

INVESTIGATIVE CHECKLIST FOR FIRST RESPONDERS



This checklist is meant to provide a framework of actions, considerations, and activities that can assist in performing competent, productive, and successful missing/abducted-children investigations.

First Responder

- ☐ Interview parent(s)/person who made the initial report.
- ☐ Confirm that the child is in fact missing.
- ☐ Verify the 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 an **initial** determination of the type of incident whether nonfamily abduction; family abduction; endangered runaway; or lost, injured, or otherwise missing.
- ☐ Obtain a **detailed** description of the missing child, abductor, and any vehicles used.
- ☐ Secure photographs/videotapes of the missing child/abductor.
- ☐ Evaluate whether circumstance of child's disappearance meets **AMBER Alert** and/or other immediate community notification protocol. Discuss plan activation with supervisor.
- ☐ Relay detailed descriptive information to communications unit for broadcast updates.
- ☐ Determine need for additional personnel including investigative and supervisory staff.
- ☐ Brief and bring up-to-date all additional responding personnel.
- ☐ Identify and separately interview everyone at the scene. 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.**
- ☐ 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 the contents and appearance of the child's room/residence.
- ☐ Inquire if child has access to the Internet and evaluate its role in the disappearance.
- ☐ Ascertain if child has a cellular telephone or other electronic communication device.
- ☐ Extend search to surrounding areas including vehicles and other places of concealment.
- ☐ Treat areas of interest as potential crime scenes.
- ☐ Determine if surveillance or security cameras in the vicinity may have captured information about the child's disappearance.
- ☐ Interview other family members, friends/associates of the child, and friends of the family to determine
 - ☐ When each last saw the child.
 - ☐ What they think happened to the child.

- [] Review sex-offender registries to determine if individuals designated as sexual predators live, work, or might otherwise be associated with area of child's disappearance.
- [] Ensure that information regarding the missing child is immediately entered into the National Crime Information Center's (NCIC) Missing Person File and any information about a suspected abductor is entered into the NCIC Wanted Person File. (Carefully review NCIC categories before entering the case, and be sure to use the Child Abduction flag whenever possible.)
- [] Prepare flier/bulletin with the child/abductor's photograph and descriptive information. Distribute in appropriate geographic regions.
- [] Prepare reports/make all required notifications.

Supervisory Officer

- [] Obtain briefing and written reports from the first responding officer and other personnel at the scene.
- [] Decide if circumstances of child's disappearance meet the protocol in place for activation of an **AMBER Alert** and/or other immediate community notification.
- [] Determine if additional personnel are needed to assist in the investigation.
- [] Establish a command post away from the child's residence.
- [] Determine if additional assistance is necessary from
 - [] State Police.
 - [] State Missing Children's Clearinghouse.
 - [] FBI.
 - [] Specialized Units.
 - [] Victim-Witness Services.
 - [] NCMEC's Project ALERT/Team Adam.
- [] Ensure that all the required resources, equipment, and assistance necessary to conduct an efficient investigation have been requested and expedite their availability.
- [] Ensure coordination/cooperation among all law-enforcement 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.
- [] Be available to make any decisions or determinations as they develop.
- [] Use 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.

Investigative Officer

- [] Obtain briefing from the first responding officer and other on-scene personnel.
- [] Verify the accuracy of all descriptive information and other details developed during the preliminary investigation.
- [] Initiate a neighborhood canvass using a standardized questionnaire.
- [] Obtain a brief, recent history of family dynamics.
- [] Correct and investigate the reasons for conflicting information offered by witnesses and other individuals.
- [] Review and evaluate all available information and evidence collected.
- [] Contact landfill management and request that they segregate garbage and dumping containers from key investigative areas in cases where it is suspected that there may be imminent danger to the missing child.
- [] Develop and execute an investigative plan.
- [] Conduct a criminal-history check on all principal suspects and participants in the investigation.
- [] Determine what additional resources and specialized services are required.
- [] 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, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and other appropriate agencies.
- [] 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 help ensure that each one is reviewed and followed up on.

This "pocket guide" is adapted from and to be used as a supplement to *Missing and Abducted Children: A Law-Enforcement Guide to Case Investigation and Program Management*. That guide contains additional investigative checklists and materials. To request a free copy or technical assistance on specific cases, please call the **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678)**. This project was supported by Grant No. 1998-MC-CX-K002 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 © 2004 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.