

Hudson Police Department

MISSING CHILDREN

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish responsibilities and guidelines for the Hudson Police Department's response to reports of missing children.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Hudson Police Department to expeditiously respond to and thoroughly investigate all reports of missing children. A child who is missing under unusual circumstances shall be considered "at risk" until sufficient information to the contrary is confirmed.

III. DEFINITIONS

Missing Child: This term refers to a person who is (a) younger than eighteen years of age and (b) whose whereabouts is unknown to his or her parents, guardian or responsible party under circumstances that are uncustomary for the child or that would cause reasonable concern.

Unusual Circumstances: For purposes of this policy, the term unusual circumstances refers to a missing child who is thirteen years of age or younger, or whose disappearance involves circumstances that would cause a reasonable person to conclude that the child should be considered at risk. Those circumstances could include the child being:

- ◀ out of the zone of safety for his or her age and developmental stage;
- ◀ mentally incapacitated (e.g., developmentally disabled or emotionally disturbed);
- ◀ medically dependent (e.g., insulin dependent);
- ◀ drug involved;
- ◀ a potential victim of foul play or sexual exploitation;
- ◀ in a life threatening situation;
- ◀ reported to the police as missing after a delay on the part of the parents, guardians, or other responsible person;
- ◀ believed to be with adults or older juveniles who could endanger his or her welfare; and/or
- ◀ absent under circumstances inconsistent with established patterns of behavior.

Zone of Safety. The distance a child could travel from the location where last seen before he or she would most likely be at risk of injury or exploitation based on the child's age, developmental stage, and related matters.

IV. PROCEDURES

A. Responsibilities of the Dispatcher

A dispatcher who receives the report of a missing child is responsible for ensuring

that appropriate information is collected to assist the responding officer. This includes, but may not be limited to, the following:

1. Determine if the circumstances of the report meet the definition of a missing child as set forth in Section III of this policy.
2. Prioritize the call based on the factors determining unusual circumstances and dispatch officers accordingly.
3. Collect essential information from the caller to transmit appropriate radio alerts providing descriptive information about the child, where the child was last seen, and any information concerning potential abductors and their means and direction of travel.
4. Inform the parent or guardian that they should not disturb or tamper with the home, school, or location where the child might have been or any of the child's belongings.
5. Where possible and appropriate, search police agency records for information that may facilitate the search and investigation. These include, but are not limited to, records that establish whether incidents have been reported in the vicinity that may have some bearing on the case, including but not limited to:
 - a. complaints of attempted abductions, prowlers, public lewdness, and suspicious person;
 - b. residents in the vicinity of the missing child's home or place last seen who are designated as sexual predators;
 - c. history of household abuse or domestic violence calls;
 - d. criminal history of family members or others at the child's home address;
 - e. runaway reports on the child or siblings; and
 - f. juvenile delinquency reports of the child or siblings.
6. Safeguard all pertinent records for future investigative reference, to include communications related to the incident, written notes, radio broadcasts, and all subsequent notifications.
7. Where unusual circumstances exist, issue a radio alert to all agency personnel and enter an alert on the statewide telecommunications system.
8. Ask the parents to stay in place until police personnel arrive.

B. The First Responder

The officer assigned as a first responder to the incident should prioritize and perform as appropriate the following tasks:

1. Unless acting in direct response to the child's safety, respond directly and promptly to the individual who made the initial report.
2. Irrespective of any search that may have been conducted previously by parents or others, verify that the child is missing by conducting a consensual search of the house and grounds to include places where a child could be hiding, trapped or asleep.

3. Conduct interviews with parents or other person(s) who made the initial report in order to gain insight into the circumstances surrounding the disappearance and gather other information needed to conduct an initial assessment of the case.
4. Obtain a detailed description of the missing child, several recent photographs, and any recent videotapes as available and forward to dispatch.
5. Confirm the child's custody status, whether a custody dispute or similar problem exists between the parents, whether a restraining order is in effect, or if the child has expressed an interest in living with the non-custodial parent.
6. Determine when, where and by whom the child was last seen; interview those who last saw the child and treat the location as a crime scene.
7. Secure and safeguard the incident scene or place last seen as a potential crime scene. Where possible, take photographs and/or videotape of the incident scene and ensure that personnel do not tamper with potential evidence.
8. Identify any areas of the incident scene or the home that have been disrupted since the child's disappearance. In particular, the child's bedroom, bed clothing, and related areas and items should be secured and protected until evidence and identification material such as hair, fingerprints, or bite marks can be collected.
9. Identify the zone of safety for the child's age and developmental stage.
10. Based on available information, make an initial determination of the type of case, the need for additional resources, and whether the incident should be initially classified as unusual as defined in this policy.
11. If the child was abducted, obtain a description of the abductors if available, the mode of travel, vehicle description, and related information and transmit to dispatch. If the abductor is a family member, obtain photographs of the suspect.
12. Determine the correct NCIC Missing Person File category disability, endangered, involuntary, juvenile, or catastrophe and request that dispatch or other authorized personnel promptly enter this into the NCIC file. Family abductions are normally entered as "involuntary", and non-family abductions are entered as "endangered."
13. Fully identify and separately interview anyone at the scene of the disappearance.
14. A thorough home search should be conducted even if the child's disappearance occurred elsewhere. Obtain written permission to conduct the search and, with the assistance of additional personnel, search the residence, out building, and other structures, vehicles, and related property.
15. Provide parents with any documentation that is required by the Ohio's Missing Children's Clearinghouse and tell them to include a photograph of the missing child.
16. Prepare a chronological account of actions taken and information obtained from point of contact to relief.

C. Amber Alert Procedure

When the Hudson Police Department receives notification of a missing child who possibly has been abducted in Hudson, an officer will immediately respond to the reporting party to gather information for an incident report. The reporting officer will determine whether or not the AMBER Alert plan needs to be activated based on these four criteria defined by the Department of Justice:

1. Law enforcement confirms that the child is 17 years old or younger.
2. Law enforcement believes the abduction poses a credible threat of immediate danger of serious bodily harm or death to the child.
3. There is sufficient descriptive information about the child, the suspect, and/or the circumstances surrounding the abduction to believe that activation of the alert will help to locate the child.
4. A law enforcement agency determines that the child is not a runaway and has not been abducted as a result of a family abduction, unless the investigation determines that the child is in immediate danger of serious bodily harm or death.

As soon as sufficient information has been gathered, it needs to be relayed to the on-duty dispatcher so he/she can begin entering the Missing Person and AMBER Alert entry into LEADS and NCIC. If credible evidence suggests the victim will be transported out of state, then an additional NLETS AMBER Alert entry must be made. Nine separate entities are notified automatically as soon as the entry is transmitted:

1. OSHP Central Dispatch by LEADS;
2. Attorney General's Office by LEADS;
3. Adjacent County Criminal Justice Agencies by LEADS;
4. FBI, Child Abduction Unit by LEADS;
5. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children by NCIC (FBI);
6. Ohio Media via EAS by OSHP or our local plan;
7. Ohio Media via e-mail/fax broadcast by Attorney General;
8. www.ohioamberplan.org by Attorney General; and
9. 1-877-AMBEROH by OSHP after initial contact with entering agency.

If a case involving a missing child does not meet the criteria necessary to activate the AMBER Alert plan, continue to follow good investigation strategies as done before AMBER. Continually reevaluate the criteria as information pertaining to the investigation changes.

D. Supervisor's Responsibilities

Where a child is missing under unusual circumstances, a supervisor will ensure that the following measures are taken:

1. Obtain a briefing from the first responder and other agency personnel at the

scene sufficient to determine the scope and complexity of the case and develop an appropriate response. Conduct the briefing away from family, friends, and other involved individuals.

2. Ensure that first responder responsibilities, as outlined in the foregoing section, have been fully and properly carried out.
3. Determine if additional personnel and resources are needed to assist in the investigation to include activation of interagency response protocols or, if necessary, turning the investigation and/or search over to a larger agency that can bring greater resources to bear on the investigation.
4. If necessary, establish a command post (away from the child's residence) to assist in field management of the search and investigation.
5. Appoint a search operations coordinator to organize search efforts. Determine whether tracking dogs are available and if they are appropriate for use under the immediate circumstances.
6. Appoint a media liaison officer if not yet on hand to deal with media inquiries and, if deemed appropriate, solicit media assistance in locating the missing child.
7. Ensure that all required notifications have been made to include, where appropriate, officers and investigative units of the agency, other law enforcement agencies, and available community resources.
8. Establish a liaison with the family who can explain police efforts and work with the family to uncover any information useful to the investigation.
9. Assess the need for additional services and contact the Ohio Clearinghouse and the NCMEC to determine what services if any can be provided.
10. Initiate an AMBER alert if all prerequisites are met.

E. Investigator's Responsibilities

Where a case involves unusual circumstances as defined in this policy, the assigned police investigator shall ensure that the following measures are taken.

1. Obtain a briefing from agency personnel at the scene.
2. Verify the accuracy of all descriptive information concerning the child, being alert to facts or statements that may conflict with those obtained by the first responder or supervisor.
3. Canvass the neighborhood as soon as possible to identify and interview residents and others within the abduction zone. Identify all vehicles parked within the neighborhood.
4. Obtain a general history of recent family dynamics from family members, neighbors, classmates, teachers, school counselors, and other persons who may have had close personal interaction with the child and/or family.
5. Conduct in-depth fact-finding interviews with all witnesses, friends or relatives of the missing child, teachers, classmates, or others who knew and/or routinely interacted with the child, placing particular emphasis on identifying any conflicting information offered by these or other individuals.

6. Review any records generated about the family or child from the police agency, social service agencies, schools, and related organizations or agencies.
7. Implement an agency system or other authorized means to record, cross reference, and retrieve information generated through the investigation.
8. Reassess the need for additional resources and specialized services to include specialized search and rescue operations, state resources (e.g., state missing children's clearinghouses), and federal agencies such as the FBI and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.
9. If the case is not resolved promptly, update descriptive records and those entered into state and federal missing persons' databases to include: dental characteristics, scars, marks and tattoos, fingerprints, and additional articles of clothing, jewelry, or possessions not previously itemized.
10. Determine whether a polygraph examination is warranted and request such an examination where indicated for parents, guardians, or other persons as appropriate.
11. Monitor media relations to include review of all agency releases to the media to ensure that information is not released that will compromise the investigation.
12. Provide the family with whatever support is possible and appropriate. Provide them with a copy of the Family Survival Guide prepared by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention or contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to have one sent to them via overnight mail.

F. Unidentified Children

An officer who is assigned to the report of an unidentified person who appears to be a child, whether living or deceased, is responsible for completion of the following tasks, among other responsibilities.

1. Obtain a complete description of the individual using standardized information gathering forms designated by this agency (or others such as the NCIC Unidentified Person File Worksheet).
2. Enter the child's description into the NCIC Unidentified Person File.
3. Utilize available resources to identify the child, to include:
 - ◀ the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children;
 - ◀ State missing and exploited children clearinghouses; and
 - ◀ Summit County and Ohio medical examiner's offices and organizations.
4. Once identification has been made, cancel all notifications.

G. Recovery and/or Case Closure

An officer assigned to the recovery or return of a missing child shall complete the following tasks, among his or her other responsibilities:

1. Verify the identity of the returned child as the missing child while assessing the child's safety and gathering available information about possible predators.
2. During the verification process, determine whether intervention services are needed to ensure that the child can safely remain in the home and ensure that arrangements are made for delivery of these services. These include, but are not limited to, mental health and/or physical health examinations and arrangements for family counseling.
3. Complete designated supplemental reports and cancel all outstanding notifications to include any NCIC Missing Person File entry and the State clearinghouse. Supplemental reports should describe the child's activities while missing and the circumstances of the recovery/return.

Acknowledgement

The Hudson Police Department and the IACP National Law Enforcement Policy Center would like to extend its sincere appreciation for the invaluable contributions to and review of this policy by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), Alexandria, Virginia. To report a missing child, to receive professional assistance in the investigation of a missing child, or to register for free training provided by the center, contact the NCMEC at 1-800-843-5678.