



# Missing Children on the Autism Spectrum

A summary of data intaked between 2011-2020



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## INTRODUCTION

Autism spectrum disorder (hereinafter autism spectrum) is a developmental disorder that affects communication and behavior. Children on the autism spectrum may have difficulty with communication and interaction with other people, restricted interests or repetitive behaviors, or have symptoms that impact their ability to function properly in school, work, and other areas of life<sup>1</sup>. This is an analysis of data regarding children on the autism spectrum who have been reported missing to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® (NCMEC). Because these children are described by callers in a variety of ways, search methodology involved querying for children with autism or Asperger’s listed as a medical condition, a mental health condition, or a special needs condition. Children who were described as “possibly” being on the autism spectrum were not included in this analysis. The previous study analyzed data from 2007 through 2016; therefore, this analysis overlaps the years 2011 through 2016.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism-spectrum-disorders-asd/index.shtml>

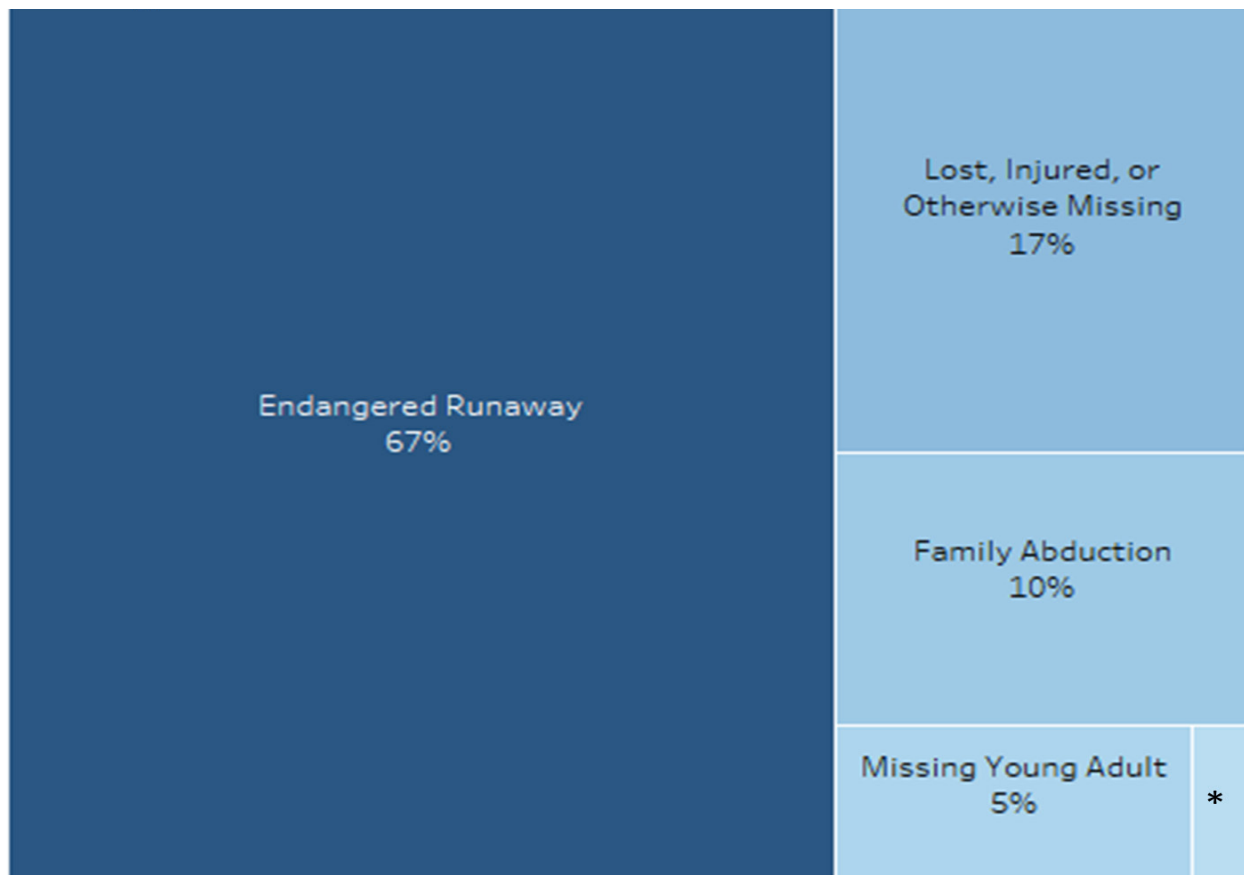
## KEY FACTS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Between January 1, 2011 and December 31, 2020 there were 1,516 children on the autism spectrum who were reported missing to NCMEC. These children were involved in 1,986 different missing incidents.

The age of missing children ranged from 1 to 20. The most common age was 14 for Nonfamily Abductions, 18 for Missing Young Adults, 14 and 15 for Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing, 3 for Family Abductions, and 16 for Endangered Runaways.

Female Children	Male Children
Average Age <b>14</b>	Average Age <b>13</b>
Most Common Age <b>16</b>	Most Common Age <b>17</b>

### Case Type



\* Nonfamily Abduction 1%

Most Common Characteristics of Missing Children on the Autism Spectrum				
<b>Sex:</b> Male (75%)	<b>Age:</b> 16 (19%) or 17 (19%)	<b>Race:</b> White (60%)	<b>Case Type:</b> ERU (67%)	<b>Case Status:</b> Recovered (98%)
<b>Missing Month:</b> June (11%)	<b>Missing Location:</b> Home (45%)	<b>Recovery Location:</b> Home (26%) or Outdoor Area (26%)	<b>Recovery Method:</b> Police Investigation (46%)	<b>Recovered in the Same State from Where They Went Missing:</b> (87%)

## Age and Race/Ethnicity Characteristics

The average age of all missing children on the autism spectrum was **13** years old.

The average age was

**15**  
for American Indian  
children

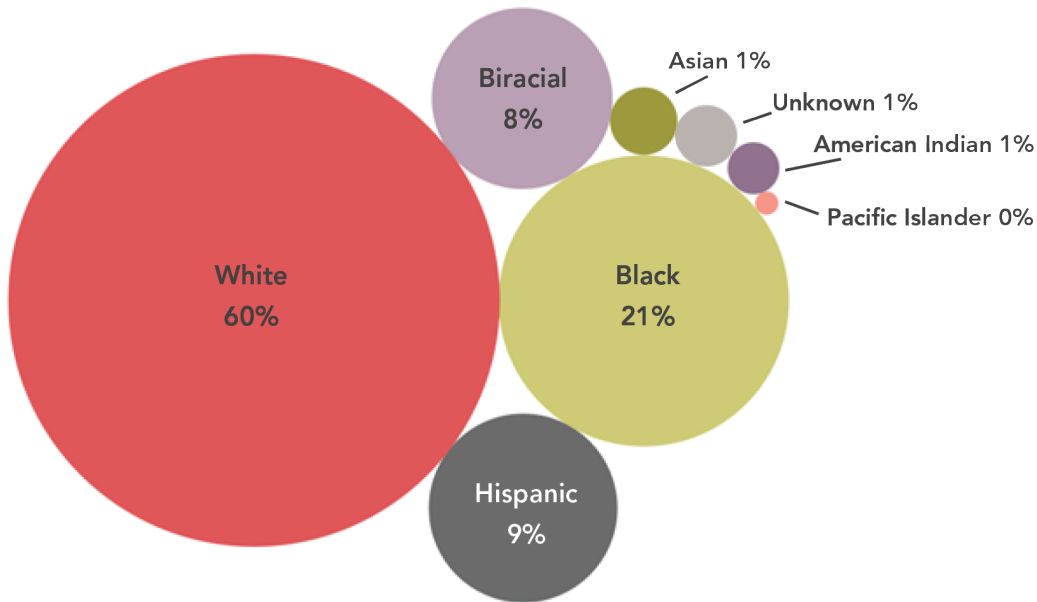
**13**  
for Asian, Biracial,  
Black, and Hispanic  
children

**10**  
for Pacific Islander  
children

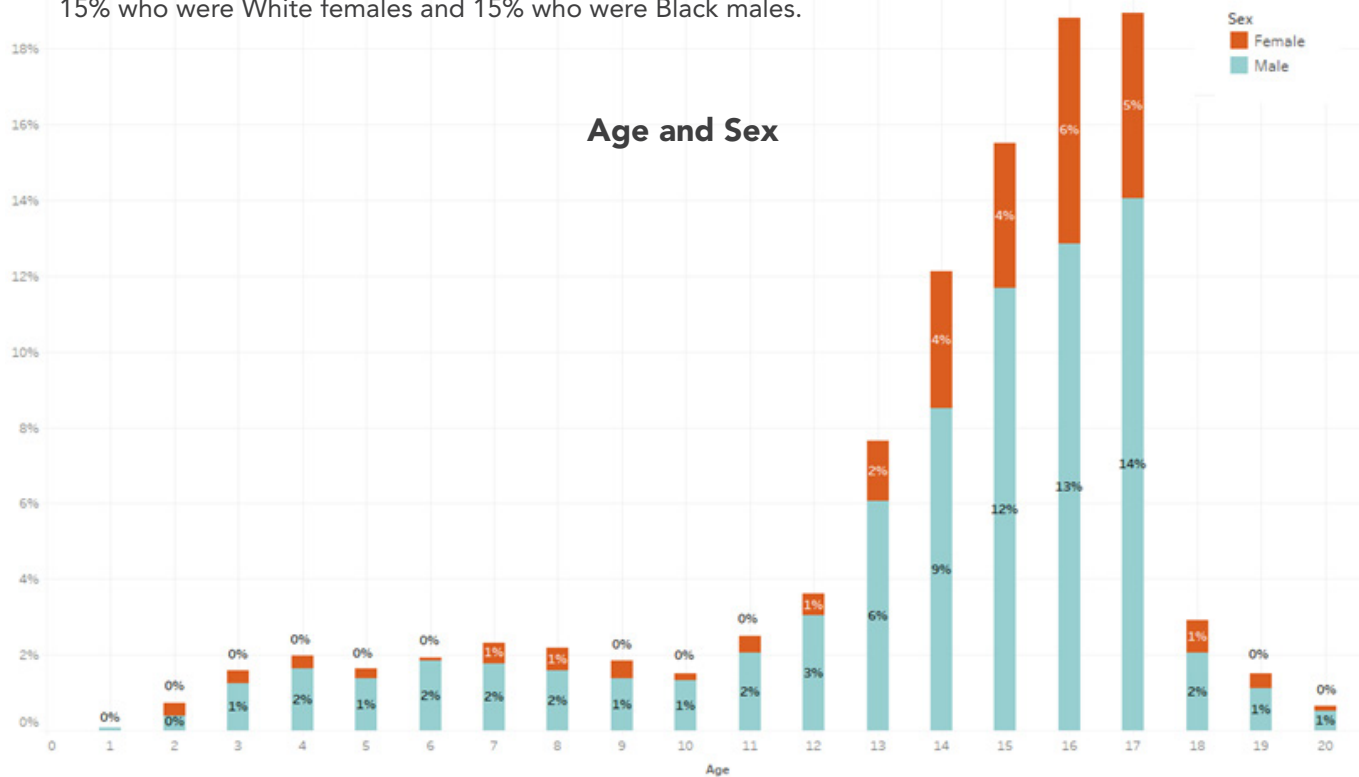
**14**  
for White  
children.

There were no major race or ethnicity differences based on sex.

### Race



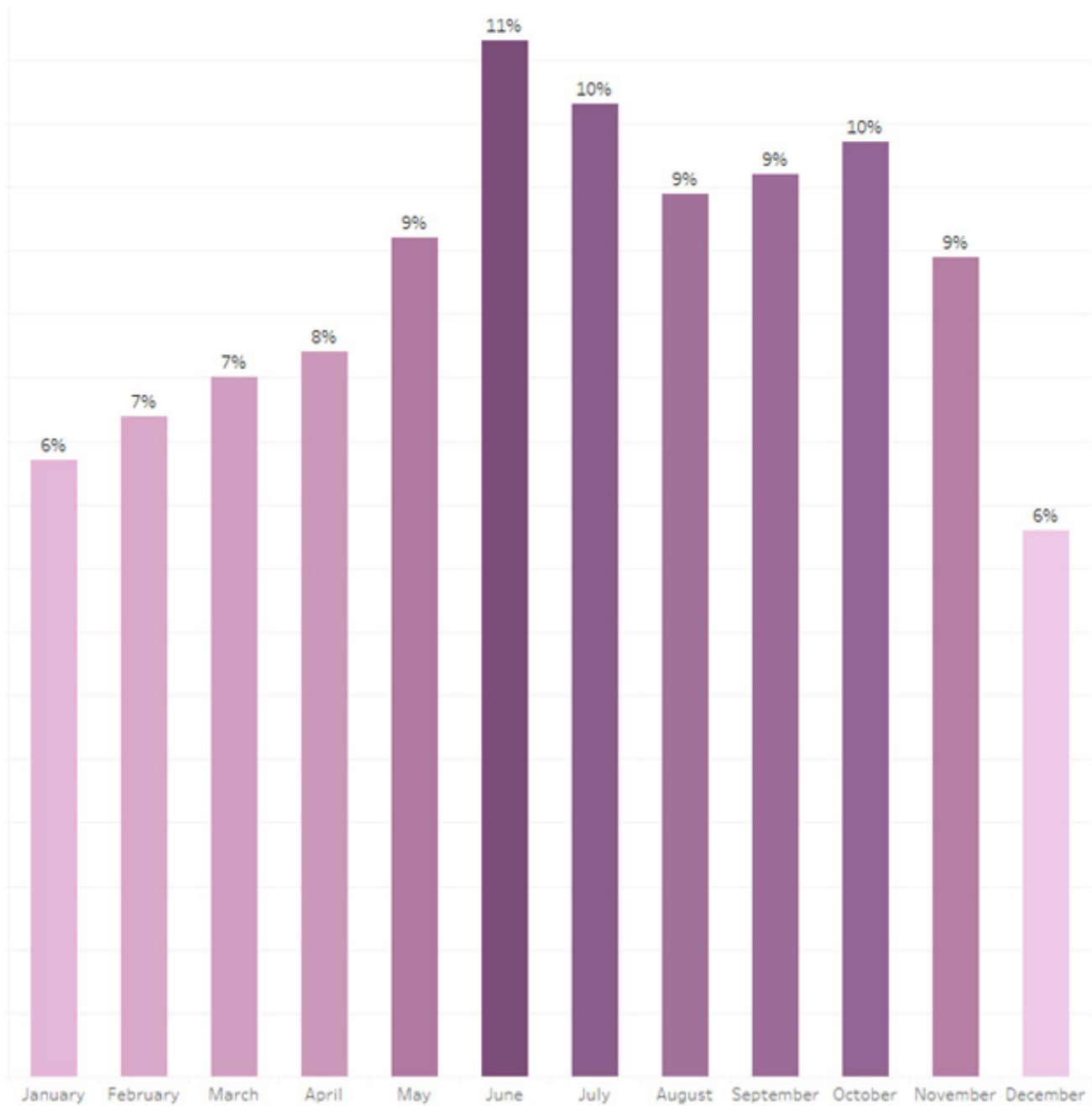
Almost half (45%) of missing children on the autism spectrum were White males, followed by 15% who were White females and 15% who were Black males.



# MISSING CIRCUMSTANCES

Children on the autism spectrum were most likely to go missing during summer.

### Missing Month Across All Years

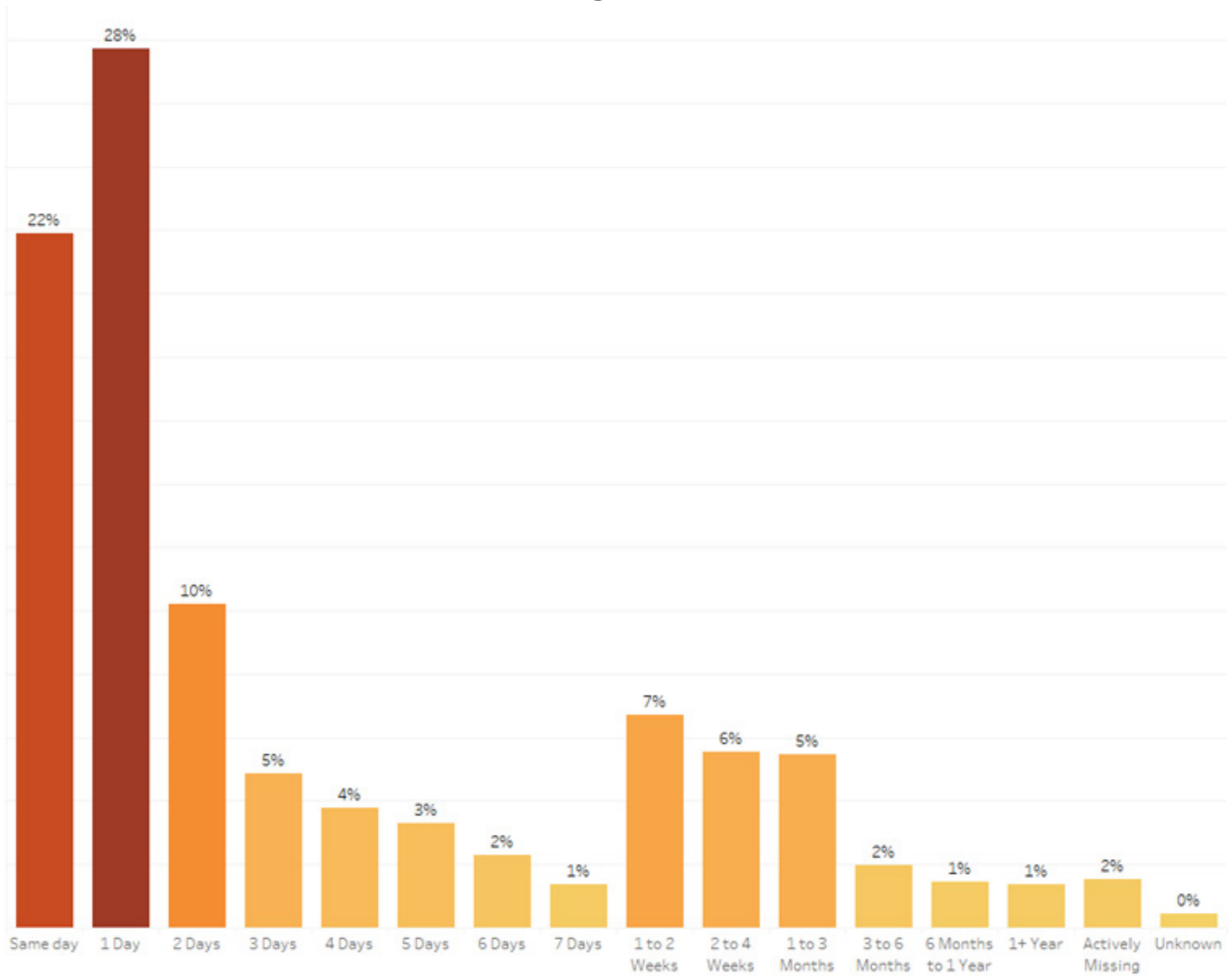


The most common missing location was the child's home (45%), followed by other/unknown (22%) and the child's foster/group home (18%). The most common reported action prior to going missing was being at home (67%). The top 3 states from where children were reported missing were California (11%), Florida (9%), and Texas (7%).

One-third (34%) of children were reported missing to NCMEC the same day they went missing, 32% were reported to NCMEC the day after, and 90% were reported to NCMEC within one week.

Multiple Missing Incidents
14% of children on the autism spectrum had multiple missing incidents.
Average: 3
Most Common: 2
The largest number of missing incidents for one child: 19

### Missing Duration



## RECOVERED CHILDREN

Most cases (98%) have been resolved.

Just over three-quarters (75%) of children were recovered within one week of going missing. Over half (60%) of children were recovered within two days, and 22% were recovered the same day. The longest missing duration of a recovered child was 1,087 days - or just short of 3 years.

Most (87%) recovered children were recovered in the same state from where they went missing. The most common recovery locations were the child's home (26%) or an outdoor area (26%).

Most Common Recovery Methods
Police Investigation: <b>46%</b>
Child Returned Home on Own: <b>17%</b>
Family/Friend Turned Child in: <b>14%</b>

## ACTIVELY MISSING CHILDREN

As of February 2020, 23 children on the autism spectrum remain actively missing. Most (39%) have been missing for less than a year, followed by 35% who have been missing for 1 to 2 years. The longest one child has remained actively missing is nearly 10 years.

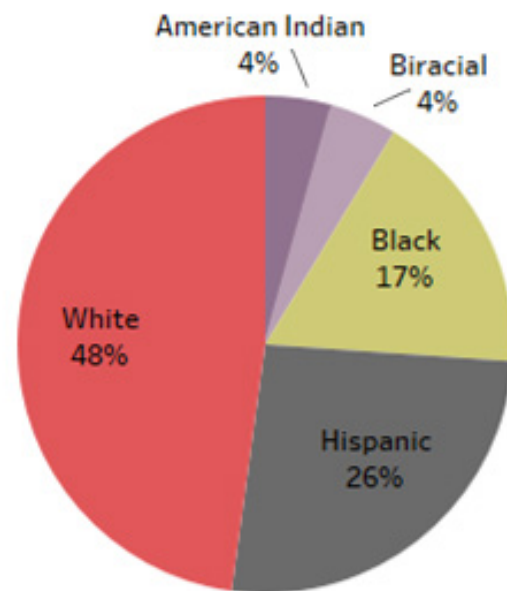
Almost three-quarters (70%) of actively missing children on the autism spectrum have been missing for over 6 months. This means they are classified by NCMEC as long-term missing children.

For actively missing children, 17% were reported missing to NCMEC one day after they went missing, and 48% were reported to NCMEC within one week.

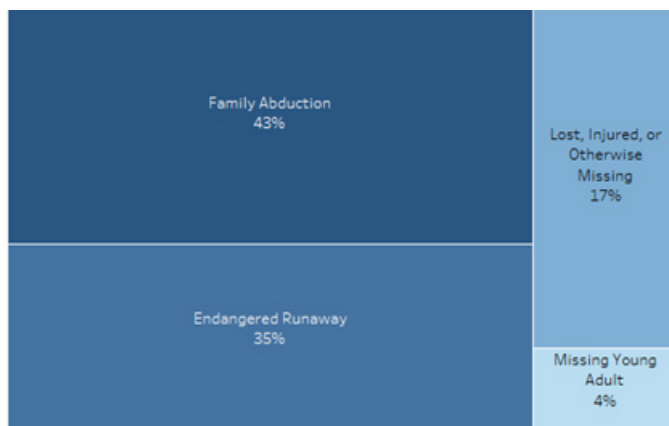
The longest amount of time it took for a child to be reported missing to NCMEC after going missing was 928 days – or 2 and 1/2 years.

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of actively missing children went missing in the most recent two years, 2019 and 2020.

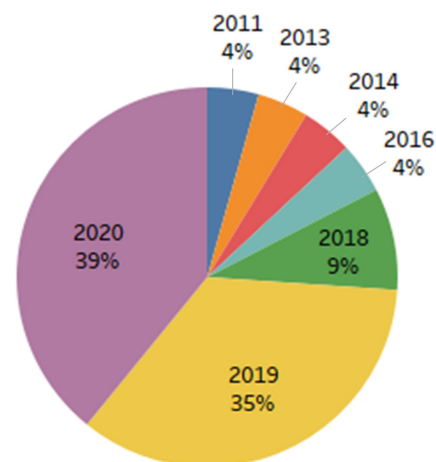
**Race of Actively Missing Children**



**Case Type of Actively Missing Children**



**Missing Year of Actively Missing Children**





## CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE

A child who goes missing from care (CMFC) is required to be reported missing by state care to law enforcement and NCMEC in compliance with the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014.

Nearly one third (28%) of children on the autism spectrum went missing from care. These children were involved in 765 different missing incidents. A majority (81%) were Endangered Runaways, followed by 9% that were Family Abductions.

The longest amount of time it took for a child missing from care to be reported missing to NCMEC after going missing was 206 days – or nearly 7 months. Over one third (39%) of CMFC on the autism spectrum were recovered by police investigation. Children were primarily recovered at a foster/group home (25%), an outdoor location (24%), or at home (22%).

**30%** of actively missing children on the autism spectrum are missing from care

### Duration Between Missing Date and When Child was Reported to NCMEC

**28%** were reported missing to NCMEC the same day they went missing.

**32%** were reported missing to NCMEC one day after they went missing.

**91%** were reported missing to NCMEC within one week.

## DECEASED CHILDREN

There were 64 (4%) children recovered deceased. The average missing duration was 23 days, and the longest missing duration was 412 days.

Of the children who died accidentally, 13% were recovered the same day, 60% were recovered within one day, and 89% were recovered within one week.

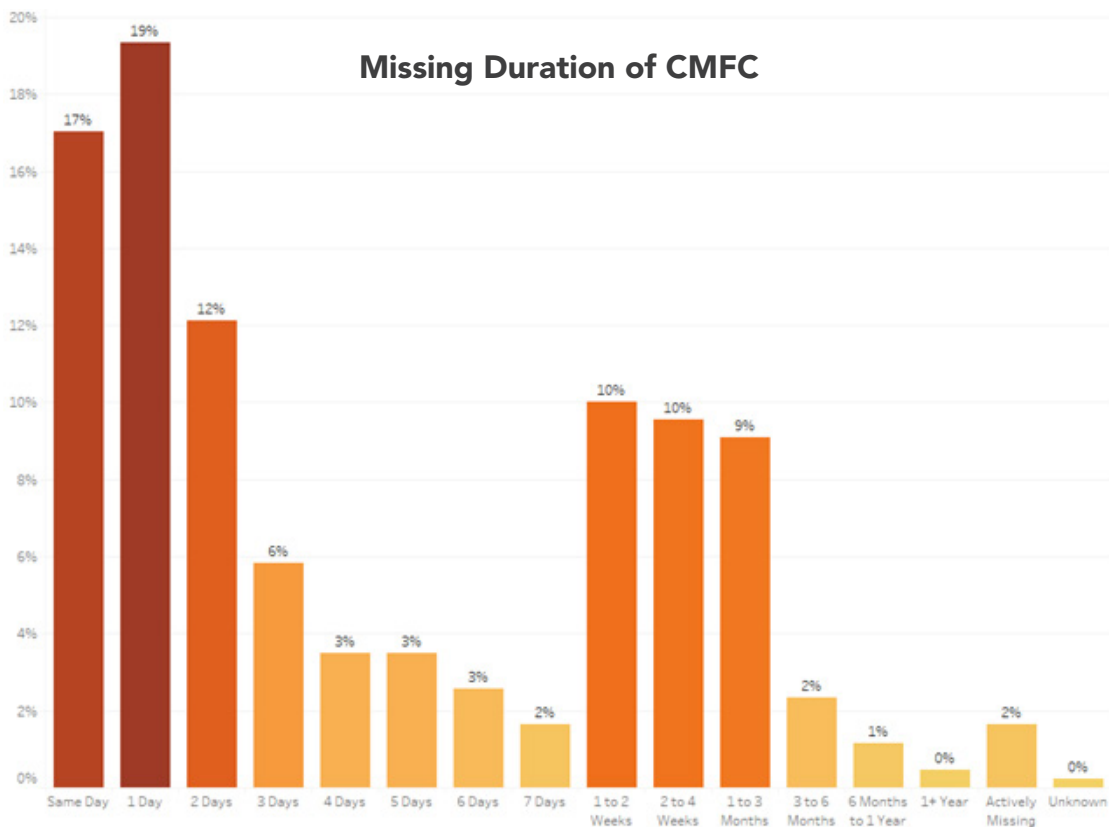
Drowning deaths accounted for 63% of all children recovered deceased, and 76% of deceased children were recovered in a body of water. Of accidental deaths, 84% were drownings.

### Missing duration

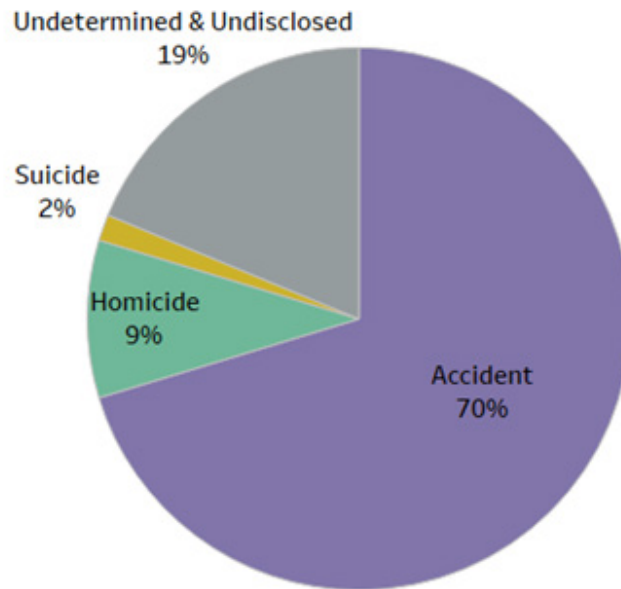
**11%** were recovered the same day.

**52%** were recovered within one day.

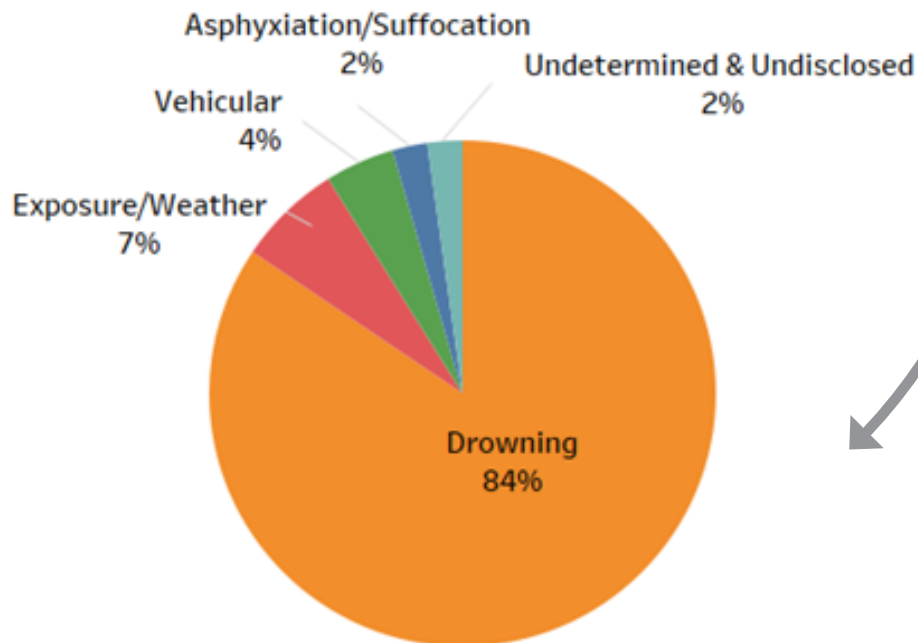
**81%** were recovered within one week.



## Manner of Death



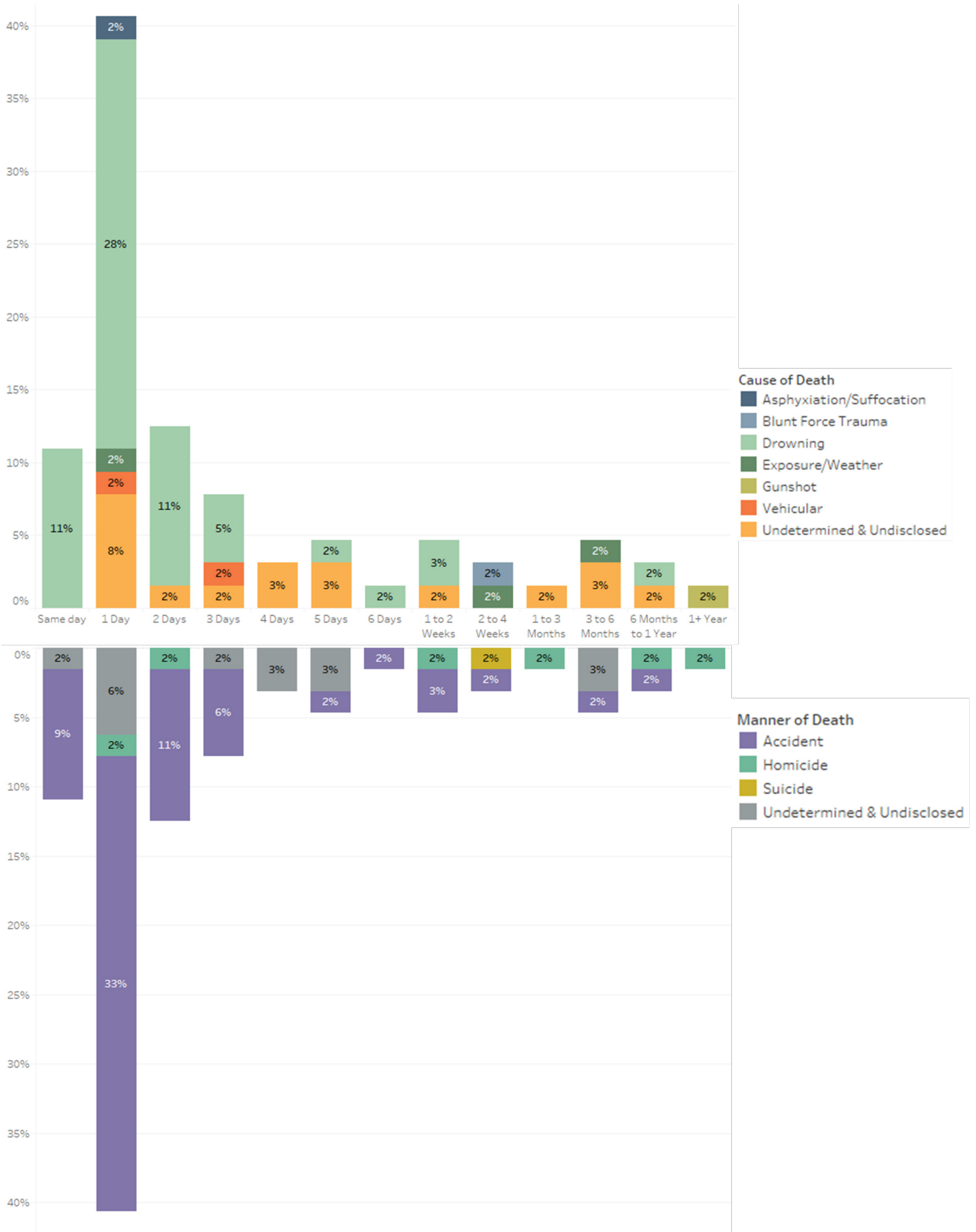
## Causes of Accidental Deaths



Children recovered deceased were most likely to go missing from home (61%) and were recovered in an outdoor location (75%) by police investigation (80%).

Children recovered deceased were primarily reported missing to NCMEC either the same day (42%) or one day (39%) after they went missing. The longest time between the missing date and the NCMEC intake date was 104 days – or 3 months.

## Missing Duration, Cause of Death, and Manner of Death



## WHAT HAS CHANGED?

Findings have largely remained the same with some variations in percentages.

Category	Previous Report (2007-2016)	Current Report (2011-2020)
Most Common Sex	74% Male	75% Male
Most Common Race	59% White	60% White
Average Age	14	13
Most Common Case Type	61% Endangered Runaway	67% Endangered Runaway
Most Common Missing Location	60% Child's Home	45% Child's Home
Most Common Recovery Method	44% Police Investigation	46% Police Investigation
Children Missing from Care	15%	28%
Recovered in One Day	48%	50%
Recovered in One Week	74%	75%
CMFC Recovered in One Week	54%	65%
Multiple Missing Incidents	17%	14%
Children Recovered Deceased	72% Accident	70% Accident

\*This list is not exhaustive of all changes\*

## DEFINITIONS

### Case Status

**Active** – Cases are categorized as active when a child is still missing, and law enforcement has an active police report on the child's disappearance or a Hague application is on file with NCMEC or the U.S. State Department.

**Resolved** – Cases are categorized as resolved when any of the following criteria are met: the child returns home to their parent or legal guardian; the child will remain in the custody of law enforcement; or the child is in contact with their parent or legal guardian but will not be returning home and the parents/legal guardian and law enforcement are satisfied with the situation. A child's case can only be labeled recovered/deceased if their body has been found and they have been positively identified.

### Case Types

**Endangered Runaway or ERU** – Any missing child between 11 and 17 years of age who is missing of his or her own accord and whose whereabouts are unknown to his or her parent(s) or legal guardian.

**Family Abduction or FA** – A family abduction is defined as the taking, retention or concealment of a child, younger than 18 years of age, by a parent, other person with a family relationship to the child, or his or her agent, in violation of the custody rights, including visitation rights of a parent or legal guardian.

**Lost, Injured or Otherwise Missing or LIM** – Lost, injured or otherwise missing is defined as any missing child younger than the age of 18 where there are insufficient facts to determine the cause of the child's disappearance or any child 10 years of age or younger who is missing on his or her own accord.

**Missing Young Adult or MYA** – A missing person 18 years of age or older but younger than the age of 21. This category is derived from Suzanne's Law, a provision in the PROTECT Act of 2003 (codified at 34 U.S.C. § 41307), which extends to missing young adults the same reporting and law enforcement response requirements already provided for children younger than 18 years of age.

**Nonfamily Abduction or NFA** – A nonfamily abduction is defined as the unauthorized taking, retention, luring, confinement or concealment of a child younger than the age of 18 by someone other than a family member.

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