

What to Do if Your Child is Missing

Child Lures Prevention Early Response System



While statistically rare, abduction puts a child's life in extreme danger. It is essential to determine as quickly as possible if a child has been criminally abducted, since 74% of abducted children who are murdered are killed within three hours. Most missing kids are runaways who return home within three days, so police often assume that even very young missing children have run away voluntarily. Sometimes it is up to parents to convince the authorities otherwise.

If Your Child is Missing:

1. Try not to panic, but act swiftly.
2. Search your home (under beds, in closets, etc.) thoroughly, as well as your child's favorite hangouts.
3. Review his/her recent online & electronic activity.
4. Call, text, post or email neighbors, relatives, your child's friends – anyone who may have seen him/her or have an idea where s/he may be.
5. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Y / N** Has the child ever run away from home (or threatened to)?
- Y / N** Are any of the child's clothes missing?
- Y / N** Is money missing? (yours or the child's)
- Y / N** Are any of the child's favorite possessions (diary, ipod, laptop, backpack) missing?
- Y / N** Is the child older than age 10?
- Y / N** Has the child been recently depressed, withdrawn, or moody?
- Y / N** Are there unhappy circumstances at home? (Pending/recent divorce, physical violence, alcoholism, sexual abuse, etc.)
- Y / N** Has the child lost enthusiasm for activities once considered important?
- Y / N** Have the child's grades dropped recently?
- Y / N** Has the child suddenly withdrawn from favorite family members or friends?
- Y / N** Has the child acquired new friends, offline or online, of whom you disapprove?
- Y / N** Does the child have a history of substance use/abuse?

If the answer to most of these questions is "No", a runaway situation is *highly unlikely*, and you should CALL THE POLICE IMMEDIATELY.

Be prepared to give the police:

- Recent photograph
- Physical description: height, weight, identifying items (glasses, braces), clothing last seen worn
- Child's dental records, DNA and/or fingerprints
- Where child was last seen/going/coming from
- Access to child's online & electronic devices

6. Limit access to your home until law enforcement arrives.
7. Be completely honest with law enforcement - including any problems at home.
8. Explain why you feel your child is not a runaway by reviewing the questions in #5.
9. Request police activate AMBER Alert for your child.
10. Ask for a copy of the police report and name of investigating officer; check back frequently to obtain updates on case.
11. Notify the media.
 - Television (Assignment Editor/Producer)
 - Radio Stations (Station Manager)
 - Newspaper (City Desk Editor)
12. Be sure your child's name and identifiers are immediately entered into NCIC (National Crime Information Center) missing person file. If the local agency will not enter your child, contact the nearest FBI office, who must enter the child according to the Federal Missing Children Act (Public Law 97-292).
13. Call the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST.
14. Mobilize relatives, neighbors, your child's friends and their families, clergy, etc.
 - Ask everyone to reach out to their VIP community contacts (i.e. police chief, principal, district attorney, district representative, mayor).
 - Go door-to-door. There is nearly always somebody who has seen something.
15. Assign someone to oversee all communications.
 - Continue to call, text, post and email contacts.
 - Monitor online & electronic messages.
 - Update messaging with incoming information.
16. **Stress the 3-hour life expectancy of a criminally abducted child.**
 - Urge police and media cooperation.
 - Share new information immediately with police.

Consider sharing this criteria with local police. Many police departments do not have this type of plan in place.

NOTE: The plan above should be executed only in an emergency. For the sake of all involved, don't "cry wolf" needlessly.

Helpful Hotlines

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children:
1-800-843-5678

National Runaway Switchboard:
1-800-786-2929