

# National Missing Persons Coordination Centre



ARE YOU WORKING WITH 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.**

## WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE GO MISSING?

Young people go missing for a number of reasons: family conflict, wanting to become independent, being the victim of a crime, forgetting to communicate, mental health problems, drugs/alcohol abuse as well as escaping from other abuse and neglect.

Research suggests that many of the factors attributed to young people who go missing are similar to the factors correlated to young people who are involved in offending, and illicit drug and alcohol abuse. These include an unstable home environment and mental health concerns.

A very small percentage of missing persons cases in Australia are stranger abductions. Most young people and children who are missing disappear for short periods and are then located. Young people may go missing as a way of resolving tension or conflict but if the underlying factors are not addressed when they return then the issues remain and they are at greater risk of going missing again.

## WHAT ARE OTHER TERMS ARE USED FOR 'MISSING'?

Often agencies work with missing people but may not use the term 'missing' in relation to their cases. There are many words that also mean 'missing' such as disappearance, abduction (both stranger and parental), homelessness, squatting, running away, couch surfing, sleeping rough, staying with friends, going walkabout or just heading off. It may be that many young people have been reported missing and don't realise.

Public policy on homelessness (DSS Reconnect Operational Guidelines 2013-2016) refers to 'the evidence of escalating family conflict or dysfunction and reduced tolerance'. Other factors that need to be considered include deteriorating academic performance, trauma, personality/mood changes, acting out and risk taking behaviours, inappropriate peer groups and substance abuse. All these factors are common with missing young people.

## WHAT ARE MY OBLIGATIONS TO YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE MISSING?

Whilst it is not a crime to go missing there are vulnerabilities present when someone disappears. Lack of access to support, financial constraints, poor hygiene, substance abuse etc. may all impact on a young persons ability to keep safe.

In working with a young person who is missing, workers might discuss the implications associated with going missing and start a conversation about what alternative options might be available to them.

## HOW DO I MAKE A MISSING PERSONS REPORT OR ASSIST A CONCERNED PERSON TO MAKE ONE?

If you are concerned for a young person's safety or welfare or wish to assist a parent or carer in making a report, you must contact your local police and provide the following information:

- the missing person's full name and any other names they use
- date and place of birth
- a detailed description of the person including any clothing, distinguishing features such as tattoos, birth marks or scars
- a recent, clear and colour photograph showing the persons face
- details of where and when the person was last seen or heard from
- a list of places the person frequents such as clubs, shopping centres, hotels, parks, amusement arcades or restaurants