

# National Missing Persons Coordination Centre



## ARE YOU A YOUNG PERSON AT RISK OF GOING MISSING?

## FACT SHEET

**25,000 young Australians under the age of 18 are reported missing each year.**

**A missing person is defined as anyone reported missing to police, whose whereabouts are unknown and there are fears for the safety or welfare of that person. You can be reported as missing even before 24 hours is up!**

### **I'M NOT THINKING OF GOING MISSING, COULD IT BE CALLED SOMETHING ELSE?**

There are a lot of words that all mean 'missing' like disappearance, abduction, homelessness, couch surfing, running away, sleeping rough, squatting, staying with friends and not letting anyone know, going walkabout or just heading off. In fact, you may be a missing person and not know it.

### **WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE GO MISSING?**

Young people go missing for lots of reasons: family conflict, wanting to become independent, being the victim of a crime, mental health problems, drugs/alcohol abuse, other abuse and neglect or even just forgetting to tell someone where you are going.

You might think about going missing because of stress or arguments at home, but if you don't get help to fix the real problems, 'missing' might just make them worse.

Only a very small percentage of missing persons cases in Australia are stranger

abductions. Most young people and children who go missing are found safe and well after a short period of time.

People usually go missing to remove themselves from something that isn't making them happy, so you might want to think about 'missing' being a symptom rather than the cause—or a solution to—a problem you are facing.

### **IS IT CRIME TO GO MISSING?**

No, it is not a crime to go missing. If you are reported missing and located by the police you will not be charged for going missing.

But remember by being a missing person you may put yourself in an unsafe position, making you sensitive to becoming a victim of a crime, or forcing you to commit a crime to stay 'missing'.

### **WHAT IF I AM MISSING - CAN THE POLICE FORCE ME TO GO HOME?**

If you have been reported missing, it means that someone cares about your safety and welfare. When you have been reported missing to the police the quickest way to resolve the issue is to attend your local police station.

You should take some photo ID with you (if you have it) and perhaps a friend to support you if you're worried about going to the police station alone. The police will ask you questions to check

your identity, where you stayed while you were missing and generally how you are.

You do not have to answer all of the questions the police ask you, but it is important to tell them if you are worried about your safety or welfare if you go back to the place you went missing from, which could have been home or another place like a refuge.

### **IF I AM MISSING AND WANT TO GET SOME HELP WHO CAN I TALK TO?**

The Department of Social Services (DSS) run a national community-based program called Reconnect.

Reconnect helps young people between 12 and 18 years who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, and their families. Reconnect assists young people stabilise their living situation and improve their level of engagement with family, work, education, training and their local community.

Reconnect workers will listen to you, and help you bridge the communication between you and your family if you want to resolve issues that are troubling you.

Information about a Reconnect office close to you can be found by calling 1300 653 227 or emailing [reconnect.policy@dss.gov.au](mailto:reconnect.policy@dss.gov.au).