

Fact Sheet

Missing children and young people



There are about 38 000 missing person reports made to police every year in Australia. Young people between the ages of 13 -17 are the most likely group to be reported missing, making up about 50% of all missing person reports. Children between the ages of 0 - 12 are one of the least likely groups to be reported missing and only make up about 8% of all reports. Although because of their age, children under 12 are considered particularly vulnerable.

The good news is that most children and young people who are reported missing are found within 48 hours and the likelihood of them having experienced harm is very low. 9 out of 10 return home unhurt. There can be many reasons a child or young person is reported missing. Children and young people may be voluntarily or involuntarily missing.

Abduction

Going missing through child abduction is rare in Australia. Less than 1% of missing person reports made in Australia are related to abduction. This includes adults and children. When it does happen, about 20% are parental or family abductions, 35% are people that are known to the child and 40% are strangers. The way parental abduction is reported (or not) means that the amount of parental abductions is probably higher than recorded. It's important to remember that abduction is still one of the least common ways for children or young people to go missing.

Voluntarily missing

The majority of teenagers who go missing are intentionally removing themselves from their home or environment. This could be because of issues like family violence, abuse, conflict with caregivers, identity issues (sexuality, gender, religious, political), mental health or drug/ alcohol issues. Children and young people in out of home care are more likely to go missing than their peers. Many stay with friends or family with a small proportion sleeping rough. Although most young people end up returning home unharmed, this group are more likely to experience violence, harm or abuse while they are missing. Some children and young people who are missing on purpose may not even know that they have been reported missing.

Young women between the ages of 13 -17 are the most likely group to go missing because of mental health issues or suicidal thoughts.

They are also most likely to intentionally go missing multiple times.

Involuntarily missing

Children between the ages of 0-12 are more likely to be involuntarily missing although this can also happen for older young people too. Becoming lost or disorientated is one reason children or young people may be missing. This includes experiences such as wandering off in a public place; being involved in a natural emergency or weather event; being involved in an accident where a child or young person cannot be located (ie lost at sea). Some young people with learning difficulties or disability may be included in this group. Children and young people may become unintentionally missing during parental separation due to a parent withholding the whereabouts of a child. When a parent has no fixed address or is transient, the other parent might report the child as missing if they cannot be located.

Steps to take if a child or young person is missing

You don't have to wait 24 hours to report someone as missing. If a child is between the ages of 0 - 12 it is mandatory to report them as missing.

Reports should be made in person to local police.
State and Territory police are responsible for investigating missing person reports.

It's important to have as much information as possible to provide to police. The [Australian National Missing Person's Coordination Centre](#) suggests the following information:

- The missing person's full name and any other names they use
- Date and place of birth
- Detailed description of clothing, distinguishing features like tattoos, birthmarks or scars
- Recent clear colour photograph that shows the person's face
- Details of where and when the person was last seen
- List of the places the person goes to regularly (sporting clubs, shopping centres, parks etc)

If you don't have all this information and are concerned that a child or young person is missing you can still make a report. Anyone can make a report, it does not have to be a family member.

Where to get help

- In an emergency call triple zero 000
- The Australian Federal Police Missing Persons website has all the information you need to know, including how to report a missing person and clear information about the process <https://missingpersons.gov.au/>.
- If you suspect that a child has experienced abuse or is at risk of harm you should contact the relevant state or territory child protection agency. The Australian Institute of Family Studies has an up to date contact list <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/cfca-resource-sheet/reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect>

What is an Amber Alert?

An amber alert uses location data and social media platforms like Facebook to post information about missing children to people's feeds if they are in the same area as a missing child. The police decide when to issue an amber alert and it's usually only when there is a serious risk to a child's safety and there is tangible information to share that might help. This could be a description of a vehicle, clothing or a person.

Prevention strategies

- Create a family password that is used by people who are allowed to transport your children. No password means no go. Learn more about [how to create a family password](#)
- Resources that teach personal safety skills to children and young people are available from the [Daniel Morcombe Foundation](#)
- Teach your child independent [travel safety skills](#), this can help them to know what to do if something goes wrong

References and resources

Australian Institute of Criminology, Bricknell, S. 2017, Research Report 08 Missing Persons: Who is it risk? Viewed 15 January 2018, <https://aic.gov.au/publications/rr/rr8>