



LITTLE RUNAWAYS

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GOING TO PUBLIC PLACES CAN OFTEN BE A NIGHTMARE FOR MANY PARENTS DUE TO THEIR CHILD BEING A 'RUNNER' ... RUNNING FROM SHOPS, CAR PARKS, BEACHES, THE PARK ... IN FACT ANYWHERE THERE IS NOT A CLOSED IN SPACE.

This causes great safety issues for the child, the general public and definitely great angst for the parents and carers. When asked at the clinic, "how do we stop our child from running" we as practitioners need to first investigate "why are they actually running?"

No behaviour is ever random!

It is essential that we don't judge the behaviour, rather understand that every behaviour is happening for a reason and it is that reason that is much more important than what the behaviour looks like. Sometimes it is hard to identify this reason, particularly as the same behaviour (in this example running) will have many different reasons. The reasons will be different for all, but a foundation is often based on the child experiencing anxiety around something that is happening in their life and they don't feel like they have all the required skills to manage that aspect of life effectively. For example, children may run in public places because:

- They have hypersensitivities to any one of their senses and thus the environment where they are creates a sensory overload. Children sometimes see their only option to relieve their sensory overload is to run and escape. For example, walking into a shopping centre we can be welcomed by intense sounds, strong smells, many people, bright lights, overwhelming visuals etcetera!
- They become anxious around crowds and do not feel like they have the skills to manage when there are lots of people.
- They had a picture that something would

happen a certain way (e.g. you would buy them a toy) and when this picture did not happen the way they expected they became anxious, not knowing how to respond to this smashed picture.

- They simply did not want to go where you were taking them - their agenda was different to your agenda and they are upset that you are not considering their agenda and they do not know when their agenda will happen (e.g. on Saturday your son was planning a morning of Playstation to rest after his school week - then you took him to the shops instead and you stayed longer than he expected).
- They might like to control the emotional reactions of other people and they have learnt that by running away that the adults around change their behaviour (e.g., might become anxious, angry, upset or even start listening to what the child might have been trying to say).

The list of possible reasons is endless and these are but a few. However, the key is to know that these situations are not random and they are happening for a reason. If we don't investigate this reason we are simply judging the behaviour to be wrong and not understanding from the child's perspective what could actually be happening for them. What might they be experiencing in life that is causing them to run? What are they trying to ESCAPE FROM?

If your child is a known runner, some suggestions to support:

- Firstly be open to asking, "What is my child trying to escape from?" or, "What part of life was presented that they did they not feel like they had the skills to respond to before they ran"?
- When your child is already anxious, chasing will typically make them run faster, become less aware of where they are actually running and thus increase safety issues. When your child is too far ahead and uncatchable,



running after them would not be advisable. Rather, without panic, try to keep an eye on where they are and walk slowly towards them!

- If they are in close proximity and catchable, then hold them firmly in your arms, sending them a message that you are there to support them.
- Always have a safe place for your child to run to. For example, a chair on the outside of the shopping centre is a place they can go to that will (1) relieve them partially of their sensory overload, (2) provide a safe place to run to if the shopping centre becomes overwhelming, (3) allows the child to know there is somewhere they can go to and my carer will find me here and I won't be in trouble and (4) allows the carers to feel less anxious as they know 'where' their child is going when they do run.
- Put strategies in place for yourself to remain calm (e.g. gentle breathing), knowing that as your own anxiety levels increase you are actually adding to the situation by either (1) providing the reaction your child was after and thus they have controlled you, or (2) adding to your child's anxiety and thus increasing the intensity of the behaviour.

The key is to UNDERSTAND and NEVER JUDGE ...

Understanding begins when we ask, "I wonder why this behaviour is happening".

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