

# MISSING-CHILD, EMERGENCY-RESPONSE, QUICK-REFERENCE GUIDE FOR FAMILIES



- [ ] Contact your local law-enforcement agency as soon as you have determined your child is missing or has been abducted. Do not delay in reporting your child missing to law enforcement.
- [ ] Search any area into which a child could crawl or hide and possibly be asleep or unable to get out. This includes closets, piles of laundry, in and under beds, inside large appliances, in vehicles including trunks, or any other space into which a child might fit. Check areas where your child was last seen or may have played such as open or abandoned wells, caves, sheds, buildings, and crawl spaces.
- [ ] Provide law enforcement with the date, time, and location where your child was last seen, if known.
- [ ] Provide law enforcement with the name(s) of the last person/people who saw your child, if known.
- [ ] Determine the names or descriptions of companions or associates last seen with your child.
- [ ] 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. Ask law enforcement to look for clues in any chat and social-networking websites your child has visited or hosts.
- [ ] Provide law enforcement with information about your child's general health and any medical conditions or concerns.
- [ ] Compile descriptive information about your child and have the information available to provide to the first-responding, law-enforcement investigator. Descriptive information should include items and information such as a recent, clear, color photo of your child; video of your child; a description of the clothing worn at the time the child was last seen; cell and other phone numbers; date of birth; hair and eye color; height; weight; complexion; identifiers such as eyeglasses or contact lenses, braces, body piercings, tattoos; and/or other unique physical attributes.
- [ ] Ask the responding officer if immediate community notification, such as an AMBER Alert™,<sup>1</sup> has been considered.
- [ ] Ask the responding officer if a neighborhood canvass will be conducted.
- [ ] Restrict access to the home, no matter where your child was last seen, until law enforcement has arrived and had the opportunity to search the home and surrounding area.
- [ ] Try to keep all phone lines open.
- [ ] Provide law enforcement with information regarding custody issues, if any, including court-ordered visitation conditions.
- [ ] Provide law enforcement with information about any recent changes in your child's behavior.
- [ ] Provide law enforcement with information about any individuals who have recently shown unusual attention to or interest in your child.
- [ ] Obtain the name of and contact information for the primary investigator assigned to your child's case.
- [ ] Report your missing child to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® (NCMEC) at 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678).

<sup>1</sup> Although the search for every missing child is important, AMBER Alerts are not designed for use in all missing-child cases and are issued only when abducted children are facing imminent danger. AMBER Alerts are designed to rapidly notify the public of a child's abduction. The criteria for dissemination of an AMBER Alert varies among states and territories. To obtain more information about AMBER Alerts in your area visit [www.amberalert.gov](http://www.amberalert.gov), and from the home page click on the "State AMBER Alert Contacts" link.

- [ ] Verify, through the investigating law-enforcement agency, that information about your missing child has been entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing Person File. Federal law<sup>2</sup> requires law enforcement to enter information about a missing child into NCIC no more than two hours after the receipt of the report.
- [ ] Report your missing child to the missing-child clearinghouse in your state or territory. To find your missing-child clearinghouse visit [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com), and from the home page click on the “More Services” and “Missing-Child Clearinghouse Program” links.
- [ ] Contact nonprofit organizations in your area assisting families of missing children. For information about organizations in your area contact the Association of Missing and Exploited Children’s Organizations (AMECO) at 1-877-263-2620 or visit [www.amecoinc.org](http://www.amecoinc.org).
- [ ] Contact the National Runaway Switchboard, if your child may be a runaway, at 1-800-RUNAWAY (1-800-786-2929) or visit [www.1800runaway.org](http://www.1800runaway.org) for assistance including information about developing communication with your child.
- [ ] Prepare posters of your missing child including a recent photo and descriptive information and post them within the local community. NCMEC may be able to provide you with copies of your child’s poster as soon as the poster has been certified by them for distribution.
- [ ] Make every effort to obtain local and national media attention regarding your missing child. Conduct television, radio, and newspaper interviews to discuss and direct attention to your child.
- [ ] Obtain medical records from your child’s doctor and dental records from your child’s dentist.
- [ ] Provide a DNA sample to law enforcement if you already have one. If not, collect samples from your missing child’s possessions such as his or her toothbrush, baby’s teeth, hair brush used exclusively by your child for at least one month, and used bandage with dried blood.
- [ ] Provide fingerprints and dental charts to law enforcement if you have them.
- [ ] Provide law enforcement with detailed information about the description and characteristics of the abductor if he or she is known to you.
- [ ] Provide law enforcement with the abductor’s photo, driver’s license number, credit-card numbers, cell and other phone numbers, passport numbers, and any other available information useful for tracking purposes if known.
- [ ] Contact the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office for Victims of Crime for possible financial assistance at 1-800-851-3420 or visit [www.ovc.gov](http://www.ovc.gov). Also check your local phone directory for crime-victim-compensation or crime-victim-assistance programs.
- [ ] Stay in regular contact with law enforcement, the media, and local government officials during the search for your child.
- [ ] Conduct periodic press conferences and plan events related to the search for your child to help keep the disappearance in the public eye.
- [ ] Notify law enforcement, NCMEC, and other agencies assisting in the search as soon as your child is located.

<sup>2</sup> The Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act (Pub. L. No. 109-248) mandates NCIC entry must be made by law enforcement within two hours of receipt of a report of a missing or abducted child. This two-hour requirement replaces the term “immediately” in the National Child Search Assistance Act (NCSAA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5779 and 5780).

This Checklist was created and published by NCMEC and is to be given to families by law enforcement during an emergency response to a report of a missing or abducted child. NCMEC, at 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678) or [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com), offers a wealth of resources to assist families and law enforcement in the search for a missing or abducted child or cases involving the sexual exploitation of a child. This project was supported by Grant No. 2011-MC-CX-K001 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. This document is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice or professional opinion on specific facts. Information provided in this document may not remain current or accurate, so recipients should use this document only as a starting point for their own independent research and analysis. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought. 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 © 2008 and 2011 National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. All rights reserved. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® and 1-800-THE-LOST® are registered trademarks of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. NCMEC Order #198.