



# AMHERST POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Missing children complaints are events that can morph into huge undertakings for police departments across the country and sad outcomes can tear apart communities forever. Typically, the cases that police received on missing children tend to fall into four categories: runaways, parental abductions, lost children and stranger abductions.

## ***Runaways***

This is the most common group of kids that are reported to police agencies. Many youths are usually attempting to assert some form of independence into their lives. Their decision to run may be because of mental health issues, behavioural difficulties, substance abuse issues or unapproved dating relationships. They may also run due to abusive relationships within the home, marital issues between the parents or alcohol/drug use in the home. Runaways are vulnerable to become victims of sexual exploitation or involvement in the drug trade.

A child who runs may be doing so because they are unable to talk to their parents and express various feelings that are troubling them. Parents should have meaningful conversations with their children and access the addictions and mental health services that are available in Cumberland County.

## ***Parental Abductions***

In Canada, abductions by a parent or guardian is the most common form of child abduction. Many times an abducting parent may take the child because they feel that their present custody agreement is unacceptable. The children are usually held as pawns in order to exert control and dominance over the other spouse. Parental abductions are criminal offences under Section 282 of the Criminal Code.

## ***Lost Children***

Many children are naturally curious and are still attempting to make sense of the world around them. This inevitably leads them to sometimes wander away from their caregivers. Parents are advised to discuss with their child about what to do when separated and to designate certain areas as meeting spots if a child becomes lost. If a child does become lost, employ the help of store or security personnel at the outset so that doorways or exits can be secured. Police can be

notified at the outset of a missing children case, parents do not have to wait 24 hours to report the incident.

### ***Stranger Abduction***

While being one of the rarest forms of child abductions, it is one that terrifies communities most. In most cases, non-parent abductions usually end up being a family friend, family acquaintance, caregiver or a neighbour. Complete stranger abductions happen in only one third of all non-parent abductions. In these cases, police must act extremely fast in order to safeguard the child. AMBER alerts, conventional media outlets and social media are employed as community wide efforts to locate the child as quickly as possible. According to the 2013 Missing Children Factsheet, there were 33 reported stranger abductions reported to Canadian Law Enforcement agencies out of the 41,000 reported missing children reports of that year. In Nova Scotia, there was one stranger abduction out of 288 missing children cases.

Sixty-Five per cent of missing children cases are resolved successfully within the first 24 hours and this moves up to approximately 90% after one week. Parents and caregivers are advised to create safety plans with their children in the event that a stranger attempts to approach their child.

There are two notable websites that provide a wealth of information on missing children. Please check the [missingkids.ca](http://missingkids.ca) website, and the missing children's society of Canada ([mcsc.ca](http://mcsc.ca)).