

What To Do When Your Child
is
1) Presumed Abducted/Missing
or
2) Runs Away/Missing

Check List of The Best Practices That Help In
The Recovery of Children

Edited from material collected by the Justice Department
Emergency Suspected Abduction of a Missing Child
Recovery Plan Checklist

The First 24 Hours

The Search and Law Enforcement

- **Be prepared** for constant law enforcement presence in your home in the first 24 hours. Welcome them because they are there to help. This will be truer if the child is missing and less so if they are a runaway. Not all police departments handle missing and endangered children the same way. If you have questions about how they handle this, ask them.
- **Request that law enforcement put out a Be On the Look Out (BOLO) bulletin and enter your child into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing Persons File.** Ask them about involving the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the search for your child, especially if you suspect the child may be crossing state lines.
- **Secure your child's room and personal belongings** until law enforcement has the opportunity to conduct a search. Identify and secure any computers and wireless devices used by your child, but do not attempt to conduct a search of these devices on your own.
- **Do not question your other children;** instead allow law enforcement to conduct the questioning.
- **Devote your time** to providing information to and answering questions from investigators. **Disclose all** recent activities your child participated in, conversations you had with your child, their interaction in school, where your child was last seen and with whom.
- **Inform law enforcement** if there is any money, extra clothing, or other personal items missing, or if there is nothing missing.
- **Write** a detailed description of the clothing worn by your child and the personal items he or she had at the time of the disappearance. Include in your description any personal identification marks, such as birthmarks, scars, tattoos, etc. that may help in finding your child. If possible find a picture of your child that shows these identification marks and give it to law enforcement.
- **Make a list** of friends, acquaintances and anyone else who might have information or clues about your child's whereabouts and include telephone numbers and addresses. Tell your law enforcement investigator about anyone who moved in or out of the neighborhood within the past year,

anyone whose interest in or involvement with the family changed in recent months, and anyone who appeared to be overly interested in your child.

Don't feel guilty about relaying suspicions concerning someone you know. Also list your child's internet interests; favorite sites and games; and internet friends from Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites.

- **Find** recent photographs of your child in both black and white and color. Scan electronically and make copies of these pictures for your law enforcement agency, the media, your state missing children's clearinghouse, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® (NCMEC), and **Called To Rescue will also need these photos for our search.**
- **Ask for the name and telephone number of the law enforcement officer assigned to the case** as soon as possible. Keep this information where you can find it and program it into your cell phone. Do not hesitate to ask law enforcement about the specific steps they will take to safely locate and return your child.
- **Ask law enforcement about using tracking dogs (preferably bloodhounds) in the search.**

Other Organizations to Contact & Action Items

- **Call Called To Rescue** for personal support. CTR offers peer support for families with missing or sexually exploited children.
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Contact the Media – Utilize Law Enforcement. Ask law enforcement to contact media for you. This “raises the bar” and legitimizes the story if it comes from law enforcement. (If this is not done within the first few hours, call and give the information to the assignment editors yourself.

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- **Some Agencies will make their own flyers.** All you will need to provide is the photo and information. Agencies like State Police, FBI, Amber Alert and others will create their own flyers from the information you give them.
- **Put someone persuasive in charge of flyer distribution.** Ask your primary law enforcement contact what telephone number should be published on flyers for people to use to call in tips.
- **Get as many individuals and organizations as possible** distributing your child’s photo and flyer.
- **Find out where your flyers have been distributed** and expand the distribution of your child’s photo to the entire country including U.S. Customs, Border Patrol and the U.S. Coast Guard.

Volunteers

- **If volunteers are used in the search remember your law enforcement agency should still be responsible for managing the overall search effort.** Called To Rescue can organize searches. All volunteer searchers should be required to sign in and coordinate the search with others involved and law enforcement each time they participate in a search activity. We recommend that there to be a volunteer organization that coordinates the work of all agencies and volunteers involved in searching so that effort is multiplied and not duplicated.
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- Contact nonprofit organizations, community groups or other agencies in the community for donations or assistance in producing or distributing posters
 - Keep track of all donated items and write thank you notes
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 - Prepare meals
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 - Run errands such as shopping for groceries or going to the pharmacy
 - Take care of pets
 - Form prayer groups
- Make sure that a **list of names and addresses of all volunteers** is kept for later reference and thank you notes.

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- **Schedule press conferences** and interviews around media deadlines. Many parents have found 10am and 3pm to be good times.

- **Assign a spokesperson** if you need to have someone speak to the media for you. However, it is best to give interviews yourself as much as possible. The spokesperson can also stand beside you as a support.
- **Review** all media stories, comments and tapes to see if new information or tips are being revealed.

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- **You can solicit help** from school board members; city commissioners; your state Governor; senators and representatives; members of the U.S. Congress. You can also seek out those individuals who can get your child's poster displayed in public places such as stores, buses, subways, parks, tollbooths, post offices, etc. Make sure that the public is kept informed, but **be sure to consult with your law enforcement contact about information to share so that the investigation is not compromised.**

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- **Keep up public interest** in the disappearance: schedule press conferences, give story new slant, organize a vigil, announce a reward, use rapport with a reporter/editor to keep story in spotlight, etc. Coordinate these efforts with law enforcement. **Consider granting exclusive interviews.**
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- **Give a wish list** to the media if you need volunteers, training, printing, equipment, etc.
- **Contact a Media Expert.** If possible obtain the help of a media expert to help navigate the media.

If your child is returned don't jeopardize identification of the perpetrator by allowing your child to review tapes of the suspect.

Photo and Flyer Distribution

- **Get your child's posters put up in high traffic areas across the country.** You can do this by asking local companies and organizations. Truck lines can post flyers on the back of their trucks. You personally asking these companies may make it a little hard for them to say no.
- **Prepare a press kit for distribution.** Make sure that you ask a local public relations firm or person with writing skills to help you prepare the kit. Make sure you use a secure email and street address. Include local and regional radio stations in the distribution.
- **Research and look for** events where volunteers can distribute flyers in your community, state or region such as county fairs, farmers markets, sports contests, festivals and concerts.
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- **Consider** using public gimmicks such as printing your child's photo on buttons, T-shirts, bumper stickers, etc.

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Rewards and Donations

Rewards

- **Get advice** from professionals / people who have first hand experience managing a reward fund (attorney, your primary law enforcement contact, your banker, and other parents of missing children). We recommend a bank account be set up.
- **Ask an attorney** for pro bono legal assistance to help you in the legal wording of your reward offer.
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Donations

- **Be aware** that pledges are not as reliable as donations.
- **Use volunteer groups** to solicit funds, manage donations.
- **Keep a list** of donors and their contact information, receipts and records of donations.
- **Set up separate bank accounts** for each type of fund: Reward, family support, search efforts.
- **Designate trusted individuals** outside the family to have signature authority over donation accounts.

- **Designate one person** to answer all questions from the public concerning the funds / donations / spending.
- **Establish written procedures** detailing how the money is to be dispensed if it cannot be used for a reward.

Maintaining Emotional and Physical Strength and Focus

- **Maintain your daily routine. Be diligent about eating, sleeping and exercise.** Keeping yourself strong to help in the search for your child requires that you attend to your own physical and emotional needs.
- **Stay away from alcohol, drugs and harmful medications.** These can prevent you from being an effective member of the search team and can even induce depression. **If you have trouble sleeping at night or coping during the day ask your physician for help.**
- **Find productive ways to release your emotions and relieve stress.** These are things like keeping a journal, talking with a friend, taking a walk, exercising etc. Take time to find a quiet place to be alone and regroup but **don't isolate yourself.**
- **Lean on your faith.** Many parents find great comfort in their faith. Turning to religion can provide much needed support in this time of crisis. Reach out to spiritual leaders in your sphere of life. This can bring you peace.
- **Don't blame yourself** for your child's disappearance and do not allow yourself to shoulder the blame of others who do not understand the situation. Don't continually "What If?" in hindsight. This will drain you and make you less effective in the fight to get your child back.
- **Stay united with your spouse and family** in your fight to find your child. Don't allow the stress of the investigation drive a wedge into your family life.
- **Talk to your family.** Don't allow the absence of your child to become a taboo subject. Encourage open discussion of feelings in a safe, caring, nonjudgmental environment during family meetings.
- **Focus on the needs of your children still at home.** Establish different routines for daily life. Find a safe place away from your home where your other children can feel free to play and express themselves, away from the spotlight of the search and the media. **Don't be surprised if their behavior changes drastically in this difficult time and seek counseling if needed.**

- **Allow your other children to participate in the search along with an adult.** They can distribute posters, flyers or balloons. Remember the child's maturity, emotional and security issues need to be addressed when deciding if this is appropriate
- **Seek professional counseling for yourself and children to help you cope.** Don't try to provide emotional support to everyone in your family. Look for support from your church, friends, family and local community resources. **You do not need to go through this crisis alone!**

Preparing for the Long Term

- **Help your other children return to a sense of normalcy by going back to school.** Listen carefully to them before they go to cover any questions or fears and request that the school bring counselors into the classroom to discuss the situation with the children.
- **Don't feel guilty if you need to return to work.** Remember that you are working to provide a home for your child to return to.
- **Include extended family members to serve in the search effort.** They can function as spokesperson for the family, coordinator of volunteers, etc. They can also help with posters and flyers, request assistance from missing children's organizations, etc.
- **Bring people up to date on the progress of the search.** Put a daily or periodic report on your home answering machine or voicemail greeting, or website.
- **Never stop looking.** Dedicate part of each day to your missing child by making phone calls, writing letters, contacting law enforcement, or doing whatever you think will help in finding your missing child.

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- **Stay united with your spouse and family** in your fight to find your child. Don't allow the stress of the investigation drive a wedge into your family life.
- **Talk to your family.** Don't allow the absence of your child to become a taboo subject. Encourage open discussion of feelings in a safe, caring, nonjudgmental environment during family meetings.
- **Focus on the needs of your children still at home.** Establish different routines for daily life. Find a safe place away from your home where your other children can feel free to play and express themselves, away from the spotlight of the search and the media. **Don't be surprised if their behavior changes drastically in this difficult time and seek counseling if needed.**

- **Allow your other children to participate in the search along with an adult.** They can distribute posters, flyers or balloons. Remember the child's maturity, emotional and security issues need to be addressed when deciding if this is appropriate
- **Seek professional counseling for yourself and children to help you cope.** Don't try to provide emotional support to everyone in your family. Look for support from your church, friends, family and local community resources. **You do not need to go through this crisis alone!**

Preparing for the Long Term

- **Help your other children return to a sense of normalcy by going back to school.** Listen carefully to them before they go to cover any questions or fears and request that the school bring counselors into the classroom to discuss the situation with the children.
- **Don't feel guilty if you need to return to work.** Remember that you are working to provide a home for your child to return to.
- **Include extended family members to serve in the search effort.** They can function as spokesperson for the family, coordinator of volunteers, etc. They can also help with posters and flyers, request assistance from missing children's organizations, etc.
- **Bring people up to date on the progress of the search.** Put a daily or periodic report on your home answering machine or voicemail greeting, or website.
- **Never stop looking.** Dedicate part of each day to your missing child by making phone calls, writing letters, contacting law enforcement, or doing whatever you think will help in finding your missing child.

