800-RUN-AWAY

1-800-786-2929

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50

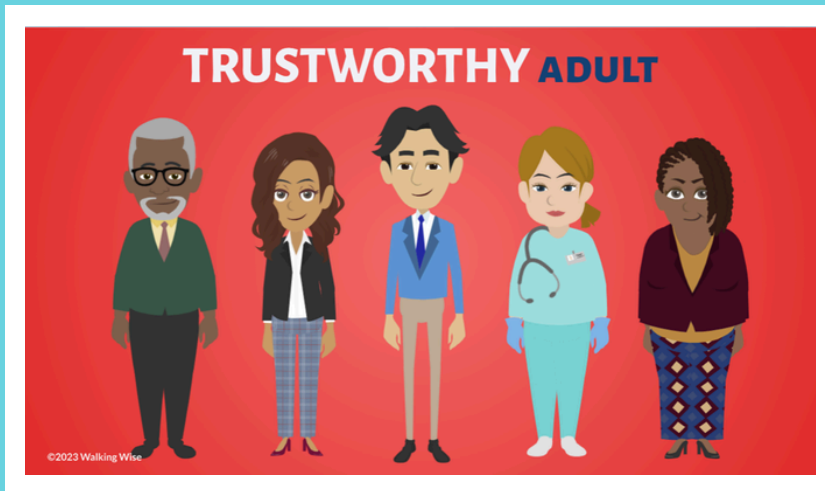
HOME FREE PROGRAM

Greyhound assists the National Runaway Safeline with reuniting children and their families.

They offer a free bus ticket to children who want to go home.

The Home Free program is for youth ages 12 to 21 who self-identify as homeless, runaways, and victims of human trafficking.

ASK FOR HELP



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51

Walking Wise asked a focus group of survivors:
What do you think young people should know about sex trafficking?

ANSWER

The survivors agreed that the most vital information teens should know is how to ask for help.

At the top of their list:
Tell a TRUSTWORTHY adult.

ASK FOR HELP



Who should a young person talk to if they are thinking about running away or need help?

ASK FOR HELP



Instead of Running Away

- Talk to a trustworthy parent, family member, or other adult.
- If you are a student in school, consider telling a trustworthy teacher, coach, school nurse, social worker, counselor, resource officer, or principal.
- Consider talking to a friend's trustworthy parent or family friend.
- Ask the National Runaway Safeline for advice: 1-800-RUN-AWAY (786-2929)
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children 1-800-THE-LOST (843-5678)

24-Hour Hotline for Help

- ✓ National Human Trafficking Hotline 888-373-7888 or TEXT 233733
- ✓ Rescue America 833-599-FREE (3733)
- ✓ National Sexual Assault Hotline 800-656-HOPE (4673)
- ✓ National Center for Missing & Exploited Children 800-THE-LOST (843-5678)
- ✓ National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-SAFE or TEXT 88788
- ✓ National Runaway Safeline 800-RUNAWAY (786-2929)

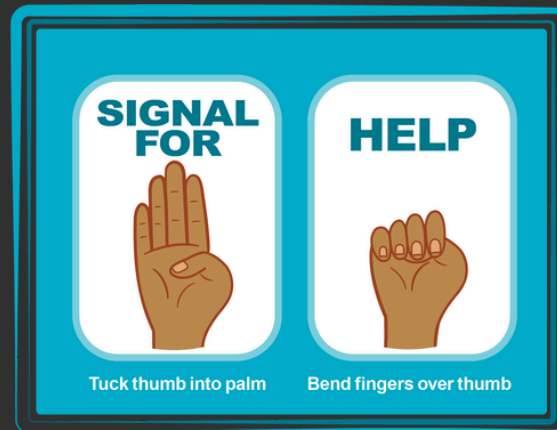
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54

NOTE TO PRESENTER

Presenters may ask their audience to consider adding a few "hotline for help" phone numbers to their cell phone contacts or take a photo of this slide.

HAND SIGNAL FOR HELP



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Source: Canadian Women's Foundation, April 2020

55

Although the hand signal for help has not yet achieved universal recognition, it may quietly get someone's attention in urgent situations.

SILENT

It can be used silently.

UNTRACKABLE

It leaves no digital footprint.

CONCEALED

It can be done secretly when a perpetrator is in the vicinity.

SIGNALS DISTRESS

A distressed facial expression can help others recognize that help is needed if the hand signal is not understood—but it is important not to alert the predator/trafficker, causing harm.

Source

Canadian Women's Foundation, April 2020

Thank you!

WalkingWise.com



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Postgraduate Institute for Medicine
Academy of Forensic Nursing



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56

NOTE TO PRESENTER

To access additional resources on targeting runaway youth, please refer to the last page of Lesson Plan #7 on the Walking Wise Learning Platform.

We welcome your feedback at support@WalkingWise.com.