(NU) - Between 1.6 and 2.8 million youth run away each year in the U.S. The brutal cold of winter is only one of the threats that runaway youth will struggle to overcome. According to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) 2011 Runaway Youth Longitudinal Study, the long-term impact on their health, economic and legal outcomes as adults is another significant risk.

“Long-term consequences of youth running away should encourage parents, teachers and other adults to get involved earlier to prevent a runaway situation,” said Maureen Blaha, NRS executive director. “Hopefully, knowing the potential consequences also deters youth from running away.”

For adults who ran away from home as adolescents, the likelihood of having suicidal thoughts increases 51 percent, they are more than three times as likely to attempt suicide, the likelihood of them being a smoker is 2.4 times as high, they are 67 percent more likely to use marijuana, and they are 53 percent more likely to report having a sexually transmitted disease.

Running away doesn’t just affect health – it also impacts the economy. As an adult, a former runaway’s annual income level is $8,823 lower on average and the likelihood of being a recipient of AFDC, public assistance or welfare is 76 percent higher.

The negative effects of running away don’t stop there. Adults who ran away as adolescents are approximately 2.5 times more likely to be arrested, and they are 99 percent more likely to sell drugs. The key is runaway prevention, and NRS offers a few tips for parents to keep their child from running away:

• **Understand Your Child.** Try to sympathize with what your kids are going through, and look at life from their point of view.
• **Discuss Feelings.** Talk about what it feels like to be a parent, and encourage your children to talk about their feelings, too. When parents share their feelings, children know it’s safe to share theirs.
• **Use Teamwork.** Work together to find mutually agreeable solutions.

Find help and information for runaway, homeless and at-risk youth by visiting www.1800RUNAWAY.org or by contacting NRS at 1-800-RUNAWAY.