

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® (NCMEC)?

Answer: NCMEC is a nonprofit 501(3)(c) charitable organization and the leading organization in the country addressing the issues of missing and sexually exploited children. NCMEC was established in 1984 and is authorized by Congress to perform 19 core functions including serving as the nation's clearinghouse for information; operating a national, toll-free, 24-hour missing children's hotline; and operating the CyberTipline® for online reporting of the sexual victimization of children and inappropriate sexual content.

Is the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children a government agency?

Answer: No, it is a nonprofit charitable organization; however, NCMEC has a close working relationship with the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Secret Service, and other federal agencies. The organization works in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

What is the mission of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children?

Answer: The mission of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children is to find missing children, eliminate child sexual exploitation, and prevent child victimization.

Does the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children accept donations?

Answer: Yes, donations, gifts, and in-kind services are an important source of funding for NCMEC.

How many missing children are there?

Answer: The problem of missing children is complex and multifaceted. Children may become missing due to abduction by nonfamily members or abduction by family members. Children may be missing as a result of running away from home. Children may also be missing involuntarily for reasons other than abduction, due to becoming lost, injured, or otherwise missing to their parents or guardians. The best national estimates for the number of missing children are found in the *National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART-2)*, released in October 2002. According to *NISMART-2*, an estimated

- Nearly 800,000 children younger than 18 are missing each year, or an average of 2,185 children reported missing each day.
- More than 200,000 children were abducted by family members.
- More than 58,000 children were abducted by nonfamily members.
- 115 children were the victims of "stereotypical" kidnapping. These crimes involve someone the child does not know or a slight acquaintance who holds the child overnight, transports the child 50 miles or more, kills the child, demands ransom, or intends to keep the child permanently.

The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention funds ongoing research about missing children through the *National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART)*. These researchers published their

latest data in 2002, [NISMART-2](#). The researchers will be collecting new data over the next year to use in an update to this study, *NISMART-3*. To discuss the previous research, please contact Andrea Sedlak at 301-251-4211, SEDLAKAI@WESTAT.com.

Are many missing children found deceased? What hours are most critical when trying to locate a missing child?

Answer: According to a 2006 study, *Case Management for Missing Children Homicides: Report II*, the murder of an abducted child is a rare event; an estimated 100 such incidents occur in the United States each year; however, the study further found that 76.2 percent of abducted children who are murdered are dead within three hours of the abduction.

REFERENCE: For more information about the *Case Management for Missing Children Homicides: Report II*, please visit the “FAQs” and “Statistics” sections at www.missingkids.com.

How many missing children are recovered?

Answer: In the past 28 years, from 1984 through March 2012, NCMEC has assisted in the recovery of more than 175,200 missing children. NCMEC’s missing-child recovery rate has risen from 62 percent in 1990 to 97 percent today.

Do the posters I see and the cards I get in the mail really help recover missing children?

Answer: Absolutely. These posters reach millions and prompt individuals across the country to call NCMEC’s missing children’s hotline and provide vital leads and information, many of which lead to the recovery of missing children.

Does NCMEC put pictures of missing kids on milk cartons?

Answer: NCMEC does not post photographs of missing children on milk cartons, but NCMEC photo partners may do so. Today NCMEC distributes photographs through a network of nearly 375 private-sector photo partners nationwide. The largest distributors of NCMEC’s missing-child photographs include the Valassis® program that reaches more than 100 million homes per week; bulletin boards in every Walmart® store; USA Today®’s provision of space throughout the year for missing-child photographs; weekly missing-child features on CNN’s HLN and truTV’s “In Session”; features of missing children on every newscast, every day on WABC-TV in New York; broadcast fax distribution via LexisNexis®’s Adam program; and many others.

Is “stranger danger” – that dangers to kids come from people they do not know – really a myth?

Answer: Yes. In the majority of cases the perpetrator is someone the parents or child knows, and that person may be in a position of trust or responsibility to the child and family.

We have learned children do not have the same understanding of who a stranger is as an adult might; therefore, it is a difficult concept for the child to grasp. It is much more beneficial to children to help them build the confidence and self-esteem they need to stay as safe as possible in any potentially dangerous situation they encounter rather than teaching them to be “on the look out” for a particular type of person.

For decades, parents, guardians, and teachers have told children to “stay away from strangers” in an effort to keep them safe. In response to the ongoing debate about the effectiveness of this advice, NCMEC has created many resources to help better safeguard children. For more

information about child safety, please visit the “More Publications” section at www.missingkids.com.

What does NCMEC do to combat child sexual exploitation?

Answer: NCMEC is a leader in the fight against child sexual exploitation. For example

- NCMEC operates the CyberTipline and has received more than 1.3 million reports of online enticement of children, child pornography, child prostitution, child sex tourism, child molestation, and other offenses resulting in the arrest and successful prosecution of sex offenders.
- NCMEC’s CyberTipline is the central reporting mechanism for the nation’s electronic service providers, who report to law enforcement via NCMEC when they discover apparent child pornography on their systems.
- NCMEC operates the Child Victim Identification Program[®] (CVIP), an effort in collaboration with law enforcement, to identify and rescue children being sexually exploited and seen in child pornography. CVIP staff members have reviewed and analyzed more than 67 million child pornography images and videos to assist law enforcement in their investigations of these crimes.
- NCMEC’s Exploited Children Division (ECD) provides technical assistance to law-enforcement agencies and prosecutors in child exploitation investigations and serves as a resource center for families, law enforcement, and the public about the issues of sexual exploitation of children.
- NCMEC’s Family Advocacy Division (FAD) provides technical assistance, referrals, and crisis-intervention services to families, law enforcement, and family-advocacy agencies. FAD also provides support, appropriate referrals, and follow-up on cases of extrafamilial exploitation. FAD’s staff is comprised of social-service professionals.

How can suspected child sexual exploitation be reported to the CyberTipline?

Answer: You can make a report to NCMEC’s CyberTipline by visiting www.cybertipline.com or calling 1-800-843-5678. NCMEC receives reports regarding the possession, manufacture, and distribution of child pornography; the online enticement of children for sex acts; child prostitution; child sex-tourism; child molestation not in the family; unsolicited obscene material sent to a child; and misleading domain names, words, or digital images. Reports may be made 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

What happens to my CyberTipline report after it is submitted to NCMEC?

Answer: Every report is analyzed by staff members in the ECD and provided to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and/or state and local law enforcement. The agency then reviews the report and determines if further action is needed. In some cases reports are also forwarded to electronic service providers, who can help law enforcement in their investigations.

How big of a problem is child sexual exploitation?

Answer: Sexual victimization of children is an enormous problem that is largely unrecognized and underreported. A study about child sexual victimization indicated as many as 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 10 boys could be sexually victimized in some way before they reach adulthood. Another study showed just 1 in 3 report their victimization.

For more information about child sexual exploitation, please visit the “More Publications” section at www.missingkids.com. Be sure to read *Preventing the Sexual Exploitation of Children*.

How many children are sexually solicited and/or approached online?

Answer: According to *Online Victimization of Youth: Five Years Later*, conducted by the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire

- Four percent (4%) of 10 to 17 year olds online received an aggressive sexual solicitation – a solicitor who asked to meet them somewhere; called them on the telephone; or sent them offline mail, money, or gifts.
- Thirty-four percent (34%) had an unwanted exposure to sexual material – pictures of naked people or people having sex.
- Twenty-seven percent (27%) of the youth who encountered unwanted sexual material told a parent or guardian. If the encounter was defined as distressing – episodes that made them feel very or extremely upset or afraid – forty-two percent (42%) told a parent or guardian.

For more information about Internet exploitation and *Online Victimization of Youth*, please visit the
“More Publications” section at www.missingkids.com.