



**AMBER
ALERT**

THE FIRST 3 HOURS

Being Prepared Can Save Your Child's Life

When your child has gone missing, you may naturally be feeling lost, confused, or isolated trying to make sense of the situation. In order to help recover your child in the midst of such chaos, it is important to remember that time is the enemy. Recent statistics demonstrate the importance of preplanning and initial response **immediately** after a child goes missing to ensure successful recovery.



The first 48 hours following a child's disappearance are the most critical to make sure a child gets returned home safely. However, **the first 3 hours are the most crucial window of time for an initial response**, as well as for gathering all available resources you have on your child. This is even more urgent on reservations, where Tribal and State jurisdiction can change quickly. For this reason, it is important to know how you can be the best prepared should a situation like this arise in your family or community.

Initial Response – the moment you know or think your child is missing **CALL 911!** Do **NOT** conduct a search on your own! Law enforcement professionals are trained and equipped to do this much more quickly and efficiently. Remember, time is running against you!

How to Be Prepared as a Parent or Guardian

During an initial response to your child's abduction, you will need to dedicate the majority of your time giving as much information as you can to investigators. Therefore, knowing what to have ready *before* an emergency could be the deciding factor in your missing child's recovery. In order to be as prepared as you can possibly be, here are a few tips and items you should **always** have ready to go in the event of an emergency:

- **Be observant of your child and his or her experiences**
For example, be mindful of what your child wears to school each day. Keep a journal to record any out-of-the-ordinary experiences your child may tell you about.
- **Create a Child ID-Kit**
This Child ID-Kit should include personal information (full name, nickname, address, date of birth), distinguishing characteristics, medical information, fingerprints (these can be taken at your local law enforcement agency), all emergency contacts, and an up-to-date, high-resolution, color head-to-shoulders photo of your child.
- **Have a list of your local community resources and contacts**
This should include your local law-enforcement agencies (Tribal, County, and State), local non-profits, emergency contacts, and contact information of your child's friends, acquaintances, coaches, teachers, and family members who frequent your home.
- **Store your child's records on a flash drive updated regularly**
In the event of an emergency you can hand this drive directly to investigators. If you cannot purchase a flash drive – keep all of these documents in a secure binder or folder. Store in a safe place. This should include copies of your child's medical, dental records, and x-rays.
- **Be on the same page as others who take care of your children**
If your child participates in after-school programs or extracurricular activities, be sure to give a list of who is approved to pick up your child if it will not always be you.



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How to Be Prepared as a Youth Worker

- **Keep communication between parents and/or guardians frequent and consistent**

Especially in potential dual/single custody situations, always know who is approved to pick up the child. Ensure that parents/guardians provide you with a list of who is or is not approved to pick up their child (consider incorporating this into your organization's membership application). Alert 911 and parents/guardians if a non-approved individual attempts to pick up their child.

- **Require visitors to your organization to sign-in**

If you do not already have one, create a required sign-in sheet for anyone who visits your organization. It should list date, time, name, and purpose of visit.

- **Remain alert for signs of child abuse**

Keep a record of any out-of-the ordinary experiences youth may tell you, staff members, and/or mentors about. Ensure that all staff members are on board with this and other preventative procedures.

- **Create an agreement between parents/guardians**

This agreement will state that if your organization is not notified in advance that a child will be absent and/or late, law enforcement may be alerted as a protective measure.

- **Provide staff with an easily accessible list of hotlines, community resources and contacts**

This should include local law-enforcement agencies (Tribal, County, and State), other local organizations and/or non-profits, emergency contacts for youth, along with their schools, teachers, and coaches.

- **Create Child ID-Kits for each of your registered youth**

Child ID-Kits should include personal information (full name, nickname, address, date of birth), distinguishing characteristics, medical information, fingerprints (these can be taken at your local law enforcement agency), all emergency contacts, and an up-to-date, high-resolution, color head-to-shoulders photo. Keep these ID-Kits in a binder and store in a safe, but easily accessible place for staff members. In the event of an emergency this can be given to investigators.



**National Center for Missing
& Exploited Children**

1-800-843-5678 (toll free)

In summary, it is important to remember that **time is never in your favor** when it comes to the case of a missing child. Therefore, having information ready to go about your child **will not matter** if you do not carry out an initial response **immediately after you think your child may be missing**. Do NOT conduct your own search or wait to call law enforcement! Once you've done this, having your child's information and resources ready to go will save both you and investigators time during the investigation.

Sources

- Office of Justice Programs. "When Your Child Is Missing: A Family Survival Guide" (May, 2010).
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. "Missing and Abducted Children: A Law-Enforcement Guide to Case Investigation and Program Management" (2011).
- Douglas, Jade-Ashli. "Crimes Against Children Spotlight: The Neighborhood Canvass and Child Abduction Investigations." Federal Bureau of Investigation (February, 2012).