

MISSING CHILDREN ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

A SUMMARY OF DATA INTAKED BETWEEN 2007 – 2016

FOCUS

This is an analysis of data regarding children with an autism spectrum disorder who were reported missing to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). The research methodology involved querying the database for children who were reported to have autism or Asperger syndrome as a medical condition, a mental health condition, or a special needs condition¹. Although the conditions and circumstances can vary widely, these children will be referred to as 'children with autism' for the purposes of this document.

This analysis includes data reported to NCMEC between January 1, 2007 and December 31, 2016. In total, there were 952 children with autism reported missing to NCMEC during this ten year period. These 952 children were involved in a total of 1,067 missing incidents.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

A majority of missing children with autism were **male (74%)**. Nearly every race had approximately the same proportion of male children versus female children.

White children made up the majority of missing children with autism (59%). There was an age range from 2 years old to 21 years old. Fourteen years old was the mean age.

During this time period, **Endangered Runaways made up 61% of intaked cases of children with autism**. The second most common case type was **Lost, Injured, or otherwise Missing (20%)**.

The most common reported action prior to going **missing was being at home (65%)**. The second and third most common reported actions prior to going missing involved being at school or traveling to school (8%) or traveling to another location (4%).

The majority (**98%**) of cases involving missing children with autism were **resolved**. The most common recovery method was **police investigation (44%)**, and the second most common recovery method involved the **child returning home on their own accord (21%)**. A majority (**82%**) were **recovered in the same state from which they went missing**.

Fifteen percent of reported children with autism were missing from foster care. They were more likely to be Endangered Runaways (79%) and older teens (a mean age of 15).²

White males comprised a plurality of all cases of missing children with autism (45%).

White females (15%) and black males (14%) were the second and third most common gender and race demographic.

Most Common Locations From Which Children Went Missing:

*Family home - 60%
A foster/group home - 12%
School - 10%*

¹ Children who were listed as "possibly" having autism but had not been diagnosed were not included in this analysis.

² Children with autism who were not missing from care had a mean age of 13.

MISSING DURATION AND FREQUENCY

Just under half (48%) of children with autism were recovered within a day after they went missing, and 74% were recovered within a week after they went missing. They had a mean missing duration of 29 days, and a median missing duration of 1 day. By comparison, during this same ten-year period, fourteen percent of children without autism were recovered by the day after they went missing, and 42% were recovered within a week after they went missing.

Thirty-eight percent of female children with autism were recovered by the day after they went missing, and 67% were recovered within a week. Fifty-two percent of male children with autism were recovered by the day after they went missing, and 76% were recovered within a week.

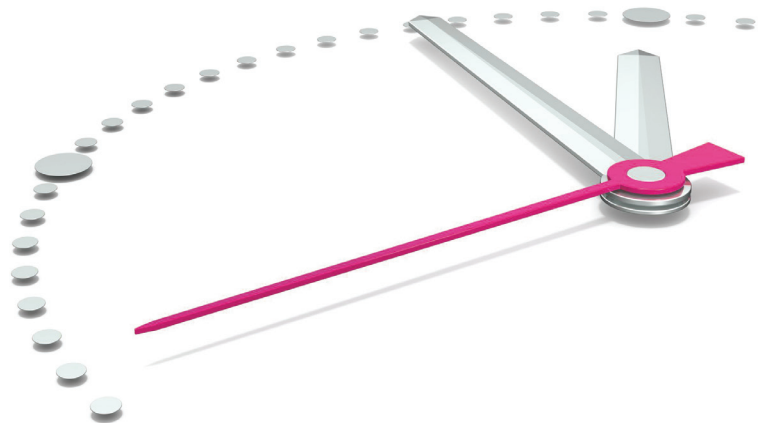
A little over half (54%) of children with autism who were missing from group or foster care were recovered within a week after they went missing. They had a mean missing duration of 17 days, and a median of 6 days. Females had a mean missing duration of 19 days, while males had a mean missing duration of 17 days.

Of the 952 children with autism who were intaked during 2007 – 2016, there were **18 children who remained actively missing. They had a mean missing duration of 3 years, and median missing duration of 9 months.** Once again, gender did not have a large effect on missing duration. **Twelve actively missing children with autism have been missing for more than 6 months.** This means they are classified by NCMEC as long-term missing children.

Seventeen percent of children with autism had multiple missing incidents. Six was the highest number of multiple missing incidents, and 3 was the mean number of multiple missing incidents. From the same time period, 15% of children without autism had multiple missing incidents. Fifty-one was the highest number of multiple missing incidents, and 4 was the mean number of multiple missing incidents.

*Longest missing duration
of a resolved case*
5 years

*Longest missing duration
of an active case*
16 years



DECEASED CHILDREN

During this time period, **there were 43 missing children with autism who were recovered deceased** (4% of the total). For a majority of these cases (72%) the manner of death was classified as accidental. Twenty-six percent of children who were recovered deceased had a manner of death that was either unknown or undisclosed. A remaining 2% of children who were recovered deceased had committed suicide.

The majority (81%) of deceased children with autism were male. Twenty-nine deceased children with autism were white, and 12 deceased children with autism were black.³

Nearly half (**46%**) of children with autism that were recovered deceased were located by the day after they went missing. They had a mean missing duration of 10 days and a median missing duration of 2 days. Missing duration for children recovered deceased did not vary greatly based on gender.

Nearly two thirds (63%) of children with autism who were recovered deceased went missing from their family home. An additional **21%** went missing from an outdoor area.

For 65% of deceased missing children with autism, drowning was listed as the official cause of death.

31 deceased missing children with autism were recovered in a body of water. An additional 9 missing children were recovered in an outdoor location.



WHEN ARE THEY REPORTED TO NCMEC?

This analysis also looked at the time that elapsed between when a child with autism was determined to be missing and when that child was reported missing to NCMEC. Mandatory reporting laws for missing children vary among states, and federal laws ensuring that NCMEC and law enforcement are notified of any cases involving children missing from foster care were first enacted in 2014. **Fifty-one percent of missing children with autism were reported to NCMEC within 24 hours.** There was a mean report time of 16 days, and a median report time of 23 hours. Females had a mean report time of 13 days and a median of 1 day. Males had a mean report time of 17 days and a median of 1 day.

Ten of the 18 actively missing children with autism were reported to NCMEC after two weeks had passed since their missing date. Actively missing children with autism had a mean report time of 11 months, and a median report time of 22 days. Actively missing females with autism tended to be reported more quickly than actively missing males with autism.

A little under half (47%) of children with autism who were missing from foster care were reported to NCMEC within 24 hours. There was a mean reporting time of 6 days, and a median report time of 2 days. The report time for children with autism missing from care did not vary much based on gender.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of children with autism who were recovered deceased were reported to NCMEC within 24 hours. There was a mean reporting time of 29 hours, and a median report time of 19 hours. For deceased females with autism, there was mean report time of 16 hours, and a median report time of 19 hours, while deceased males with autism had a mean report time of 33 hours and a median report time of 19 hours.

When reporting to NCMEC was delayed children tended to have a longer missing duration

³ Among the remaining children that were recovered deceased, there was one Asian child, and one Hispanic child.