

# MISSING-CHILD, EMERGENCY-RESPONSE, QUICK-REFERENCE GUIDE FOR FAMILIES



- [ ] Contact your local law-enforcement agency as soon as you have determined your child is missing or has been abducted. Do not delay in reporting your child missing to law enforcement.
- [ ] Depending on the age of your child, thoroughly search all areas where a small child may play and fall asleep such as closets; piles of laundry; in and under beds; inside large appliances including abandoned refrigerators, freezers, dryers, washers, and trunks of vehicles. Check areas where your child was last seen or may have played such as open or abandoned wells, caves, sheds, buildings, and crawl spaces.
- [ ] If known, provide law enforcement with the date, time, and location where your child was last seen.
- [ ] If known, provide law enforcement with the name(s) of the last person/people who saw your child prior to the disappearance.
- [ ] Determine the names or descriptions of companions or associates last seen with your child.
- [ ] Secure your child's room and personal belongings until law enforcement has had the opportunity to conduct a search.
- [ ] Identify and secure any computers, online resources, and communications devices used by your child, but do not attempt to conduct a search of these devices on your own. Ask law enforcement to look for clues in any chat, dating, and social networking sites your child has visited or hosts.
- [ ] Provide law enforcement with information about your child's general health, stamina, and any medical conditions or concerns.
- [ ] Compile descriptive information about your child and have the information available to provide to the first-responding, law-enforcement investigator. Descriptive information should include items and information such as a recent, clear, head-and-shoulders photograph of your child; videotapes of your child; a description of the clothing worn at the time of the disappearance; cellular and other telephone numbers; date of birth; hair and eye color; height; weight; complexion; identifiers such as eyeglasses or contact lenses, braces on the teeth, piercings; and specific physical attributes such as scars, marks, and tattoos.
- [ ] Ask the responding officer if immediate community notification, such as an AMBER Alert™,<sup>1</sup> has been considered.
- [ ] Ask the responding officer if a neighborhood canvass will be done.
- [ ] If your child is missing from home, restrict access to neighbors, friends, and nonfamily members until law enforcement has arrived and had the opportunity to search the home and surrounding area.
- [ ] Try to keep all telephone lines open.
- [ ] Provide law enforcement with information regarding custody issues, if any, including court-ordered visitation conditions.
- [ ] Provide law enforcement with information about any changes in your child's behavior prior to the disappearance.
- [ ] Provide law enforcement with information about any individuals showing unusual attention or interest in your child prior to the disappearance.
- [ ] Obtain the name of and contact information for the primary investigator assigned to your child's case.

<sup>1</sup> Although the search for every missing child is important, AMBER Alerts are not designed for use in all missing-child cases. AMBER Alerts are issued only when abducted children are facing imminent danger. AMBER Alerts are designed to rapidly notify the public of a child's abduction. AMBER Alert criteria vary among states and territories. To obtain more information about AMBER Alerts in your area contact your state/territorial Coordinator through [www.amberalert.gov/state\\_contacts.htm](http://www.amberalert.gov/state_contacts.htm).

- [ ] Report your child's disappearance to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® (NCMEC) at 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678).
- [ ] Verify, through the investigating law-enforcement agency, that information about your missing child has been entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing Person File. Federal law<sup>2</sup> requires law enforcement to enter information about a missing child into NCIC within 2 hours of receiving a missing-child report.
- [ ] Report your child's disappearance to the missing-child clearinghouse in your state/territory. Check local telephone listings to obtain this telephone number. This contact information may also be obtained by calling NCMEC at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678) or visiting [www.missingkids.com/lawenforcement](http://www.missingkids.com/lawenforcement) and clicking on the "Missing-Child Clearinghouse Program" link.
- [ ] Contact regional, state/territorial, and local nonprofit organizations assisting families of missing children. For information about organizations in your area contact the Association of Missing and Exploited Childrens Organizations (AMECO) at 1-877-263-2620 or visit [www.amecoinc.org](http://www.amecoinc.org).
- [ ] If your child may be a runaway, contact the National Runaway Switchboard at 1-800-RUNAWAY (1-800-786-2929) or visit [www.1800runaway.org](http://www.1800runaway.org) for assistance including information about their resources in developing communications.
- [ ] Prepare posters of your missing child including a recent photograph and descriptive information and post them within the local community. NCMEC may be able to provide you with copies of your child's poster as soon as the poster has been certified by them for distribution.
- [ ] If a video of your missing child is available provide it to the media and post it on the YouTube Missing Children's Channel at [www.youtube.com/DontYouForgetAboutMe](http://www.youtube.com/DontYouForgetAboutMe).
- [ ] Make every effort to obtain local and national media attention regarding your child's disappearance. Conduct television, radio, and newspaper interviews to discuss and direct attention to your child's disappearance.
- [ ] Obtain medical records from your child's doctor and dental records from your child's dentist.
- [ ] If you already have a DNA sample, provide it to law enforcement. If not, collect samples from your missing child's possessions such as his or her toothbrush, baby's teeth, hair brush used exclusively by your child for at least one month, and used bandage with dried blood.
- [ ] If you have fingerprints and dental prints of your child, provide those to law enforcement.
- [ ] If the identity of the abductor is known to you, provide law enforcement with detailed information about the description and characteristics of the abductor.
- [ ] If possible provide law enforcement with the abductor's photograph, driver's license number, credit-card numbers, cellular and other telephone numbers, passport numbers, and any other information useful for tracking purposes.
- [ ] Contact the U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime for possible financial assistance at 202-307-5983 or visit [www.ovc.gov](http://www.ovc.gov). Also check your local telephone directory for local, crime-victim-compensation or crime-victim-assistance programs.
- [ ] Stay in regular contact with law enforcement, the media, and local government officials during the search for your child.
- [ ] Conduct periodic press conferences and plan events related to the search for your child to help keep the disappearance in the public eye.
- [ ] Notify law enforcement, NCMEC, and other agencies assisting in the search as soon as your child is located.

<sup>2</sup> Pub. L. No. 109-248.

This checklist was created and published by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and is to be given to families by law enforcement during an emergency response to a report of a missing or abducted child. The **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, at 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678) or [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com)**, offers a wealth of resources to assist families and law enforcement in the search for a missing or abducted child or cases involving the sexual exploitation of a child. This project was supported by Grant No. 2007-MC-CX-K001 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. Copyright © 2008 National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. All rights reserved. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® and 1-800-THE-LOST® are registered service marks of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.