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*Listening, learning,  
and living together:  
it's the science of life.*

## Missing Children<sup>1</sup>

*Donna Davis<sup>2</sup>*

It's nearly impossible to miss the headline stories, the posters at the grocery store or post office, the milk cartons...even the television series that dramatize the tragic tale of missing children.

If you're afraid to let your child play in the yard or walk down the street for fear of abduction, perhaps a report from the Department of Justice can help shed light on the risks involved. The 2002 National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children reported that there are an estimated 45 stereotypical stranger "kidnappings" per year of children under age 12 in the United States. That's less than one child in a million each year (National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children, 2002). In fact, a child has more chance of being killed by a lightning strike than of being abducted (National Weather Service, n.d.).

More commonly, children are abducted by family members. According to the most recent data, in 2002, approximately 200,000 missing children were victims of family abduction, and almost half of them were not reported as missing because their caretakers knew their child's whereabouts. Most of the missing children in the U.S.

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became missing because they had either run away (48%) or because of a misunderstanding about where they were supposed to be (28%). An additional 15% of the children were missing because they became lost or injured. Of the children reported missing by their caretaker, 99.8% were returned home alive or had been located by the time the study was complete (NISMART, 2002).

Of course, the fear of losing a child is every parent's worst nightmare. Parents may feel more comfortable if they understand that it is unlikely that children will be abducted by strangers.

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