

INITIAL-RESPONSE INVESTIGATIVE CHECKLIST

The purpose of this Investigative Checklist is to provide law-enforcement officers and agencies with a generic guide for the investigation of missing-child cases. Law-enforcement administrators should ensure that their agencies have established effective policies and procedures for the handling of missing/abducted-child investigations. Compliance with an agency's standard operating procedures, by officers conducting missing-child investigations, can result in efficient operations and successful resolution of the incident.

This checklist is not intended to be followed step-by-step by officers during each missing-child investigation. It is meant to provide them with a framework of actions, considerations, and activities that can assist them in performing competent, productive, and successful missing/abducted-children investigations. Please consult the text of this chapter for details on the items listed.

Administrative

- Intake report from parent/caller.
- Obtain basic facts; details, and a brief description of missing child and abductor.
- Dispatch officer to scene to conduct a preliminary investigation.
- Search juvenile/incident records for previous incidents related to missing child and prior police activity in the area including prowlers, indecent exposure, and attempted abductions.
Inform responding officer of any pertinent information.
- Broadcast known details, on all police communication channels, to other patrol units, other local law-enforcement agencies, and surrounding law enforcement agencies. If necessary, use the NLETS telecommunication network to directly alert agencies in multi-state areas.
- Activate established fugitive search plans (prearranged plans among participating police agencies designed to apprehend fleeing fugitives) if necessary.
- Maintain records/recordings of telephone communications/messages.
- Activate established protocols for working with the media.

First Responder

- Interview parent(s)/person who made initial report.
- Verify that the child is in fact missing.
- Verify child's custody status.
- Identify the circumstances of the disappearance.
- Determine when, where, and by whom the missing child was last seen.
- Interview the individuals who last had contact with the child.
- Identify the child's zone of safety for his or her age and developmental stage.
- Based on the available information, make initial determinations of the type of incident whether non-

family abduction; family abduction; endangered runaway; or lost, injured, or otherwise missing.

Obtain a **detailed** description of the missing child, abductor, and any vehicles used.

Relay detailed descriptive information to communications unit for broadcast updates.

Request additional personnel if circumstances require.

Request investigative assistance if necessary.

Request supervisory assistance if necessary.

Brief and bring up-to-date all additional responding personnel including supervisors and investigative staff.

Ensure that everyone at the scene is identified and interviewed separately. Make sure that their interview and identifying information is properly recorded. To aid in this process, if possible, take pictures or record video images of everyone present.

Note name, address, home/business telephone numbers of each person.

Determine each person's relationship to the missing child.

Note information that each person may have about the child's disappearance.

Determine when/where each person last saw the child.

Ask each one, 'What do you think happened to the child?'

Obtain names/addresses/telephone numbers of child's friends/associates and other relatives and friends of the family.

Continue to keep communications unit apprised of all appropriate developing information for broadcast updates.

Obtain and note permission to search home or building where incident took place.

Conduct an immediate, thorough search of the missing child's home, even if the child was reported missing from a different location.

Conduct search to include all surrounding areas including vehicles and other places of concealment.

Treat the area as a crime scene.

Seal/protect scene and area of the child's home (including child's personal articles such as hairbrush, diary, photographs, and items with the child's fingerprints/footprints/teeth impressions) so that evidence is not destroyed during or after the initial search and to help ensure that items which could help in the search for and/or to identify the child are preserved. Determine if any of the child's personal items are missing. If possible, photograph/videotape these areas.

Evaluate contents and appearance of the child's room/residence.

Obtain photographs/videotapes of missing child/abductor.

Prepare reports/make all required notifications.

Ensure that information regarding missing child is entered into the NCIC Missing Person File and that any information on a suspected abductor is entered into the NCIC Wanted Person File. (*See*

Appendices A and B regarding the child abduction flag and definitions of NCIC categories.)

Interview other family members, friends/associates of the child, and friends of the family to determine

When each saw the child

What they think happened to the child

Ensure that details of the case have been reported to NCMEC

Prepare and update bulletins for local law-enforcement agencies, state missing children's clearinghouse, FBI, and other appropriate agencies.

Prepare a flier/bulletin with the child/abductor's photograph and descriptive information. Distribute in appropriate geographic regions.

Secure the child's latest medical and dental records.

Establish a telephone hotline for receipt of tips and leads.

Establish a leads management system to prioritize leads and ensure that each one is reviewed and followed up on.

Investigative Officer

Obtain briefing from first responding officer and other on-scene personnel.

Verify the accuracy of all descriptive information and other details developed during the preliminary investigation.

Obtain a brief, recent history of family dynamics.

Correct and investigate the reasons for any conflicting information offered by witnesses and other individuals submitting information.

Review and evaluate all available information and evidence collected.

Develop an investigative plan for follow-up.

Determine what additional resources and specialized services are required.

Execute investigative follow-up plan.

Supervisory Responsibility

Obtain briefing and written reports from first responding officer, investigators, and other agency personnel at the scene.

Determine if additional personnel are needed to assist in the investigation. Determine if outside help is necessary from:

State Police.

State Missing Children's Clearinghouse.

- FBI.
- Specialized Units.
- Victim-Witness Services.
- NCMEC's Project ALERT.
- Ensure that all the required resources, equipment, and assistance necessary to conduct an efficient investigation have been requested and expedite their availability.
- Establish a command post away from the child's residence.
- Ensure coordination/cooperation among all police personnel involved in the investigation and search effort.
- Ensure that all required notifications are made.
- Ensure that all agency policies and procedures are in compliance.
- Conduct a criminal-history check on all principal suspects and participants in the investigation.
- Be available to make any decisions or determinations as they develop.
- Utilize media (including radio, television, and newspapers) to assist in the search for the missing child and maintain media relations, per established protocols, throughout the duration of the case.