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## Ways Children Go Missing

By Caitlin Bootsma

Each year, our country recognizes National Missing Children's Day. As caring adults, care providers and for those of us who are parents, we have been equipped to be watchful to help children. Another component of this is awareness. While it is hard to consider, it is important to know that there are many ways that children can go missing, but we can identify risk factors and indicators to prevent this from happening, or, help us to respond as quickly as possible in the event that it does happen.



The following are ways that the [National Center for Missing & Exploited Children](#)<sup>1</sup> have identified as significant ways that children go missing:

**Autism and Wandering:** In a recent survey, nearly half of families with kids on the autism spectrum reported that their kids had wandered or left. Children living with autism spectrum disorder can wander for a variety of reasons, including seeking out enclosed spaces or escaping overwhelming sensory input. To find out more, click [here](#).<sup>2</sup>

**Child Sex Trafficking:** This tragic reality refers to anytime a child under the age of 18 is "advertised, solicited or exploited through a commercial sex act."<sup>3</sup> Data tells us that kids are often targeted who don't have a lot of support, experience homelessness, or are victims of trauma. Children who run away from home are particularly vulnerable. But, even children that appear to be in stable home situations can also be victims due to the

manipulation of traffickers. Find out more [here](#).<sup>4</sup>

**Family Abduction:** This occurs when a child is taken by a family member who denies another family member lawful custody or visitation rights. Sixty-three percent of Amber Alerts in 2020 were family abductions. Find out more about risk factors [here](#).<sup>5</sup>

**Infant Abduction:** This refers to when a child under one is abducted, by a family member or a stranger. Child abductions are rare, but they do have some particular warning signs to look out for. Find out more [here](#).<sup>6</sup>

**Endangered Runaways:** Children under 18 who run away of their own accord often meet the criteria of one or more risk factors. Find out more about at-risk youth and what we can do to help [here](#).<sup>7</sup>

**Online Enticement:** This category refers to children who are groomed online to be abducted and, often, to become victims of a sexual crime. It's important to recognize the signs of "sextortion" to better protect our youth. Find out more [here](#).<sup>8</sup>

Missing children can be reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children by calling 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).

#### References

- 1 <https://www.missingkids.org/HOME>
- 2 <https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/autism>
- 3 <https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/trafficking>
- 4 <https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/trafficking>
- 5 <https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/familyabduction>
- 6 <https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/infantabductions>
- 7 <https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/runaways>
- 8 <https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/onlineenticement>

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## What is Your Opinion?

How will you celebrate Father's Day?

- Celebrating fatherhood!
- By spending time with my own father, or an important father in my life.
- By praying for fathers.
- More than one of the above.
- Something else, or I'm not sure.

Submit Vote!

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