

What to Do When Your Child is Presumed Abducted

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

Edited from material collected by the Justice Department

Recovery Plan Checklist for When a Child is Abducted

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.
- **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.

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.
- **Call the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (800-843-5678) to ask for help.** They will find out the names and telephone numbers of other organizations that might be able to help.
- **Designate one person to answer your phone** and keep a phone log next to the phone to record the date and time of phone calls, the name of the caller, and other information. Employ the use of a cell phone or pager so you can be reached when you are away from home. This also allows you to keep your main phone line open.

Media

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.)

In the Portland Metro Area Contact:

1) TV: KATU (503-231-4264) KGW (503-226-5000) KPTV (503-548-6550)

2) Radio: KXL (503-517-6280) KEX (503-802-6397)

3) Local Newspapers: Oregonian (Susan Gage 503-294-7610)
 Tribune (Features 503-546-5147
 Columbian (360-735-4569)

Photo and Flyer Distribution

- **Find the most recent pictures of your child.** Pick out pictures that most resemble your child. Find recent videos or home movies. Remember that posters and flyers will show only the head, neck and shoulders. Called To Rescue will make a missing child flyer in both print and digital versions for distribution.
- **Ask someone to make copies** of the pictures and videos you have selected. Photos can be scanned and sent off to local businesses to make copies quickly. Put all photo originals and negatives in a safe place and never give away your original picture.
- **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.

- **Select a volunteer coordinator** who is organized, efficient and able to work well with and give directions to others. Choose someone who is skilled in providing leadership. The volunteer search coordinator will need instruction from law enforcement to determine:
 - How many non-police personnel will be needed
 - What locations or areas are to be searched and on what schedule
 - What training will be provided to volunteers
 - How information will be disseminated among volunteers
 - What specific instructions will be given to volunteers about the process, procedures and parameters of the search

- **Make a list of things that others can do to help** or things that you need as they may arise. If you have no ready answer for someone who asks to help, write down specific contact information that will enable you to contact that person later with a particular task.

- **Request that the volunteer staging area be located away from your home.**

- **Protect yourself from people who might be disillusioned** or who may even prey on victims through scams; not all volunteers may have your best interest in mind but are there for personal reasons. If you feel uncomfortable with anyone for any reason inform your volunteer coordinator or primary law enforcement contact right away.

- **Volunteer activities** to keep in mind may include:
 - Participating in the physical search
 - Canvass area businesses for donations of supplies needed for the search effort or for the family's upkeep
 - Design posters or flyers – Called To Rescue will volunteer to do this
 - Design an electronic website and forward leads electronically via the website.
 - Set up a Facebook page dedicated to your missing child
 - Tack up pictures, posters and hand out flyers
 - 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
 - Answer the home telephone 24 hours a day and maintain a telephone log
 - Prepare meals
 - Help with household chores such as cleaning, laundry, watering flowers, mowing the lawn, maintaining the yard or shoveling the driveway
 - 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.

The First 72 Hours

The Search and Law Enforcement

- **Talk regularly with your law enforcement contact.** Choose a specific time of day to call your primary contact. Have one person designated for calling and speaking with your primary law enforcement officer. **Remember law enforcement may not be able to share all information so the case is not jeopardized.**
- **Satisfy yourself that law enforcement is handling your child's case properly.** All agencies involved in the case should be working with one another in finding your missing child. **If the primary contact can't answer your questions, ask who can.** Ask to see your child's case file periodically.
- **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.**

Media

- **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.**
- **Continue working with Assignment Editors.** If you plan an event email or fax the information in a news release to the assignment editor.
- **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.
- **Make your own personal photo cards** to insert into mailings and get permission from the proper agency to have them inserted in newspapers, local utility bills and bank statements.
- **Ask** national groups such as law enforcement, Lions Club, Rotary Club, etc. to help distribute your child's photo or flyer.
- **Ask franchise businesses** such as fast food or gas stations to distribute posters along with their normal supplies. Most people who abduct children frequent liquor stores and adult bookstores more than banks, post offices and schools. **Put reward posters up where people with information will see them.**
- **Consider** using public gimmicks such as printing your child's photo on buttons, T-shirts, bumper stickers, etc.

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.

- **Keep your law enforcement contact informed** of any decision you make regarding a reward. Ask law enforcement if there are any special reward funds that already exist (locally, state, FBI, Crime Stoppers, etc.).
- **Outline your reward:**
 - Decide what you want the reward to accomplish and then make sure that this purpose is clearly described.
 - Set a time limit for the reward (keep short at onset; you can always extend it later).
 - Establish the amount of the reward (Don't offer more money than you can raise. Do not use your personal funds).

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.