

**More than 1,900 'lost' kids
yet to be tracked down**

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KUALA LUMPUR: What do you tell a parent whose child has gone missing? Can anything you say heal the wound?

The hearts of more than 1,900 parents continue to bleed for their children who are missing.

Since 2004, a total of 5,996 children aged below 18 went missing from their homes. However, except for 1,904, the rest subsequently returned home or were found.

The majority of those who went missing are girls. Of the four-year total, 3,398 were girls. In fact, girls from the 14 to 17 age group made up the majority of missing children in all four years.

According to Deputy Internal Security Minister Datuk Johari Baharum, 303 children and teenagers below 18 went missing from Jan 1 to April 13.

The good news is that 176 of them have been found and reunited with their families. The rest continue to anguish over the fate of their children.

Johari said there were five main reasons why children and teenagers went missing.

"Most ran away from home because they were influenced by their friends or were persuaded to do so by their boyfriends or girlfriends," he said in the *Dewan Negara* yesterday.

"Some children left home because of misunderstandings with family members, a lack of attention from their families or the wish to be free from their families.

"These are the top five reasons why children run away from home. There are many more reasons."

He said this in reply to Senator Datin Nik Azizah Nik Yahya who had wanted to know the reasons why children went missing.

Johari said in 2006, a total of 1,485 children were reported missing.

He added that 900 were found but



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585 were still missing.

Of the number, 343 were boys and 1,142 were girls. For boys, 30 were below 9 years old, 78 were between 10 and 13, and 235 were between 14 and 17.

On the other hand, there were 34 girls below the age of 9, 103 were between 10 and 13 age group and 1,005 were in the 14 to 17 age group.

Kedah recorded the highest number of missing children last year, with 343.

There were 1,803 cases in 2005, with 1,254 found and 549 still missing.

In 2004, there were 2,405 cases of missing children, with 1,752 found and 653 still missing.

Generally, he said, girls in the 14 to 17 age group had left home to follow friends or their love interests.

Johari said negligent parents who failed to properly supervise their children could be punished under Section 33 of the Child Act 2001, where they could be fined up to RM5,000 or jailed for up to two years.

"I hope the authorities will take action against parents whose children go missing because of their negligence,"

he said.

To a question by Senator Samsiah Samsuddin, Johari said parents were to blame for the social problems which plagued the young.

He said problems such as drug abuse and Mat Rempit were due to poor upbringing.

He called on parents to monitor their children's activities and to keep track of their whereabouts.

"If parents notice any change in their children's behaviour, they should take immediate action to find out what is wrong," he said.