



First Responder's Checklist

Child Abduction Response Plan (3rd Edition)



**Federal Bureau of Investigation
Behavioral Analysis Unit
Quantico, Virginia**

First Responder's Checklist

This checklist is designed for first responders to a reported child abduction or missing child call and is intended to supplement the Child Abduction Response Plan (CARP). It is not intended to replace it. If appropriate, immediately request additional personnel, including departmental supervisors, to respond to the scene and assist in the initial response.

Investigating agencies should use caution in following the recommendations contained in this checklist if a ransom or other specific demand has been communicated to the parents/family of an abducted child, including instructions not to contact law enforcement authorities. In ransom cases, direct, overt contact with the parents/family by law enforcement may place the victim in additional danger. Initial communications between investigators and the family, in ransom kidnappings, should be done covertly, at least until it is determined that additional contacts or investigation can be done without further compromising the safety of the child. As in all child abduction cases, the FBI should be contacted immediately for assistance.

Initial Response

- _____ Identify and separately interview the reporting party and any other witnesses present at the scene. Obtain the basic facts regarding the child's disappearance, including exactly when and where the child was last seen, the identity of the last person to reliably see or interact with the child, and whether there is any information about or description of a potential suspect and/or suspect vehicle.
- _____ Obtain the full name, age and current physical description of the child. Obtain a recent photograph of the child, preferably one that reflects their typical, day-to-day appearance. Glamour or special event photographs, which may not depict the child's normal appearance/attire, should be avoided unless there are no other suitable photographs available.
- _____ Determine if the child has any medical, emotional, or psychological conditions that would endanger the child's welfare or influence the search/investigative efforts.

- _____ Obtain a detailed description, and photographs if available, of the clothing the victim is believed to be wearing, as well as all other items the victim is thought to have in his/her possession (e.g., backpack, purse, jewelry, cellular telephone).

- _____ Conduct a detailed search of the immediate area where the child was last seen. Specifically target areas where a child may hide or become trapped. If the child is reported missing from his/her home, ensure a thorough search is made of the residence, including all child-size areas therein, and any other structures and vehicles on the property.

- _____ If the exact location where the child was abducted or was last seen can be identified, secure it as a crime scene until it can be searched and examined for possible evidence.

- _____ Dispatch all available officers to the area surrounding the last known location of the victim, focusing on secluded places where an offender might have quickly taken the victim (e.g., empty parking lots, abandoned houses/buildings, wooded areas, parks, etc.). Flooding the area with officers provides the best opportunity to quickly locate the victim and/or to prevent the offender from removing the victim from the area.

_____ Considering the circumstances of the abduction and the nature of the neighborhood, use officers in marked vehicles to set up checkpoints at logical traffic chokepoints around the perimeter of the area. Obtain consent to search each vehicle (including the trunk) entering/exiting the area, in an effort to locate the victim. Keep a log of all vehicles/individuals that transit through the checkpoint. Note whether the vehicles were searched, or if consent to search was refused. Maintain the presence of marked units as long as possible in the neighborhood. This will inhibit opportunities to remove the victim from the area, provide another means to obtain information from the public, and reassure residents in the area.

_____ Provide information regarding the disappearance, including the child's photograph, description, clothing, last known location, and any available suspect/suspect vehicle information, to the communications/dispatch desk for immediate dissemination within your agency and to all area law enforcement agencies. Ensure the victim is entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) as a missing person, along with any suspect information.

_____ If the facts of the missing child incident are within jurisdictional guidelines, immediately activate the local, state, or regional AMBER

Alert. Consult the local or state AMBER Alert Coordinator for current guidelines in the area.

- _____ Obtain information regarding cellular telephones, tablets and/or any other portable electronic devices belonging to the victim, particularly those believed to be in his/her possession. Immediately forward any telephone numbers, service providers, and any other identifying data for these devices to investigators tasked with analyzing/tracking data from portable electronic devices.

- _____ Notify the local FBI office and provide information regarding the circumstances of the victim's disappearance and the status of the investigation. The local FBI office can provide immediate resources and assistance, and can facilitate the response of other specialized FBI services.

- _____ Contact the local news media, and request that the information regarding the disappearance, including the victim's photograph, description and clothing, be immediately disseminated.

- _____ Establish a temporary forward command post near the area where the victim was last seen, using a mobile command post vehicle or other suitable nearby location. This will provide a base of operations to coordinate the searches, canvasses and other investigative activities, as detailed below, that will be conducted in the immediate area. The forward/mobile command post should be established at a location separate from the victim's residence.

- _____ Conduct a preliminary canvass in the neighborhood where the victim was abducted or last seen. The purpose of this preliminary canvass is to quickly determine if there are potential witnesses who saw the victim and/or anyone else in the area around the time of his/her disappearance, and to obtain any other information that can provide direction to the early stages of the investigation. The information obtained, the addresses canvassed and the identity of each individual interviewed should be documented. A more comprehensive neighborhood investigation will be conducted once sufficient resources are available.

- _____ Document the presence of all vehicles located in the vicinity of the abduction. Consider the use of video-equipped patrol cars to document

the location and license plates of vehicles in the area. Conduct vehicle registration inquiries on these vehicles and compare the names of the registered owners against the results of the neighborhood canvass interviews.

_____ Secure the missing child's room as a potential crime scene as it may be necessary to obtain sources of known samples of the child's hair, body fluids, and fingerprints, such as bed linens, caps and/or hooded clothing, hair brushes/combs, and toothbrushes.

_____ Determine if personal items that the victim would commonly have in their possession (e.g., backpack, purse, cellular telephone, chargers, keys, favored shoes/clothes, etc.), are missing along with the victim, or are accounted for at the victim's residence or other location.

_____ Obtain a duplicate of the clothing the victim was wearing at the time of disappearance and any personal items believed to be in their possession. If appropriate, immediately publicize this information to the media and consider incorporating it into the missing child flyer. Maintain the items for future forensic comparisons.

- _____ Utilize Reverse 911 notification system for both landline and cellular telephones (if available) to disseminate information concerning the missing child.

- _____ Prepare a case-specific missing child flyer for dissemination in the community. This flyer should include the aforementioned photograph of the victim. The flyer should also depict photographs of the clothing the victim was wearing and/or other items in his/her possession at the time of the disappearance. Unique characteristics of the missing child, such as birthmarks, scars, tattoos, health condition, etc., should be noted. Additionally, the flyer should publicize the telephone number, and website/email address dedicated to the investigation.

- _____ Identify any desktop or laptop computers, tablets, cellular telephones, gaming systems and other computing devices that the victim and other family members had access to, as well as email addresses, social media sites, passwords, and any online identities. Quickly review recent emails, chats, and other online communications for any information pertinent to the investigation.

- _____ Identify and secure the missing child's known play areas, comfort zones and any other relevant locations as potential crime scenes.

- _____ Conduct comprehensive interviews with pertinent witnesses (e.g., family members, close associates). These witnesses should be separated and interviewed immediately, and their statements compared with known information.

- _____ Obtain copies of security videos from all businesses, residences, and any structures in the area of the abduction and along travel routes that may have been used by the victim and/or the offender to enter/leave the area. Depending on the local geography, population density, commercial development and traffic patterns, this may include locations that are some distance away from the victim's last known location.

- _____ Determine if traffic/red light/bus cameras, license plate readers, or other video recording devices are utilized in the area of the abduction or in logical travel routes to/from the area. Obtain copies of any recordings for future analysis.

- _____ Search trash cans/dumpsters in the area and identify those searched with chalk, paint or other identification method. If the victim has not been recovered, trash cans/dumpsters may have to be searched again.

- _____ Contact local government and commercial trash companies to delay trash collection in the vicinity of the abduction/last seen location and consider segregating the trash from the missing child's neighborhood.

- _____ If applicable, document/record all incoming and outgoing communications (e.g., telephone calls, emails, text messages, etc.) involving the missing child's family.

- _____ Identify and interview all individuals who may have had some reason to be in the neighborhood during the timeframe of the abduction. This would include any customers at commercial establishments, delivery personnel, construction workers, mail carriers, utility service employees or any other persons temporarily present in the neighborhood.

- _____ Each first responder should document all actions for inclusion in the lead management tracking system.

Victimology

An important task for the first responder is to quickly gather as much information as possible about the victim. A tool that will assist in this undertaking is the Child Victim Background Questionnaire (*see Section 12 in the CARP*).

- _____ Identify and separately interview all immediate and extended family members (to include their spouses, boyfriends/girlfriends, or other close associates) who reside in or frequent the victim's residence. These individuals should be questioned regarding their knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the victim's disappearance, and background information about the victim including his/her physical, mental and emotional condition, personality, lifestyle, habits, friends/associates and typical activities.

- _____ Identify friends, school mates, neighbors and other associates of the victim and conduct interviews as detailed above.

- _____ Determine who has normal "parental control" over the victim. This would include biological parents, step-parents, foster parents, divorced/estranged parents, or any others who exercised guardianship of the child. Identify known or suspected conflicts between any of these individuals.

- _____ All individuals interviewed about the victim should be asked if they communicate with the victim via cellular telephone, email, social media, or other communications devices/software. For those who do, request consent to view/copy communications on their cellular telephones or other devices regarding any recent communications with or about the victim. Ask them about the social media sites, communication software, and/or email addresses known to be utilized by the victim.

- _____ Obtain consent to search the victim's room and seize any personal writings, diaries, drawings, or other items that may provide clues into his/her disappearance, as well as insight into the victim's friends, personality or interests. Review any photographs found, identifying all individuals. Look for any references to relationships or communications with any individuals. The nature of the room's décor and the items within, such as pictures, posters, music, etc., can provide additional insight into the victim's personality and interests.

- _____ Search trash cans in the victim's room/bathroom for any items of evidentiary or lead value.

- ___ Identify and interview any babysitters or routine caregivers of the missing child.

- ___ Consider the culture of the family and any bearing it may have on the incident. This includes religious beliefs and customs, racial or ethnic prejudices, language barriers, etc.



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