

Checklist: What You Should Do When Your Child Is First Missing

The first 48 hours following the disappearance of a child are the most critical in terms of finding and returning that child safely home – but they also can be the most troublesome and chaotic. Use this checklist during those first hours to help you do everything you can to increase the chances of recovering your child – but if more than 48 hours have passed since your child disappeared, you should still try to tend to these items as quickly as possible.

The First 24 Hours

Immediately report your child as missing to your local law enforcement agency. Ask investigators to enter your child into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing Persons File. There is no waiting period for entry into NCIC for children under age 18. If a vehicle is involved, make sure the license is also entered in NCIC. Make a note of the NCIC number of your case.

Request that law enforcement put out a Be On the Look Out (BOLO) bulletin. Ask them about involving the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the search for your child.

Limit access to your home until law enforcement arrives and has collected possible evidence. Do not touch or remove anything from your child's room or from your home. Remember that clothing, sheets, personal items, computers, and even trash may hold clues to the whereabouts of your child.

Ask for the name and telephone number of the law enforcement investigator assigned to your case, the police report number, and keep this information in a safe and convenient place.

Give law enforcement investigators all the facts and circumstances related to the disappearance of your child, including what efforts have already been made to search for your child.

Write a detailed description of the clothing worn by your child and the personal items he or she had at the time of the disappearance. Include in your description any personal identification marks, such as birthmarks, scars, tattoos, or mannerisms that may help in finding your child. If possible, find a picture of your child that shows these identification marks and give it to law enforcement. Should you have in your possession any child ID kit's information, provide it to law enforcement.

Make a list of friends, acquaintances and anyone else who might have information or clues about your child's whereabouts. Include telephone numbers and addresses, if possible. Tell your law enforcement investigator about anyone who moved in or out of the neighborhood within the past year, anyone whose interest in or involvement with the family changed in recent months, and anyone who appeared to be overly interested in your child.

Find recent photographs of your child in both black and white and color. Make copies of these pictures for your law enforcement agency, the media, your State missing children's clearinghouse, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), and other nonprofit organizations. (Up to 20 different poses are often helpful.

Flyers do help. This will assist people in recognizing your family member. Make sure these flyers are posted in high traffic areas that your family member would frequent. If when you are requesting a flyer be posted in a mall or other retail establishment and they decline to post it, request they put it in the employee only areas for the employees to view. Feel free to "add" any handwritten messages to your loved one to "Please call home!" Or "We need to know you are okay!". Flyer templates available at www.fourthekids.org for your use.

Call NCMEC at 800-THE-LOST (800-843-5678) to ask for help with photo distribution. Also, ask for the telephone numbers of other nonprofit organizations that might be able to help. Make a note of the person you spoke with at NCMEC for any follow up needs that arise. (ie. Reward funding often is added after the initial call at case initialization.

Contact your State missing children's clearinghouse to find out what resources and services it can provide in the search for your child.

Ask your law enforcement agency to organize a search for your child. Ask them about using tracking or trailing dogs (preferably bloodhounds) in the search effort. Be prepared to provide an article of clothing that has been worn and only touched by the missing person.

Ask your law enforcement agency for help in contacting the media.

Designate one person to answer your telephone. Keep a notebook or pad of paper by the telephone so this person can jot down names, telephone numbers, dates and times of calls, and other information relating to each call.

Keep a notebook or pad of paper with you at all times to write down your thoughts or questions and record important information, such as names, dates, or telephone numbers.

Take good care of yourself and your family, because your child needs you to be strong. As hard as it may be, force yourself to get rest, eat nourishing food, and talk to someone about your tumultuous feelings.

Contact non-profit missing children's organization(s), and begin the process of signing up and furnishing documents to them. A listing of numerous non-profit missing person's organizations can be located at this web site: www.fourthekids.org. Be prepared to offer release forms in a "notarized legal format" for their individual organization's use in publicity regarding your missing person.

Computer related information is relevant. Therefore be able to provide names used under **any** email account you are aware of. Know who the internet service provider is by name and their contact information. Know what your child's internet chat room names were, along with the names of the various chat room providers used.

Make posters, flyers, t-shirts, business cards, etc., with missing person's information on them with contact information, if observed. Consider the option of developing a press kit / media kit regarding the information you & law enforcement want disclosed.

Amber Alert may be issued based upon your local law enforcement guidelines to the media. Request it on your first visit with them.

If the missing person had in their possession a cell phone, provide this information **immediately** to law enforcement so it can be traced as to its location.

If your household uses **Voice Over Internet Provider, (VOIP)**, notify law enforcement so that previous calls made can be obtained from that service provider.

FLAG any potential use of credit cards thru law enforcement. Be prepared to provide account numbers of any/all cards known to be in the possession of the missing person. It is often not wise to stop access to these accounts, as they become a method of tracking the current whereabouts of the missing person when these cards are used. Often ATM machines, convenience stores, and other businesses will have video for review as the cards are being used for law enforcement use.

The Second 24 Hours

Talk with your law enforcement investigator about the steps that are being taken to find your child. If your law enforcement investigator does not have a copy of *Missing and Abducted Children: A Law Enforcement Guide to Case Investigation and Program Management*, suggest that he or she call NCMEC at 800-THELOST (800-843-5678) to obtain one. Also, your law enforcement investigator can contact the Crimes Against Children Coordinator in the local FBI Field Office to obtain a copy of the FBI's *Child Abduction Response Plan*.

Expand your list of friends, acquaintances, extended family members, yard workers, delivery persons, and anyone who may have seen your child during or following the abduction.

Look at personal calendars, community events calendars, and newspapers to see if there are any clues as to who was in the vicinity and might be the abductor or a possible witness. Give this information to law enforcement.

Expect that you will be asked to take a polygraph test, which is standard procedure.

Ask your law enforcement agency to request that NCMEC issue a broadcast fax to law enforcement agencies around the country.

Work with your law enforcement agency to schedule press releases and media events. If necessary, ask someone close to you to serve as your media spokesperson.

Talk to your law enforcement agency about the use of a reward.

Report all extortion attempts to law enforcement.

Have a second telephone line installed with call forwarding. Get caller ID and call waiting. Ask law enforcement to install a trap-and-trace feature on your phone. Get a cellular phone or pager so you can be reached when you are away from home.

CRIME VICTIM SERVICES – National and State levels are available thru the National Victim Center. They provide victims of crime education on how the criminal justice system works, and providing information about grief and the healing process. To learn about the Victim Services in each state, contact – 703.276.2880.

PROVIDE accurate information to the various non-profit organizations. They can provide you “free” services to include web sites on the internet regarding your missing person. Better & accurate information equals better services from these organizations to aide in resolution with a happy ending.

Take care of yourself. Don't be afraid to ask others to take care of your physical and emotional needs and those of your family.

Make a list of things that volunteers can do for you and your family.

Call your child's doctor and dentist and ask for copies of medical records and x-rays. Give them to law enforcement.

Make the determination with the assistance of your local law enforcement and victim's advocate about setting up a **Family Volunteer Center**. This would then centrally locate everything needing to be done with numerous organizations, media, and volunteers working on all aspects of the recovery process.

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