

Federal Missing Children Acts

The Missing Children Act of 1982 (28 U.S.C. § 534 (a)) enables families to guarantee that information about their missing child is properly entered into the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Crime Information Center (NCIC) computer system. If you have doubts about whether the law-enforcement agency taking the missing-child report has entered the information into the computer system, you have the right to ask the FBI to verify the entry. If the case has not been entered, ask the FBI to make the entry for you. You may also call the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children to verify that the correct information was entered into the NCIC system.

The Missing Children Assistance Act of 1984 (42 U.S.C. §§ 5771 *et seq.* as amended) mandates the U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ) to provide certain services including the establishment of a toll-free telephone line to receive information about missing and sexually exploited children and provision of assistance to families and law enforcement in the search for missing children. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children serves as the national clearinghouse and resource center that carries out these mandates on behalf of DoJ with funding and program coordination provided by DoJ's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

The National Child Search Assistance Act of 1990 (P.L.101-647) requires federal, state, and local law enforcement to enter

reports of a missing child who is younger than 18 years of age and unidentified persons into the NCIC, and work cooperatively with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children on these difficult cases. It also eliminates any waiting period prior to entry of this information into NCIC.

Please understand and exercise your rights as stipulated by these Acts.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), established in 1984 as a private, nonprofit organization, serves as a clearinghouse of information about missing and exploited children; provides technical assistance to the public and law-enforcement agencies; offers training programs to law-enforcement and social-service professionals; distributes photographs and descriptions about missing children worldwide; creates and coordinates child-protection education and prevention programs and publications; networks with nonprofit service providers and state clearinghouses regarding missing-child cases; and provides information about effective legislation to help ensure the protection of children per 42 U.S.C. §§ 5771 *et seq.*; 42 U.S.C. § 11606; and 22 C.F.R. § 94.6.

A 24-hour, toll-free telephone line, **1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)**, is available in Canada, Mexico, and the United States for those who have information regarding missing and exploited children. The "phone free" number when dialing internationally is 00-800-0843-5678. The CyberTipline® is available worldwide for

online reporting of these crimes at www.cybertipline.com. The TTY line is 1-800-826-7653. The NCMEC business number is 703-274-3900. The business number when dialing from other countries is 001-703-522-9320. The NCMEC facsimile number is 703-274-2200. The NCMEC web-site address is www.missingkids.com.

How NCMEC Can Help

After you have reported your child missing to local law enforcement, call our toll-free telephone number. A Communications Specialist will take information concerning your child, a Case Manager may be able to follow-up with you and the law-enforcement agency investigating the case, and we may be able to refer you to a support group in your community that can also help.

For information regarding the services offered by our NCMEC branches, please call them directly in California at 714-508-0150, Florida at 561-848-1900, Kansas City at 816-756-5422, New York at 585-242-0900, and South Carolina at 803-254-2326.

A number of publications, addressing various aspects of the missing- and exploited-child issue, are available free of charge in single copies by contacting the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's Publications Department at



Charles B. Wang International Children's Building
699 Prince Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3175
U.S.A.

Another resource is *When Your Child Is Missing: A Family Survival Guide* (NCJ 170022). This book, written by searching parents and published by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, explains the role that various agencies play in the search for a missing child and features helpful checklists. Copies are available by calling 1-800-851-3420 or visiting www.ncjrs.org.

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Just in case...

Guidelines in case your child might someday be missing



National Center for Missing & Exploited Children®

1-800-THE-LOST®
(1-800-843-5678)

www.missingkids.com



Guidelines in case your child might someday be missing

The rising awareness of crimes that are being committed against children—and of missing children in particular—has left many families feeling vulnerable. It is important for families to be aware and alert, but you and your child do **not** need to be afraid. You should, however, be wary of gadgets and gimmicks that purport to protect your child or any sort of data-collection or registration services that store information about your child. To help ensure that others do not misuse this information, you should be the **only person** to keep this information about your child.

The most important key to child safety is effective communication with your child. Remember, children who do not feel that they are listened to or think their needs are met in the home are more vulnerable to abduction or exploitation. The first step you should take is to establish an atmosphere in the home in which your children feel truly comfortable about discussing sensitive matters and relating experiences in which anyone may have approached them in an inappropriate manner or a way that made them feel uncomfortable. The simple truth is that children are often too afraid or confused to report their experiences and fears. Allow them to talk freely about their likes, dislikes, friends, and true feelings.

This brochure gives instructions about the actions you should take to prepare for the **remote** possibility that your child may one day be missing. It also provides instructions about the **immediate** actions you should take when you believe that your child is missing.

Preparation

There are six steps that you should take now to be prepared in case your child might someday be missing. Collecting the data described below will help law enforcement search for and identify your child when he or she is recovered.

- **Keep a complete description of your child.** This description must include color of hair, color of eyes, height, weight, and date of birth. In addition the descriptions should include identifiers such as eyeglasses or contact lenses, braces on teeth, pierced ears, and other unique physical attributes. The complete description must be written down.
- **Take color photographs of your child every six months.** Photographs should be of high quality and in sharp focus so that your child is easily recognizable. Head and shoulder portraits from different angles, such as those taken by school photographers, are preferable, but make certain you have a photograph that most resembles your child. Candid photographs may be more representative of how your child looks than a posed shot.
- **Have your dentist prepare dental charts and prints for your child. Be sure the dental chart is updated each time an examination or dental work is performed and dental prints are taken once every two years until your child is 18 years old.** Make sure your dentist maintains accurate, up-to-date dental charts and X-rays for your child as a routine part of his or her normal office procedure. If you move, you should get a copy from your former dentist to keep yourself until a new dentist is found. Make certain that the information is easily accessible

should you need it quickly. Also consider taking a bite impression of your child's teeth. Take a two-inch square of flat material like Styrofoam® and have your child bite partially through it. The bite should be strong enough to leave an impression of the upper and lower teeth. A new bite sample should be made each time your child loses or grows a tooth.

- **Know where your child's medical records are located.** Medical records, particularly X-rays, can be invaluable in helping to identify a recovered child. It is important to have all permanent scars, birthmarks, blemishes, and broken bones recorded. You should find out from your child's doctor where such records are located and how you can obtain them if the need arises.
- **Arrange with your local law-enforcement agency to have your child fingerprinted.** In order for fingerprints to be useful in identifying a person, they must be properly taken. Your law-enforcement agency has trained personnel to help ensure that the fingerprints taken are useful. They will give you the fingerprint card and **not** keep a record of the prints.
- **Consider having a DNA sample taken from your child.** DNA, or deoxyribonucleic acid, is rapidly becoming the "gold standard" for identifications. There are many DNA collection kits available, but it is simple for you to collect a sample. For example an old toothbrush that has been used by your child is rich with his or her DNA. Allow the toothbrush to air dry and place it in a brown envelope, have your child lick the envelope shut, and label it. The same procedure can be used for

other samples such as baby teeth, an old hair-brush used exclusively by your child for at least one month, and dried blood from a bandage. If using a buccal-swab sample from the inside of your child's mouth it is important to follow the instructions to allow for the swab to dry prior to storage.

As a family project make an identification box for each family member. Each family member should use a separate shoebox. In each shoebox place one family member's fingerprints, extra dental X-rays and prints as obtained from the dentist, a recent picture, and the DNA sample in separate brown envelopes. Store the box at room temperature in a dry place away from heat. The DNA sample should be good for up to six or seven years.

Action

If you believe that your child is missing, it is critical that you act **immediately**. If your child is missing from home, search the house. You should check closets, piles of laundry, in and under beds, inside old refrigerators—wherever a child could crawl into or hide and possibly be asleep or not able to get out. Check with your neighbors and friends of your child. If you still cannot find your child, **immediately call your local law-enforcement agency**.

If your child disappears when you are away from home—on a shopping trip, for example—notify the manager of the store or the security office and ask for assistance in finding your child. Then **immediately call law enforcement**. Many stores have initiated a plan of action if a child is missing while shopping in their establish-

ment, like Code ADAM started by Wal-Mart® and used by retailers all over the country.

When you call law enforcement, try to stay calm. Identify yourself and your location, and say, "Please send an officer; I want to report a missing child." You should give your child's name, date of birth, height, weight, and any unique identifiers such as eyeglasses, pierced ears, or braces on the teeth. In addition you should tell them when you noticed the disappearance and last saw your child. Knowing what clothing the child was wearing when he or she disappeared will help. After you have reported your child missing to law enforcement, listen to their instructions and respond to their questions.

Any significant and unexplained deviation from your child's daily routine should prompt a timely law-enforcement response. This response may be expedited if any of these circumstances exist. Your child is

- younger than 13 years of age
- mentally incapacitated or drug dependent
- a potential victim of foul play or with adults who could endanger the child's welfare
- communicating with someone he or she has become acquainted with via the Internet and has arranged to meet, in person, with the individual

Request that your child's name and identifying information be immediately entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing Person File. This ensures that any law-enforcement agency in the country will be able to identify your child if he or she is found in another community.