

Initial-Response Investigative Checklist

The purpose of this Investigative Checklist is to provide law-enforcement officers and agencies with a guide for the investigation of missing-child cases. Law-enforcement administrators should ensure 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, may result in efficient operations and 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 a framework of actions, considerations, and activities that may assist in performing competent, productive, and thorough missing/abducted-children investigations. Please consult the text of this chapter for details about the items listed.

Note: The material contained in this Checklist is found in the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® (NCMEC) Publication #88 titled *Investigative Checklist for First Responders*. This checklist is laminated for durability and may be easily carried in a briefcase or kept in a glove compartment or other place within a law-enforcement vehicle. This checklist, if not received with this guide, and additional copies of it may be viewed, downloaded, and ordered from the "More Publications" section of NCMEC's web site at www.missingkids.com.

To request technical assistance for specific cases, please call NCMEC toll-free at **1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678)**.

Administrative

- [] Intake report from parent/guardian.
- [] Obtain basic facts about, details about, and a brief description of the 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 law-enforcement activity in the area including prowlers, indecent exposure, and attempted abductions. Inform responding officer of any pertinent information.
- [] Broadcast known details, **on all law-enforcement 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 multistate areas.
- [] Activate established **fugitive search plans** (prearranged plans among participating law-enforcement agencies designed to apprehend fleeing fugitives) if necessary.
- [] Maintain records/recordings of telephone communications/messages.

- [] Activate established protocols for working with the media including activation of an **America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response (AMBER) Alert** or other immediate community-notification system.

First Responder

- [] If circumstances warrant, consider activating patrol-vehicle-mounted video camera when approaching the scene to record vehicles, people, and anything else of note for later investigative review.
- [] Interview parent(s)/guardian(s)/person who made the initial report.
- [] Confirm 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; 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 the circumstances of the child's disappearance meet **AMBER Alert criteria** 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 their interview and identifying information is properly recorded. To aid in this process, if possible, take pictures or record video images of everyone present. Video cameras affixed to patrol vehicles may be helpful with this task.

- [] Note name, address, home/business telephone numbers of each person.
 - [] Determine each person's relationship to the missing child.
 - [] Note information 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 the 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 the child's personal articles such as hairbrush, diary, photographs, and items with the child's fingerprints/footprints/teeth impressions) so evidence is not destroyed during or after the initial search and to help ensure 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 the child has access to the Internet and evaluate its role in the disappearance.
 - [] Ascertain if the 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 the child's disappearance.
- [] Ensure information regarding the missing child is entered into the National Crime Information Center's (NCIC) Missing Person File within two hours of report receipt 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 the child's disappearance meet the protocol in place for activation of an **AMBER Alert** and/or other immediate community-notification systems.
- [] 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.
 - [] Missing-Children Clearinghouse.
 - [] FBI.
 - [] Specialized Units.
 - [] Victim-Witness Services.
 - [] NCMEC's Project ALERT/Team Adam.
- [] Confirm 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.
- [] Verify all required notifications are made.
- [] Ensure 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 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.
- [] Collect article(s) of the child's clothing for scent-tracking purposes.
- [] Review and evaluate all available information and evidence collected.
- [] Secure the child's latest medical and dental records.
- [] Contact landfill management and request they segregate garbage and dumping containers from key investigative areas in cases where it is suspected 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 details of the case have been reported to NCMEC.
- [] Prepare and update bulletins for local law-enforcement agencies, missing-children clearinghouse, the FBI, and other appropriate agencies.
- [] Establish a telephone hotline for receipt of tips and leads.
- [] Establish a leads-management system to prioritize leads and help ensure each one is reviewed and followed up on. **Note:** NCMEC has developed software, named the Simple Leads Management System, designed to manage and prioritize leads associated with missing-child investigations. It is available at no cost by calling NCMEC's National Missing Children's Division toll-free at 1-888-24-NCMEC (1-888-246-2632).

In cases of **Nonfamily Abduction** see chapter beginning on page 49
Family Abduction see chapter beginning on page 79
Runaway Children see chapter beginning on page 109
Unknown Missing Children Treat as **Nonfamily Abduction**