



INVESTIGATIVE CHECKLIST

for Patrol First Responders

The Patrol First Responder Checklist provides information to promote accurate and effective response to reports of endangered missing and abducted children for first responding officers. The preliminary decisions made, and actions taken, during the initial response have a profound impact on the outcome of the investigation. Patrol first responders are encouraged to familiarize themselves with this checklist in a proactive manner, rather than amid an endangered missing or abducted child incident.

- 1. If possible and circumstances/policy allow, activate body camera or vehicle-mounted camera when approaching the scene to record vehicles, people, and anything else of note for later investigative review.**

If no recording device is available, be prepared to take notes of surroundings and observations.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____

2. Interview parents/guardians/persons who made the initial report. (Privately if possible).

Interview parents/guardians/reporting persons (privately if possible). Confirm and build upon the information provided by the 911 telecommunicator to ensure you gather complete identifying information on the child and suspect (if known/seen) in order to better ascertain the nature of the missing/abducted child incident.

[Telecommunicator Intake Checklist, Refer to pages 6-19.](#)

Resource – [Investigative Checklist for First Responders](#)

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____

3. Verbally confirm the child is in fact missing (if not fully and directly confirmed in step two).

This may seem redundant to confirm the child is indeed missing, but has proven to be important in clarifying information that investigative and supervisory officers need for decisions around whether or not AMBER Alert criteria are met; and the best way, if appropriate, to alert the public in the event the criteria are not met.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____

4. Determine and document when the child was last seen, where the child was last seen and who last saw the child.

Be sure to maintain all notes in a centralized area to support accurate and complete briefing of other officers and investigators. This information will also support AMBER Alert activation if/when warranted. Every detail, no matter how insignificant or basic it may seem, has the potential of making a profound impact on how well the investigation is conducted.

Note: Be sure to record the time and place where the missing child was last seen and any circumstances around that last sighting and/or contact with the child.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____

5. Identify the circumstances of the missing or abducted child episode.

Questions to cover include:

1. What was the mood or demeanor of the child when last seen?
2. Was there anything else going on in the area at the time?
3. Have there been any recent changes in the child's behavior?
4. Have you noticed the child spending time with any new friends or acquaintances?

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____



6. Be sure to ask these questions when interviewing the individual(s) who last had contact with the child.

Please note that if this step requires leaving the scene to contact individuals, another officer should be brought in to remain at the location of response.

If the parents/guardians/reporting persons interviewed in step two are not those who last saw the child, be sure to ask those who last saw the child these questions. This assumes you have already asked these questions of the parents/guardians/reporting persons interviewed in step two. You should also be sure to update communications with this information as they will update the incident records and NCIC as appropriate.

1. A detailed description of the missing child at the time last seen
 - Clothing and outerwear (coats, hats)
 - Personal items the child may have had with him/her (backpack, phone, toys/stuffed animals, etc.)
 - Any injuries or medical issues the child had at the time (or which may have been witnessed during the incident, if known)
2. Any descriptive information on the abductor, if known or witnessed
3. Any descriptive information on any vehicle used in the missing/abduction incident
4. What is the child’s custody status?
5. With whom does the child typically stay (mother, father, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.)?
6. Who generally cares for/watches the child during the time when the child was last seen?
7. Does the child have any special needs (cognitive/behavioral and/or medical)?
8. What is the child’s spoken language? Does the child have any language barriers or abilities (such as speaking more than one language, or using sign language)?
9. Who does the child know that lives in the area or nearby, where they may have gone seeking them or to visit (obtain names, addresses and/or phone numbers known)?
10. How far do you believe the child would be able to travel by foot since last were seen?

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____

7. Make and document an initial assessment, based on the available information, of the type of incident.

Types of incidents include:

1. Nonfamily abduction
2. Family abduction
3. Runaway
4. Lost, injured, or otherwise missing

Within reason it is best to always operate from a worst case scenario perspective. However, to avoid exacerbating panic, it is not recommended to relay this perspective to interviewees, caretakers, or the wider community.

Resource – [NISMART Episode Definitions](#) (Refer to Page 3 table)

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____

8. Obtain photos and videos of the missing child (and the abductor if known). Be sure to ask about photos on cell phones/mobile devices.

Seek to obtain permission from parents or guardians for child photos (verbally, and preferably with witnesses). Note: It is always best to gather multiple photos and/or videos that are recent and reflective of the day to day appearance of the missing child. Ideally these will include profile, head-on, smiling, and candid photos or videos.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____

9. Ensure information regarding the missing child is entered into the National Crime Information Center’s (NCIC) Missing Person File as soon as confirmed, and no more than two hours after receipt of the report. Also ensure confirmed information about the abductor is entered into the NCIC’s Wanted Persons File.

Accurate entry and update of records on the missing child and any associated suspect and vehicle information is critical. Work with your telecommunicator to ensure these resources are familiar and easily accessible to guide entry and update work.

Resource – [NCIC Quick Reference Guide for Telecommunicators and First Responders](#)

- If the case is believed to be an abduction, ensure telecommunications staff enter or update the missing child record with the CA (Child Abduction) flag.
- If an AMBER Alert is issued in the case, update the record with the AA (AMBER Alert) flag.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____

10. Review sex-offender registries to determine if registered individuals live/work in the area or might otherwise be associated with the case.

Call NCMEC toll-free at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678) to request assistance with this step.

- NCMEC has a Sex Offender Tracking Team (SOTT) available to all law enforcement agencies to serve as an information clearinghouse.
- [U.S. Department of Justice National Sex Offender Public Website](#)

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____



11. If directed by investigations and/or supervisory officers, assist in evaluating the information obtained thus far to determine whether the circumstances meet the criteria for an AMBER Alert or other public alerting notification.

Activation of an AMBER Alert or other public alerting system (if AMBER Alert criteria are not met) can be a critically important tool in engaging the public in efforts to locate an endangered missing or abducted child. Be aware of your state's AMBER Alert plan criteria for issuing an alert.

- If an AMBER Alert is issued, work with telecommunications personnel to update the missing child record with the AA (AMBER Alert Flag).
- [Find your state's AMBER Alert Contact Information](#)

The U.S. Department of Justice recommends the following criteria for AMBER Alert programs:

- There is reasonable belief by law enforcement that an abduction has occurred.
- The law enforcement agency believes that the child is in imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death.
- There is enough descriptive information about the victim and the abduction for law enforcement to issue an AMBER Alert to assist in the recovery of the child.
- The abduction is of a child aged 17 years or younger.
- The child's name and other critical data elements, including the Child Abduction (CA) flag, have been entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) system.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____

12. Evaluate whether the circumstances warrant requesting the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's (NCMEC) Team Adam. If a Child Abduction Response Team (CART) is available, request their assistance if appropriate.

As with considerations to request an activation of the AMBER Alert system, this step should be done in collaboration with investigative and supervisory staff (if applicable). For more information and to activate NCMEC's Team Adam, call 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____

13. Continue to keep the communication unit, investigators and supervisors up to date on all appropriate developing information.

It is best to give regular updates of what is happening to all parties involved in the investigation (communications, investigative, and supervisory personnel) at least twice hourly if possible or as any new pertinent information arises.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____



14. Identify and separately interview everyone at the scene. Make sure their interview and identifying information is properly recorded.

Vehicle-mounted or body cameras may be helpful with this task if they are available. If not, phone cameras, and/or other available recording devices are suggested. When interviewing, be sure to ask each of the following questions. It is also good to begin questioning with a disclaimer that their support could be critical in gaining information to locate the child.

1. May I please have your name, address, and home/business phone numbers?
2. What is your relationship to the missing child?
3. Do you have any information that you think would be helpful in regards to the current circumstances?
4. When is the last time you saw the child?
5. What do you think happened to the child?
6. Do you have any names, phone numbers, and addresses of relatives or friends of the child and family?
7. Did you see anything suspicious or out of the ordinary in the area recently?

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____

15. Obtain and document permission to search the home or building where incident took place even if the premises have been previously searched by family members or others.

It is important to obtain permission to search whenever possible to protect the integrity of the investigation, as well as to maintain a cooperative atmosphere with the family. Remain cognizant that family members who appear to be difficult may have different experiences with police and first responders in addition to the panic and distress they are likely to be experiencing.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____

16. Conduct an immediate, thorough search of the missing child's home even if the child was reported missing from a different location.

In addition to searching for the child, take note of any other information that might be helpful in locating the child; such as electronic devices, backpacks/bags, notes or diaries, missing clothes, valuables, food, or any other items he/she may have had or taken.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____

17. Seal/protect scene(s) and areas of the child's home. This should include the child's personal articles (e.g., hairbrush, toothbrush, books, toys - items with the child's fingerprints/footprints/teeth impressions. This helps to preserve (and avoid contamination of) evidence found during or after the initial search. In this process, determine if any of the child's personal items are missing. If possible, photograph and/or video the areas searched and secured.

Personal effects are valuable to a missing person investigation, and also very important to the family. Be sure to explain to parents and/or caretakers the importance of documenting and gathering these belongings.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____

18. Evaluate the contents and appearance of the child's room/residence.

It is important to take particular note of anything that appears out of place or like it does not belong in a child's room. Ensure you do not touch or disturb in any way potential items or areas of evidence. Document with written notes and capture photos if possible.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____

19. Inquire if the child has access to the internet and evaluate its role. Do not overlook activity on social media accounts or other online apps and platforms.

Take particular note of photos and conversations had on social media. However, be mindful of parent wishes in order to maintain a solid working relationship with the family.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____

20. Ascertain if the child has a cell phone and/or other electronic communication devices. If directed, work with investigative and supervisory personnel regarding phone/device searches and to pursue records of use.

In cases of adolescent and teen missing children, pictures, text messages and other communication through social media apps can be vital to the investigation. Locating and securing digital devices is essential, and must be done according to agency, state and other applicable laws.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____

21. Extend search to surrounding areas and vehicles, including those that are abandoned, and other places of concealment such as abandoned appliances, pools, wells, sheds, or other areas that a young person would be curious to explore.

- Places that are attractive for young people to explore are particularly important to search in the case of younger missing children.
- If applicable, make note to repeat a neighborhood canvass the following day for the same time frame of the abduction, ideally starting 30 minutes before the time of the abduction.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____

22. Treat all areas of interest or frequenting/regular visits by the missing child as potential crime scenes.

Wherever possible, assign officers to search and canvass areas the child frequents or has indicated interest in, based upon interview information received.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____

23. If applicable, determine locations of surveillance or security cameras in the vicinity that may have captured relevant information which may help locate the child and/or corroborate or refute witness statements.

- Under investigative supervision, if advised, contact local business (or residents - see next item below) in the area to confirm the availability of video footage or still-shots captured by security systems.
- Through canvassing efforts and documentation, identify locations/addresses of any home security cameras in areas associated with scenes or suspected/known routes of travel.
- Communicate all updates to command post or other staff involved in the case.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____

24. Interview other family members, friends, teachers/coaches or others with whom the child has regular associations.

Continue to interview other family members, friends, teachers/coaches and associates of the missing child.

- When was the last time each person saw the child?
- What do you think may have happened to the child?
- Did you notice any recent changes or concerning issues with the child's behavior/demeanor?
- Did the child mention being approached by anyone?
- During the investigation, give special attention to individuals who recently moved into or away from the area.
- When possible, conduct interviews separately to be able to compare the multiple accounts.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____



25. Ensure NCIC entries for the incident are being updated as new information is obtained from interviews. Additional identifying information, and persons with information (PWI) should be added to the missing child record.

Work with communications to update NCIC records in the case with new information as it is obtained.

- Timely update of NCIC with additional descriptive information on the child, suspect and/or vehicle involved, along with Persons with Information (PWI) records, is critical to helping officers in the field make identifications when coming into contact with persons and property.
- Refer to the [NCIC Quick Reference Guide](#) for information on updating and modifying entries.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____



26. Prepare flyers/bulletins with the child's (and abductor, if confirmed) photo and descriptive information. Distribute in the appropriate geographic regions through all appropriate methods/technology platforms.

Call NCMEC toll free at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678) for assistance with this step.

- In addition to traditional media broadcasts (television, radio), the quickest and most effective way to get the information out to the community will likely involve social media and websites as appropriate; and with vigilant attention to keeping information updated to avoid confusion, missed identifications and false leads.
- Public participation is a key component in the success of the AMBER Alert and other community notification protocols. The public becomes the eyes and ears of law enforcement in the search for the child. To that end, law enforcement must be diligent in ensuring that photos and videos of the child are widely distributed to and viewed by as many people as possible.
- Timing is critical when reporting that a child is missing. According to research relating to cases in which children were abducted with the intent to murder them:
 - » In 43 percent of cases studied, more than 2 hours passed between the time the victim was known to be missing and the time a report was made to law enforcement.
 - » In 76 percent of cases studied, the victims were dead within 3 hours of the abduction.
 - » Given these rapid time realities in child abduction cases, it is crucial to get the word out to as many people as possible, as soon as possible.
- Coordinate with other agencies as needed and directed.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____



27. Prepare reports/make all required notifications.

- Reports should include everything documented during your work on the case; do not assume only events seeming to have a direct bearing on the case should be reported.
- As set forth in your agency policy and as authorized, ensure notifications go to all officers, and to other departments and agencies, to ensure all investigative networks are supplied with accurate details.
- Centralize all reports into one location for ease of use.

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____