

ATTENTION

All Florida 5th Grade Students and Teachers 2026 Florida Missing Children's Day Essay Contest Due by Wednesday, March 18, 2026



The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), the Florida Department of Education, and the Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation present the 2026 Florida Missing Children's Day Essay Contest to all 5th graders in Florida.

PRIZE: A winner will be selected from each FDLE region in the state. The 7 regional winners will receive \$100 dollars from the Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation. The state winner will be awarded an additional \$100 dollars, a prize package, and an invitation to Florida Missing Children's Day in Tallahassee on Monday, September 14, 2026.

PURPOSE: To promote safety awareness among Florida's children and encourage them to proactively think of ways to keep themselves safe from abduction.

To stay safe from abduction and predators, children should arm themselves with a good plan. There will be moments when children find themselves away from the safety of their parents. As they grow older, children encounter different situations. Whether at play, on the Internet, on social networking websites, walking to and from school, at the school bus stop or other places, all children should have a safety plan. They should ask themselves, "How can I stay safe from abduction, especially when my parents are not with me?" Parents should talk to their children and provide clear direction in this regard.

Fifth grade students across Florida are asked to write an essay about ways to stay safe from abduction. They will need to conduct research and construct their thoughts into a one page essay. The theme "This Is How I Stay Safe All Day" was chosen for the 2026 Essay Contest. The body of the essay must focus on things children can do to keep themselves safe from abduction.

We encourage all schools/programs to hold an essay contest among their 5th grade students. **Each school/program must choose only one "School Winner"** (except for homeschooled students, who may send their entries directly). Essays should be sent by email to FMCD@fdle.state.fl.us.

For full essay contest details, please visit the Florida Missing Children's Day (FMCD) Foundation's website at <https://www.fmcd.org/student-contests> or FDLE's website at <https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/MEPIC/Home/FMCD-Foundation/FMCD-Contest>.



The Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Florida Department of Education, and the Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation present the

2026 Florida Missing Children's Day Statewide 5th Grade Essay Contest

THEME:

This is how I stay
safe all day.



**All essays due by:
Wednesday, March
18, 2026**

**Submit essays via
email to:**

FMCD@fdle.state.fl.us

Essays without school
information and parental
release and consent will
not be considered.

7 regional winners will each
receive \$100.

Winners will be announced
before the school year ends.

PURPOSE:

To promote safety awareness among Florida's children and encourage them to proactively think of ways to keep themselves safe from abduction and online exploitation.

CONTEST GUIDELINES:

The contest is open to all Florida 5th grade students, including public, charter, and private schools, as well as afterschool programs and homeschooled students.

Each school or program can submit **only one "School Winner."** Students that are homeschooled or whose school does not hold an essay contest may submit entries directly to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

The school/program information **and** the parent/guardian release and consent **must** be submitted with the essay by **March 18, 2026.**

Essays should be no longer than 1 typed page or 2 handwritten pages. If typed, essay must be in size 12 to 14 Times New Roman font. If handwritten, writing must be legible.

Essays must focus on things children can do to help keep them safe from abduction or online exploitation while at home, school, the library, a friend's house, or anywhere they might be away from their parents.

Essays may be based upon, but are not limited to: personal experiences of the child, friends, or relatives; discussions with their parents and teachers about abduction safety tips and what/where they can go to get away from uncomfortable situations; steps to avoid online exploitation in which a child may be asked to provide pictures or travel to meet another person; or interviews with people who can assist them should they encounter situations beyond their control.

Essays must be grammatically correct and free of spelling errors. Essays should demonstrate clear thought processes and be based on realistic scenarios.



2026 Essay Contest Prizes

School Winner: Each participating school or program must select 1 winner (except for homeschooled students, who may send their entries directly to the Essay Contest Coordinator). The winning essay must be submitted to the contest coordinator by **Wednesday, March 18, 2026**. The school contact person can submit the school winner's essay via email to FMCD@fdle.state.fl.us. Please make sure to include the school information and parental release/consent and the school's winning essay.

A certificate of participation will be given to all of the school winners received by the deadline.

Regional Winner: All essays received by March 18, 2026 will be considered for the contest. One winner from the 7 FDLE regions will be selected as regional winners. The 7 FDLE regions are the Tallahassee Region, Jacksonville Region, Tampa Region, Orlando Region, Miami Region, Fort Myers Region, and Pensacola Region. See the map below of the counties by region. Essays are judged by the Department of Education and the Florida Executive Office of the Governor.

Regional winners will receive a check for \$100 and the opportunity to be selected as the statewide winner.

Statewide Winner: The statewide winner will be selected from the 7 regional winners. The statewide winner will be invited to Tallahassee to read the winning essay during the formal Florida Missing Children's Day Ceremony on September 14, 2026. The statewide winner will also receive an additional \$100 dollars and a prize package.

At the ceremony, the statewide winner will read their essay and be presented an additional check for \$100, an award, and a prize package.

Florida Regions With Counties

Tallahassee Region:

Columbia, Dixie, Franklin, Gadsden, Hamilton,
Jefferson, Lafayette, Leon, Liberty, Madison,
Suwannee, Taylor, Wakulla

Jacksonville Region:

Alachua, Baker, Bradford,
Clay, Duval, Flagler, Gilchrist,
Levy, Marion, Nassau, Putnam,
St. Johns, Union

Orlando Region:

Brevard, Indian River, Lake,
Martin, Orange, Osceola,
Seminole, St. Lucie

Miami Region:

Broward, Miami-Dade,
Monroe, Palm Beach

Pensacola Region:

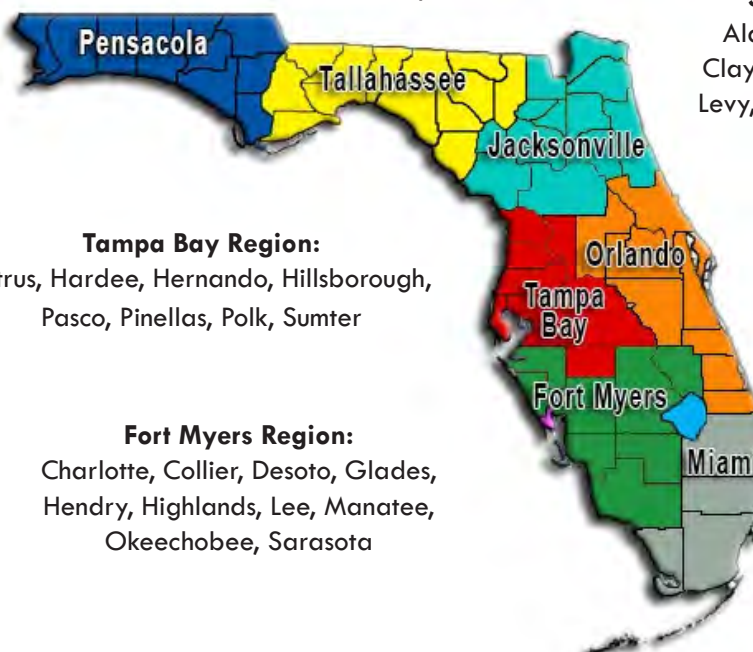
Bay, Calhoun, Escambia,
Gulf, Holmes, Jackson,
Okaloosa, Santa Rosa,
Walton, Washington

Tampa Bay Region:

Citrus, Hardee, Hernando, Hillsborough,
Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Sumter

Fort Myers Region:

Charlotte, Collier, Desoto, Glades,
Hendry, Highlands, Lee, Manatee,
Okeechobee, Sarasota



For Educators

EDUCATORS:

You can use the theme “this is how I stay safe all day” as a writing prompt to generate essay topics surrounding safety. **Some suggested topics are:**

- What would you do if you were approached by a person that made you feel uncomfortable?
- What would you do if someone you know makes you feel uncomfortable?
- What would you do if a person you don't know asked you to go somewhere with them, or if they asked you for your personal information (for example: your full name, address, social media information, or school)?
- What are some ways you can stay safe online? Think about what you should not share online.
- What should you do if someone you don't know talks to you online or asks you to meet in person?
- What should you do if someone you know talks to you online or asks to meet you in person without your parent's approval or permission?

Provide examples of online safety and the “do's and don'ts” of online messaging to students. You can suggest ways to stay safe at home during family time and with their siblings. Encourage them to make their own safety plan and find out what their guardians/parents want them to do in specific situations.

If a child opts to conduct interviews for an essay, help them devise a plan so that the information gathered can be helpful. Suggested people to interview: school resource officers, family members, school officials, security officers, law enforcement officers, etc.

Sample questions include:

- What is your name and what is your occupation?
- What tips can you provide to help me stay safe from abduction?
- What tips can you provide to help me stay safe online?
- How can I get in touch with you if I need help?
- If you are not available, who else can I contact for help?

School information, parental release/consent, and the school's winning essay should be sent to FMCD@fdle.state.fl.us by March 18, 2026.

Use the education kit(s) available from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at <https://www.missingkids.org/education> to help facilitate safety discussions. How to discuss child safety and the level of detail is left to teachers and guardians/parents that are familiar with the child and their level of understanding and appropriateness of topic.



For Families

FAMILIES:

To stay safe from abduction and predators, children should arm themselves with a good plan. There will be moments when children find themselves away from the safety of their parents. As they grow older, children encounter different situations.

Whether at play, on the Internet, playing video games with others, on social networking websites, walking to and from school, at the school bus stop or other places, all children should have a safety plan. They should ask themselves, “How can I stay safe from abduction and other unsafe situations, especially when my parents are not with me?” Parents should talk to their children and provide clear direction in this regard.

Fifth-grade Florida students are asked to write an essay about ways to stay safe from abduction and online exploitation. They will need to conduct research and construct their thoughts into an essay.

Essay materials include a few websites children can use to conduct their research. Teachers and parents are encouraged to review and discuss these sites with the children. Doing so will help to arm them with the ability to protect themselves at all times.

Listed below are helpful hints to use in the discussion:

- What would you do if you were approached by someone who made you feel uncomfortable?
- If someone tried to take you somewhere or get you to go somewhere with them, what would you do?
- If you are chatting online and the person asked you to meet them somewhere, asked you for personal information, or asked for a picture of you, what would you do?
- Have they been in a situation where they were asked to provide personal information?
- Have they received messages or phone calls from someone they do not know? If so, how did they handle it?

Children should ask permission from parents before conducting interviews or going on the Internet.

Helpful Resources

Florida Department of Law Enforcement - Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse

- www.fdle.state.fl.us/mcicsearch/SafetyTips.asp
- www.fdle.state.fl.us/mcicsearch/Publications.asp
- www.fdle.state.fl.us/MCICSearch/Documents/SafeSteps.pdf

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

- www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/home
- www.missingkids.org/education/kidsmartz

Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation

- www.fmcdf.org

Office of the Attorney General of Florida

- www.safe florida.net/safesurf

Jimmy Ryce Center for Victims of Predatory Abduction

- www.jimmyryce.org/educate

Internet Safety Sites

- www.ikeepsafe.org
- www.getnetwise.org
- www.cisa.gov/resources-tools/resources/chatting-kids-about-being-online-booklet
- www.isafeventures.com
- www.safekids.com
- <https://consumer.ftc.gov/identity-theft-and-online-security/protecting-kids-online>

2026 FMCD Essay Contest Application

School Information:

Please print the following information clearly.

Student's Name (as it should appear on certificate): _____

School/Program Type:	Public	Charter	Private
	Homeschool	Afterschool Program	Other

School/Program Name: _____

Current Grade Level: _____

School/Program Address: _____

School/Program City/State/Zip: _____

School/Program County: _____

Teacher/Program Contact Name: _____

Teacher/Program Contact Email: _____

Parent/Guardian Release and Consent

Please print the following information clearly.

I hereby grant permission to use and reproduce the essay of my child, _____, and use my child's name in federal and state related publications, news features, blogs, or other advertisements relating to the Annual Florida Missing Children's Day Essay Contest. I also grant permission for my child to participate in any interviews with media relating to this event. I understand that any written statements may be edited or used, in whole or in part, or adapted with other materials, and I hereby waive all rights of privacy, compensation, control, or royalties that I may have. I understand that if my child becomes the state winner, they will be invited to Florida Missing Children's Day to read their essay and accept their award. Florida Missing Children's Day is livestreamed on the Florida Channel and recorded by other media outlets.

I have read this document before signing below and warrant that I fully understand its contents.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name of Parent/Guardian (please print): _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Contact Email: _____

Contact Phone: _____