

Fact Sheet: Missing People Victimization

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Missing People Victimization: The Facts

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Who is Considered a Missing Child and a Missing Person?¹

In Texas, a missing child is distinguished from a missing person. A missing child is considered a person under the age of 18 whose legal custodian is unaware of their location. Circumstances surrounding their disappearance appear that: (1) the child did not leave voluntarily, and the person who took the child was not given permission to do so or is in violation of a court order, except when attempting to prevent family violence, or (2) the child ran away without the custodian's permission and does not intend to return.

A missing person includes a person of any age who is missing and: (1) has a physical or mental disability, (2) may be in danger, (3) still legally under the care of a legal custodian, (4) the disappearance may be involuntary, or (5) missing after a natural disaster or catastrophe.

Have you Heard?

- ◇ In 2020, over 543,000 missing person records were entered into the National Crime Information Center's missing person database. At the end of 2020, there were 89,637 active missing persons records with 34% of active records being children.²
- ◇ Missing persons cases may be linked to human trafficking, domestic violence, homelessness, or organized crime.

Risk Factors for Children³

Risk factors vary by age and circumstances. For children, risk factors include, but are not limited to: (1) being under the age of 14, (2) having a mental or cognitive disability, (3) having a drug (prescription or illegal) dependency, (4) missing for over 24 hours before reporting to law enforcement, (5) being at-risk, in danger, or with someone who may put them in danger, and (6) the child's absence is out of character and without clear reason. Common categories for missing children are juvenile runaways, family abductions, lost and/or injured children, and nonfamily abductions. Children may run away for various reasons, such as problems in the home or with legal custodians or manipulation by a third-party. Runaways are at a higher risk of physical, drug, or sexual abuse, suicide, or being sexually exploited or trafficked.

Risk Factors for Adults and Older People³

Missing adults usually fall into categories such as: involuntarily missing, endangered adults, disabled adults, or missing because of a catastrophe. In some situations, adults may voluntarily leave their homes and loved ones to escape relationship problems or abuse, financial stress, or as a symptom of a mental condition. Risk factors for older adults include being easily disoriented or physically lost, having memory problems, wandering behavior, or having a cognitive disability. People with dementia, Alzheimer's, Down syndrome, or autism are at an increased risk of getting lost and going missing.

Alert Systems in Texas⁴

Alert systems are designed to notify the public of missing people to increase the likelihood of law enforcement receiving tips and information. In Texas, there are five alert systems for missing people: AMBER, Silver, Endangered Missing Persons, Camo, and CLEAR. AMBER Alerts are specific to children under the age of 18, while Silver Alerts are for older people with mental conditions. Missing people (of any age) with an intellectual disability may be able to have an Endangered Missing Persons Alert activated on their behalf. Camo Alerts notify the public about missing current or former military

members with a mental illness. CLEAR Alerts are for missing, kidnapped, or abducted adults or adults who are in immediate danger. To request an alert activation, please visit the Texas Department of Public Safety [website](#).



If Your Child, Friend, or Loved One Goes Missing

Evaluate the Situation

1. Search areas the person frequents and leave the area undisturbed.⁵ If in the home, search closets, piles of laundry, in and under beds, inside of large appliances, vehicles, and any other area where a child may crawl or hide⁶
2. If at a store, tell the store manager or security guard⁶
3. Talk to family and friends and visit their workplace and places the person is known to go⁵
4. Have a friend or neighbor help you recall information and keep detailed notes of your conversations⁵

Contact Law Enforcement

1. Contact the police and request a missing person report to be filed⁵
2. Provide information such as the child's name, date of birth, height, weight, and descriptions of any other unique identifiers such as eyeglasses and braces. Tell them when you noticed your child was missing and what clothing they were wearing. Have recent photos available⁶

Continue the Search⁵

1. Create posters and post on social media
2. Decide who will be the primary contact for the media and law enforcement
3. Keep in contact with the officer assigned to the case and make reasonable requests. Work with law enforcement to decide details of any rewards posted.
4. Maintain public attention of your story. The police can help guide you when contacting the media.

Resources

- ◇ Alzheimer's Association (1-800-272-3900) <https://www.alz.org/>
- ◇ National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (1-800-843-5678) <https://www.missingkids.org/home>
- ◇ National Runaway Safeline (1-800-786-2929) <https://www.1800runaway.org/>
- ◇ Texas Center for the Missing (713-599-0235) <https://centerforthemissing.org/>
- ◇ The Polly Klaas Foundation (1-800-587-4357) <https://www.pollyklaas.org/>

References

- 1 Texas Department of Public Safety. (2017). *Missing persons clearinghouse*. <https://www.dps.texas.gov/internetforms/Forms/MP-14.pdf>
- 2 Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2020). 2020 NCIC Missing Person and Unidentified Person Statistics. <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/2020-ncic-missing-person-and-unidentified-person-statistics.pdf/view>
- 3 Quinet, K. (2012). Missing persons. *Problem-Specific Guides Serices*, 66. https://popcenter.asu.edu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/problems/pdfs/missing_persons.pdf
- 4 Texas Department of Public Safety. (2021). Statewide alert programs. <https://www.dps.texas.gov/section/intelligence-counterterrorism/statewide-alert-programs>
- 5 The Center for Hope. (n.d.). Steps to take if a loved one goes missing. <http://www.hope4themissing.org/page.php?15>
- 6 National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. (n.d.). Get help now. <https://www.missingkids.org/gethelpnow>

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Resources

- Texas Abuse Hotline (suspicions of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children, adults with disabilities, or people 65 years or older) <https://www.txabusehotline.org/Login/>
1-800-252-5400
- Texas Council on Family Violence <https://tcfv.org/survivor-resources/>
- Texas Association Against Sexual Assault <https://taasa.org/>
- National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-7233
- National Sexual Assault Hotline 1-800-656-4673
- National Human Trafficking Hotline 1-888-373-7888
- Aging and Disability Resource Center 1-855-937-2372
- Victim Connect Resource Center 1-855-484-2846

