

## Children Missing From Care: The Law-Enforcement Response



# **Children Missing From Care:**

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## The Children Missing From Care Project

In Fiscal Year 2004 the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) received a one-year grant, pursuant to the legislative authority of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, to improve the safety and well-being of children in out-of-home care.

The Children Missing from Care Project was initiated in response to the heightened awareness of the risk of harm faced by children who become missing from out-of-home care. Reasons for disappearances range from action by the child such as running away; actions of others such as abduction by a noncustodial parent, an acquaintance, or an unknown person; or inattentiveness of the custodial agency referred to in this guide as being “lost in care.”

The primary goal of this project is to provide comprehensive guidance to child-welfare and law-enforcement agencies with respect to monitoring the status of children in out-of-home care and responding effectively when a child is missing. A coordinated response by child welfare and law enforcement is crucial.

Through collaboration between representatives from the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), CWLA, state clearinghouses, and other law-enforcement agencies, the recommendations and guidelines contained in this publication were developed. CWLA has developed a companion publication titled *CWLA Best Practice Guidelines: Children Missing From Care* for use by child-welfare agencies and their staff members.

Material outlined in this publication is intended to assist in strengthening collaboration between law-enforcement agencies and child-welfare authorities. Specific investigative guidelines have **not** been included in this guide; however, they are found in NCMEC’s *Missing and Abducted Children: A Law-Enforcement Guide to Case Investigation and Program Management* available at the “More Publications” section of [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com) or by calling 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).



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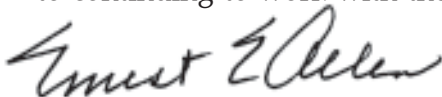
## Foreword

For more than 20 years the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) has worked closely with law-enforcement agencies, assisting in the search for missing children and raising awareness about ways to keep children safer. While most people know of our work to assist in the recovery of children missing from traditional homes and families, we are proud to also be a part of a larger effort addressing the issue of children missing from out-of-home care. This issue is not new, yet it did not gain national attention until 2001 when it was discovered a 4-year-old girl in Florida was missing from her foster home. Sadly this child could have been missing from care in any state across the country.

Distinguished as the nation's oldest and largest membership-based, child-welfare organization, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) has supported the efforts of child- and family-serving agencies since being founded in 1920. In Fiscal Year 2004 CWLA was the recipient of a grant addressing the needs of those children in out-of-home care. It was an honor to be invited to join CWLA in responding to this very important issue.

The primary goal of the collaboration between CWLA and NCMEC is to continue to facilitate the coordination of the specialized skills of child-welfare and law-enforcement professionals. Both are so clearly needed to successfully respond to cases of children missing from care. We have a responsibility to all children, and, with that in mind, we began developing this guide for policymakers within law-enforcement agencies. This guide is a companion to both the CWLA's newly published guide titled *CWLA Best Practice Guidelines: Children Missing From Care* and NCMEC's *Missing and Abducted Children: A Law-Enforcement Guide to Case Investigation and Program Management*. That NCMEC guide outlines a standard of practice for law-enforcement officers handling missing-child cases and includes definitive checklists for investigating cases of children who are missing from a home, care, or any other setting. That guide is given to thousands of law-enforcement officers annually and is the fundamental text for NCMEC's approximately week-long *Responding to Missing and Abducted Children (ReMAC)* training course. The purpose of these guides and enhanced law-enforcement training on this issue is to offer guidance to child-welfare and law-enforcement agencies about monitoring children in state custody and responding when a child is missing.

While we have come a long way since 2001 in our partnership with child-welfare agencies, much remains to be done to help safeguard even more children. We commend CWLA for taking the lead in addressing this issue and look forward to continuing to work with them on behalf of all children.



Ernest E. Allen

President and Chief Executive Officer  
National Center for Missing & Exploited Children



## Introduction

The term “missing child” may bring about great fear in any community as it tends to make people think of abduction and possibly even death. Fortunately most disappearances do not involve abductions<sup>1</sup> and 94.9 percent of children who are reported missing to NCMEC are found.<sup>2</sup>

There are many different reasons why children become missing. In general a child is considered a **runaway** if he or she has voluntarily left a legal residence. A child is considered **abducted** if someone without legal authority or permission of the custodian takes the child or fails to return the child at an agreed-upon time. A child may be abducted by a family member or nonfamily member. A child is considered **missing from care** if he or she is not in the physical custody of the child-welfare agency or person or institution with whom the child has been placed. A child is considered **lost in care** if his or her whereabouts are unknown to the child-welfare agency **and** this status is due to the inattentiveness of the agency.<sup>3</sup>

Regardless of why a child is missing or where a child is missing from, all missing children are at risk and each missing-child case needs immediate investigation and entry into the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) National Crime Information Center (NCIC) computer and the state law-enforcement system. When children are missing from care, law-enforcement and child-welfare agencies need to work in partnership to quickly find and return that child to care. This guide offers information about adopting such partnerships in jurisdictions where they do not already exist and reviewing currently existing partnerships to identify needed enhancements in jurisdictions where these partnerships are already in place.

For information about investigative techniques recommended for missing-children cases in general and specific needs in various types of missing-child cases – from runaways to family abductions to nonfamily abductions – please view, download, and/or order *Missing and Abducted Children: A Law-Enforcement Guide to Case Investigation and Program Management* from the “More Publications” section of [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com) or order a free hard copy by calling 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).

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<sup>1</sup>See table detailing categories of missing children on page 2 of this guide.

<sup>2</sup>2004 *Key Facts*. Alexandria, Virginia: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, page 1.

<sup>3</sup>Julie Gwin and Eve Malakoff-Klein, Editors. *CWLA Best Practice Guidelines: Children Missing From Care*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America, 2005, page 5 [hereafter *CWLA Best Practice Guidelines*].



# Nature of the Problem

## Incidence

Statistical information regarding missing children varies from source-to-source depending on many factors including the definitions used and the source of the data being examined.

Often statistical information is gathered from the NCIC databases. It is important, however, to remember that NCIC only captures information about missing children who are reported to law enforcement **and** subsequently entered into the NCIC missing-person database by the investigating law-enforcement agency. Consequently statistics based on NCIC numbers do not reflect the actual number of children who are missing since it is believed a significant number of incidents are not reported to law enforcement and/or are not entered into the NCIC database.

Therefore a review of additional resources is needed to gain a better understanding of the magnitude of the problem. While there are no national resources tracking the number of children missing from care, more general numbers from the second *National Incidence Study of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART-2)* helps us better understand the number of missing children in general. In addition statistics from *The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Report* gives us an understanding of the number of children in care in the United States.

The *NISMART-2* study was conducted in 1999 and is based on a total of 16,111 households surveyed about their experiences with children believed to be or reported missing in their family. In the survey adult caretakers identified 31,787 such children. When these data were rated to reflect the Census-based United States population of children age 18 and younger, the estimates noted on the next page were derived.<sup>4</sup> In the following table Caretaker Missing Children represents a child whose whereabouts was unknown and the caretaker was alarmed and tried to locate the child. Reported Missing Children represents children reported missing to law enforcement or a missing children's agency for purposes of locating a child.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>"National Estimates of Missing Children: An Overview." *National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, page 2. To view the entire bulletin and access bulletins detailing other aspects of this study visit [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com) and click on the "FAQs and Statistics" and "How many missing children are there?" links.

<sup>5</sup>*Id.*, page 5.

Category	Estimated Total*	Rate per 1,000 in U.S. Child Population
Caretaker Missing Children	1,315,600	18.8
Reported Missing Children	797,500	11.4

\*This estimate represents a 95-percent confidence interval indicating if the study were repeated 100 times, 95 of the replications would produce estimates within a 95-percent confidence interval for the noted numbers and percentages. Those ranges are respectively 1,131,100 to 1,500,100 and 16.1 to 21.4 percent for Caretaker Missing Children and 645,400 to 949,500 and 9.2 to 13.5 percent for Reported Missing Children.<sup>6</sup>

The table below reflects the estimated total number of children by episode type.

Episode Type	Total Number of Children With Episodes	Percent in Row Counted as Caretaker Missing	Percent in Row Counted as Reported Missing
Nonfamily Abduction	58,200	57	21
Family Abduction	203,900	57	28
Runaway/Thrownaway	1,682,900	37	21
Missing Involuntarily, Lost, or Injured	198,300	100+	31
Missing Benign Explanation	374,700	100+	91

Note these estimates cannot be added or combined. All estimates are rounded to the nearest 100.  
+ By definition all children with episodes in this category are caretaker missing.<sup>7</sup>

The most recent source of national data about children in out-of-home care is from *The AFCARS Report* offering a snapshot of children in foster care on September 3, 2002. The report findings are based on data collected from the period between October 1, 2001, and September 30, 2002.<sup>8</sup> Key findings of that data are detailed in the following charts.

<sup>6</sup>*Id.*

<sup>7</sup>*Id.*, page 10.

<sup>8</sup>*The AFCARS Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau at [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb), accessed February 3, 2005.



<b>Ages of Children in Foster Care</b>		
Younger than 1 Year	5%	24,290
1 to 5 Years	24%	128,947
6 to 10 Years	22%	116,802
11 to 15 Years	30%	158,290
16 to 18 Years	17%	92,091
19 and Older	2%	10,321

<b>Placement Settings of Children in Foster Care</b>		
Pre-Adoptive Home	5%	24,960
Foster Family Home (Relative)	23%	124,036
Foster Family Home (Non-Relative)	46%	243,505
Group Home	9%	45,464
Institution	10%	54,472
Supervised Independent Living	1%	5,676
Runaway	2%	9,459
Trial Home Visit	4%	18,809

<b>Lengths of Stay for Children in Foster Care</b>		
Less Than 1 Month	5%	23,948
1 to 5 Months	18%	94,399
6 to 11 Months	16%	84,707
12 to 17 Months	12%	62,036
18 to 23 Months	8%	45,008
24 to 29 Months	7%	36,236
30 to 35 Months	5%	27,196
3 to 4 Years	13%	70,754
5 Years or More	16%	87,694

## Risk Assessment

While all missing children are at risk and require immediate report-taking and entry of information about the child into NCIC and the state law-enforcement system, decisions about specific resources used by investigator's with missing-child cases should be determined by the level of potential risk to the child, when it may be assessed.

With regard to runaways these children are at significant risk of becoming crime victims and later possibly involved in criminal activity themselves. Children who have left a caregiver are typically vulnerable. Regardless of the reasons for leaving they often become dependent on risky behavior for survival. For example they may be recruited by exploiters to engage in activity such as the sale of illicit drugs, prostitution, or theft. As such law enforcement's first encounter with a child may be as a result of a criminal investigation where the child is named as a victim or suspect. Thus it is important to remember many children brought into the legal system must be checked to see if they are missing.

In the case of children who are missing from care they may run to their birth families prior to placement in care or some other familiar surroundings. Unfortunately as they run back to familiar surroundings, that may place them in harms way by being back in an environment they may have been removed from because of abuse or neglect. In addition there is a concern once a child runs away a pattern of running may develop and carry on throughout their placement history.

With regard to family abductions, cases have shown again and again that children who have been taken by a noncustodial family member may be in significant danger. Desperate people sometimes do desperate things, including bringing harm to their own children.

A review of NCMEC family-abduction cases from October 1, 1990, through September 30, 2005, reveals of the 21,189 cases reported 91.9 percent have been resolved. Of those resolved cases, however, 35 children were located deceased.<sup>9</sup> A child abducted by a family member is likely to live a life "on the run" with that family member. Children may live with an altered name, appearance, and lifestyle; experience physical or medical neglect; experience unstable schooling; experience frequent moves or even homelessness; and/or are told lies about the left-behind parent.

The bottom line is all missing children – whether missing from a home, care, or any other setting or because they ran away, were abducted by a family or nonfamily member, or for any other reason – need to be immediately reported to law enforcement by caregivers and missing-children reports need to be immediately taken by law enforcement. Our children deserve nothing less, and in the case of taking immediate reports it is the law<sup>10</sup> as discussed in the next section titled "Legal Issues and Laws In Place."

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<sup>9</sup>John B. Rabun. *NCMEC Quarterly Progress Report: October 25, 2005*. Alexandria, Virginia: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, page 11 [hereafter *Quarterly Progress Report*].

<sup>10</sup>See explanation of the National Child Search Assistance Act on page 6 of this guide.

## Legal Issues and Laws In Place

For many years specialized, multidisciplinary teams, including representatives from child-welfare agencies, social-service organizations, and law enforcement have formally collaborated to better protect children from abuse and neglect. Distinct protocols have been instituted to provide unified intervention in child-maltreatment cases.

For the children who have fled or have been taken from out-of-home care, however, significant gaps in services often exist. In instances where response and intervention protocols exist, they are often inconsistent from community-to-community. Child-welfare and law-enforcement personnel are often not entirely familiar with policies, procedures, and statutory obligations.

It is imperative for law-enforcement and child-welfare agencies to work together in developing joint response plans and carrying out actions pursuant to these policies in a collaborative manner. Many issues and relevant procedures need to be considered, discussed, and agreed upon. Open lines of communication, sharing of resources, and plans of action must be both understood and adhered to by management and staff from all involved agencies.

One point that cannot be over-emphasized is regardless of the reasons behind a disappearance, law-enforcement agencies are statutorily and ethically responsible for taking appropriate investigative action in all missing-child cases. Many federal statutes mandate legal requirements with respect to the handling of missing-child cases by law-enforcement agencies. They include the passage of the Federal Kidnapping Act in 1932; adoption of the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction Act by all states in the United States of America from 1968 to 1983; passage of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act and Runaway and Homeless Youth Act in 1974; creation of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Missing Person File in 1975; passage of the Parental Kidnapping Prevention Act in 1980; passage of the Missing Children Act in 1982; creation of the FBI's Unidentified Person File in 1983; passage of the Missing Children's Assistance Act and establishment of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children in 1984; passage of the International Child Abduction Remedies Act, Amendment of Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act to create the Transitional Living Program for Homeless Youth, and the United States becoming a signatory to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction in 1988; passage of the National Child Search Assistance Act in 1990; enactment of the International Parental Kidnapping Crime Act in 1993; passage of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act including the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act and Child Safety Act in 1994; passage of the Child Abuse Prevention and Enforcement Act known as "Jennifer's Law" in 2000; and passage of the Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to end the Exploitation of Children Today (PROTECT) Act of 2003.<sup>11</sup> Key Acts governing currently mandated law-enforcement response are summarized next.

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<sup>11</sup>Steve Steidel, Editor. *Missing and Abducted Children: A Law-Enforcement Guide to Case Investigation and Program Management*. Alexandria, Virginia: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, May 2000, page 4 [hereafter *Missing and Abducted Children*].

The **National Child Search Assistance Act of 1990** (42 U.S.C. §§ 5779 and 5780) requires each federal, state, and local law-enforcement agency to immediately enter information about missing children younger than 18 into the National Crime Information Center database and the state law-enforcement system. The Act also establishes state reporting requirements, abolishes waiting periods before accepting a missing-child or unidentified-person report, and requires close liaison with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children regarding missing-child cases.

### **National Child Search Assistance Act of 1990**

#### **5779. Reporting Requirement**

**(a) In General.** Each Federal, State, and local law enforcement agency shall report each case of a missing child under the age of 18 reported to such agency to the National Crime Information Center of the Department of Justice.

**(b) Guidelines.** The Attorney General may establish guidelines for the collection of such reports including procedures for carrying out the purposes of this Act.

**(c) Annual summary.** The Attorney General shall publish an annual statistical summary of the reports received under this title [42 U.S.C.S. §§ 5779, 5780]. (Nov. 29, 1990, P. L. 101-647, Title XXXVII, § 3701, 104 Stat. 4966.)

### **HISTORY; ANCILLARY LAWS AND DIRECTIVES**

#### **References in text:**

This "Act", referred to in this section, is Act Nov. 29, 1990, P. L. 101-647, Title XXXVII, 104 Stat. 4966, which is popularly known as the Crime Control Act of 1990, and generally amends title 18 U.S.C.S. For full classification of such Act, consult U.S.C.S. Tables volumes.

#### **Explanatory notes:**

This section was enacted as part of Act Nov. 29, 1990, P. L. 101-647, Title XXXVII, and not as part of Act Sept. 7, 1974, P. L. 93-415, Title IV, which generally comprises this chapter.

#### **§ 5780. State requirements**

Each State reporting under the provisions of this title shall [42 U.S.C.S. §§ 5779 et seq.] –

(1) ensure that no law enforcement agency within the State establishes or maintains any policy that requires the observance of any waiting period before accepting a missing child or unidentified person report;

(2) provide that each such report and all necessary and available information, which, with respect to each missing child report, shall include –

(A) the name, date of birth, sex, race, height, weight, and eye and hair color of the child;

(B) the date and location of the last known contact with the child; and

(C) the category under which the child is reported missing;

is entered immediately into the State law enforcement system and the National Crime Information Center computer networks and made available to the Missing Children Information Clearinghouse within the State or other agency designated within the State to receive such reports; and

(3) provide that after receiving reports as provided in paragraph (2), the law enforcement agency that entered the report into the National Crime Information Center shall –

(A) no later than 60 days after the original entry of the record into the State law enforcement system and National Crime Information Center computer networks, verify and update such record with any additional information, including where available medical and dental records;

(B) institute or assist with appropriate search and investigative procedures; and

(C) maintain close liaison with the National Center for Missing [&] Exploited Children for the exchange of information and technical assistance in the missing children cases.

(Nov. 29, 1990, P. L. 101-647, Title XXXVII, § 3702, 104 Stat. 4967.)

#### **HISTORY; ANCILLARY LAWS AND DIRECTIVES**

##### **Explanatory notes:**

This section was enacted as part of Act Nov. 29, 1990, P. L. 101-647, Title XXXVII, and not as part of Act Sept. 7, 1974, P. L. 93-415, Title IV, which generally comprises this chapter.

A provision of the **PROTECT Act of 2003**, specifically Suzanne’s Law, amended the National Child Search Assistance Act to require each federal, state, and local law-enforcement agency to enter information about missing persons younger than 21 into NCIC.

And **state statutes** regarding the handling of missing-child cases may also apply. In addition to requiring immediate entry of missing-child information into state law-enforcement systems, they may require entry of dental records and other detailed identifying information.

Furthermore, over time, it has been observed some law-enforcement agencies require a missing-child report be filed in the jurisdiction where the child resided prior to the disappearance while others require the report be filed in the jurisdiction where the child was last seen. This conflict has frequently resulted in loss of valuable time during the period immediately after a disappearance and frustration for those attempting to report a disappearance.

The safest and most effective policy is to require acceptance of a report wherever reported. This may be in the jurisdiction where the child was last seen or it may be in the jurisdiction where the child legally resides, if different. In cases involving a child who is missing from out-of-home care, the report will ordinarily be filed in the jurisdiction where the out-of-home placement is located. There will always be exceptions, but they will be based on unique circumstances. These guidelines represent reasonable practices to promote continuity among law-enforcement agency efforts.

Having said this, it is important for law-enforcement officers in both the jurisdiction where a child was last seen and the jurisdiction where the child last resided to collaborate during the subsequent investigation. Also nothing precludes transfer of primary responsibility for an investigation, if warranted by information revealed during the investigation.

Law enforcement and child welfare share mutual responsibility and liability when a child is reported as "missing from care." Inadequacies in the discovery, reporting, intervention, investigation, or recovery processes by either a law-enforcement or child-welfare agency may go unnoticed unless the child becomes the victim of foul play. In order to minimize the possibility of a child being seriously injured, assaulted, or killed while missing, all cases must be **immediately** reported, entered into NCIC and the state law-enforcement system, and investigated. Otherwise what would normally be an innocuous mistake or policy flaw may immediately become the center of intense scrutiny, especially by the media. Additionally agencies need to be aware of potential exposure to civil liability, especially in cases when the community perceives actions on the part of any agency or individual involved with the case even inadvertently contributed to the endangerment of a child. Potential court judgments may damage professional and agency reputations and be financially significant.

There are many legal precedents highlighting the duty of law enforcement to provide appropriate and adequate services. The failure of an agency to identify training needs and set policy for matters that are foreseeable may create liability. Failure to appropriately handle a case pursuant to relevant statutes or generally accepted practices may create liability. Failure to act reasonably and/or in a timely manner may create liability. The cases noted below point to the importance of ensuring policies, procedures, and actions are defensible.

A municipality may, in certain circumstances, be held liable for constitutional violations resulting from its failure to train its employees. The inadequacy of law-enforcement training may serve as a basis for liability when the failure to train in a relevant respect amounts to deliberate indifference to the constitutional rights of persons with whom law enforcement came into contact.<sup>12</sup>

Although the general rule is that the state is not liable for its omissions, there are several exceptions to the rule, including the “danger-creation” exception. This exception exists where there is affirmative conduct on the part of the state that places an individual in danger. In examining whether an officer affirmatively places an individual in danger, the court does not look solely to the agency or individual, nor does the court’s opinion rest on what options may not have been available to the individual. Instead the court examines whether the officers left the person in a situation that was more dangerous than the one in which they found him or her.<sup>13</sup>

Law-enforcement and child-welfare agencies must collectively develop and implement joint protocols and train staff in the response, investigation, and resolution of children-missing-from-care cases. Both agencies must establish protocols to identify tasks and responsibilities for the intake and follow-up of children in their care and for those who disappear.

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<sup>12</sup>*City of Canton v. Harris*, 489 U.S. 378 (1989).

<sup>13</sup>*Munger v. City of Glasgow*, 227 F.3d 1082 (9th Cir. 2000).





# Self-Assessment of Law-Enforcement Agencies

Law-enforcement agencies should conduct a self-assessment analysis and determine if adequate policies and procedures are in place. If none exist, it is imperative they be developed, implemented, and understood by all staff members.

Examples of considerations to be examined during self-assessment are noted below. The first set of questions addresses missing-child cases in general. The second set focuses on cases involving children missing from care.

- Is an officer dispatched on **all** missing-child reports?
- Are all staff members in your agency, including officers, investigators, supervisors, and civilians, aware of the National Child Search Assistance Act mandating immediate entry of **all** missing-child cases into NCIC/the state law-enforcement system and coordination with NCMEC?
- Does your agency's policy for handling missing-children cases follow model policies recommended by NCMEC?<sup>14</sup>
- Are all missing-child reports sent to one central location?
- Is each report entered in a central log for easy case management?
- Is each report checked for proper teletype entry and/or removal?
- Is each report checked for valid/accurate information?
- Is the person reporting the case promptly contacted for initial case follow-up?
- Is the person reporting the case regularly contacted to update him or her about the case?
- Are photographs of missing children obtained in all cases?
- Is a bulletin with a photograph prepared and distributed within 2 hours of receiving the report about the missing child?
- Is it clear as to who investigates missing-child cases?
- Are you familiar with NCMEC and the services they offer?<sup>15</sup>
- Are you familiar with your state missing children's clearinghouse and the services they offer?<sup>16</sup>
- Does your state have laws requiring certain actions be taken in missing-child cases?
- Are your local, state, and federal records checked to determine if the missing child/suspected abductor have pending criminal charges or are being investigated by a separate section within your agency?
- Are the dental records of all children missing for more than 30 days entered into NCIC?
- Do you have an officer/unit specializing in missing-child cases?

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<sup>14</sup>Model policies are available online at [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com) by clicking on the "Training" and "Model Policies" links.

<sup>15</sup>Detailed information about NCMEC is found beginning on page 27 of this guide and may also be obtained by visiting [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com).

<sup>16</sup>See section titled "State Clearinghouses" on page 29 of this guide.

- [ ] When a missing child returns/is recovered, are all cases cleared by use of a supplemental report?
- [ ] Is the recovery/return of each missing-child confirmed by sight?
- [ ] Does your agency have a waiting period before taking a runaway report?
- [ ] Are you able to readily identify your jurisdiction's habitual runaways?
- [ ] Is there a runaway shelter in your community?
- [ ] If so, what procedures are in place to work with this runaway shelter?
- [ ] Once located, are runaways sensitively interviewed to determine their reasons for leaving, gather valuable information, and refer them for follow-up treatment and assistance?
- [ ] Is each recovered/returned missing child immediately removed from NCIC?
- [ ] Are all unidentified body teletypes from other agencies compared to your active cases for possible matches?
- [ ] Do you reply to inquiring agencies in regard to the teletypes they have sent, even if there is no match?
- [ ] Are you aware of alternative resources within your community to aid in locating missing children?
- [ ] If so, are services being used?
- [ ] Is there a policy regarding the publishing of missing-child bulletins by the local media on a regular basis?
- [ ] Is there an officer in your agency who is knowledgeable about the laws pertaining to family abduction, Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution (UFAP) warrants, the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction Act, the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act, the Parental Kidnapping Prevention Act, and the Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS)?
- [ ] Does your agency have an active public-relations response to missing-children cases?
- [ ] Are you able to provide accurate statistics about the number of missing children reported to your agency annually and break down the total by ages and categories?
- [ ] Has your agency established linkages with child-welfare agencies to assist in the reunification of missing children with their families?
- [ ] Do you use the resources of your intelligence and/or crime analysis unit(s), if operational in your agency, to generate leads and locate victims and potential offenders?<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>*Missing and Abducted Children*, op. cit., n. 11, pages 168-169.

**With respect to missing-from-care cases, the considerations listed below should be addressed.**

- [ ] Has your law-enforcement agency discussed with your local child-welfare agency the importance of collecting specific biographical information in order to have the critical information needed to complete a missing-person report at the point of intake? As a matter of policy, does the child-welfare agency have a recent photograph available of the children in their care? Are procedures in place to help ensure this information is available to investigating officers in a timely manner? It may be appropriate to provide blank copies of your agency's *Missing Person Report* to child-welfare representatives to help ensure complete information is made available to investigating officers.
- [ ] Do law-enforcement officers have a way to access child-welfare files and an on-call caseworker 24 hours a day 7 days a week?
- [ ] Do recovery procedures include action by a multidisciplinary team to respond to situations such as the trauma abducted children suffer from or determine the underlying reasons for running away?
- [ ] Is there an understanding regarding and a plan for responding to media inquiries?
- [ ] Do policies clearly state the procedure to be followed when a child missing from care is found whether in your jurisdiction or another one?
- [ ] Do procedures cover action to take if a child, upon recovery, reports inappropriate actions/activities at the facility or home they were placed in prior to the missing episode?
- [ ] Do procedures provide direction for handling a child missing from another jurisdiction or state, when he or she is located in your jurisdiction?

Does your law-enforcement agency have sound policies in place to most effectively and efficiently respond to missing-child cases in general and missing-from-care cases?



# Adopting or Enhancing A Team Approach

## Roles and Responsibilities

Child welfare and law enforcement have a shared interest in the safe return of children missing from out-of-home care. When child-welfare and law-enforcement agencies work in partnership, they provide the expertise of both disciplines and enhance both the investigative effort and successful recovery of the child. It is essential both partners also bring a respect for the other's point of view and knowledge, openness to different ways of working and thinking, and a willingness to work together in the best interests of the child who is missing.<sup>18</sup>

Child welfare brings to the partnership a set of values, knowledge, and skills focusing on the safety and well-being of children who are in out-of-home care and devote much of their work to the relationships between children and birth families, children and foster families or other caregivers, and birth families and caregivers. They are trained in a strengths-based, family-focused perspective and approach and conduct assessments and make professional judgments based on their knowledge of a variety of topics including family dynamics and child development.<sup>19</sup>

Law-enforcement personnel focus their work on the investigation necessary to locate and safely return the child to the custody of the agency. Their efforts are dedicated to fact-finding, the collection of evidence, and upholding the law. Their knowledge of family dynamics tend to focus more on the specific circumstances, problems, and individual characteristics that may lead to abduction or runaway episodes.<sup>20</sup>

Regardless of differences in approach between professions, given the fact law-enforcement and child-welfare agencies are frequent partners in responding to and managing the recovery of children missing from care, it is imperative for agency managers to establish an environment promoting genuine collaboration and cooperation between respective staff members.

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<sup>18</sup>*CWLA Best Practice Guidelines*, op. cit., n. 3, page 33.

<sup>19</sup>*Id.*

<sup>20</sup>*Id.*

In working with the assigned child-welfare worker, any previously appointed counsel such as a guardian ad litem,<sup>21</sup> and in cases when a child is a crime victim any appointed victim advocate, law enforcement is better able to obtain all available information in furtherance of the investigation and children may be placed in an environment conducive to growth and well-being upon their recovery.

## Duties and Development of Those Duties

Cooperation between agencies will always be enhanced through adoption of mutually agreed upon protocols that clarify reporting arrangements; response procedures; and the shared and distinct roles and responsibilities of child welfare, law enforcement, and others involved with cases of children missing from care.

Agency-specific and collaborative practices should be detailed in a written policy and procedures document. A clear delineation of the distinct and shared responsibilities of law enforcement and child welfare reduces confusion, shortens response time, and increases efficient use of personnel and other resources. Examples of issues, procedures, and resource material contained in a joint protocol document may include

- A list containing the names and telephone numbers of key contact individuals from law enforcement, child welfare, and other involved agencies.
- Agreement on the case-management system that will best serve the needs of both agencies.
- A comprehensive resource list including resources available from other entities.
- Requirements to have joint briefings and meetings when case circumstances warrant such.

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<sup>21</sup>The practice of appointing counsel to children in care is gaining national support as evidenced by the four examples noted below.

- According to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), in order to receive federal funding, in the form of grants to states for child abuse and neglect prevention and treatment programs, states must appoint a guardian ad litem to represent the child in any abuse and neglect case that results in a judicial proceeding. In these instances the guardian ad litem may be an attorney or a court appointed special advocate 42 U.S.C. § 5106a(b)(2)(A)(xiii) (2003).
- A February 7, 2005, Order by Judge Marvin H. Schoob of the United States District Court, Northern District of Georgia in *Kenny A. v. Perdue* opined all children in Georgia state care have the constitutional right to counsel in all major child-welfare proceedings. The proceedings include the initial hearing, adjudicatory hearing, dispositional hearing, and periodic case reviews.
- A 1998 survey by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges showed 40 states appoint counsel for children in abuse and neglect cases. Of those 40 states 30 appoint an attorney guardian ad litem. The remaining 10 states appoint a guardian ad litem who serves in addition to an appointed attorney. Information from "Child Abuse and Neglect Cases: Representation as a Critical Component of Effective Practice" in *Technical Assistance Bulletin*, Vol. II, No. 2, March 1998, page 44. This bulletin is published by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.
- And, as recommended in *Adoption 2002: The President's Initiative on Adoption and Foster Care Guidelines for Public Policy and State Legislation Governing Permanence for Children*, in order for the best interest of children to be known, it is recommended states assure all children involved in dependency cases be represented by a trained attorney at every stage of the court process. Information accessed on March 21, 2005, at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/adopt02/02final.htm>, chapter 7, section 11.

- Use of an oversight committee board to address problems and deviations from policy and procedure and recommend corrective action.
- Design of a standardized interview format to be used by officers and child-welfare staff members.
- Commonly used forms such as initial intake, missing-child report, and lead-intake.
- Joint training programs such as policies and procedures, scenario-based training exercises, investigative processes, available technologies, interviewing techniques, and report preparation.
- Ensuring child-welfare agency intakes report and law-enforcement report information collection is consistent, especially with regard to collection of basic biographical details.
- Ensuring updated information resulting from respective agency efforts is shared with other agencies in a timely manner.
- Establishing a multidisciplinary team or work group to actively improve relationships and processes addressing children's issues of mutual concern. Members of the group should be regular attendees who have the ability to make things happen at an administrative level.
- Making sure each agency has an opportunity to express needs and concerns.
- Developing a process and the forms needed for interviewing each child who has returned from a missing episode.
- Provisions to collaborate with prosecutors and the courts, when warranted by case specifics, such as in cases when the child is enticed to voluntarily flee with an adult and adult offenders will be prosecuted.
- A public information plan for publicizing all cases and preparing for inevitable media coverage in high-profile cases.
- Use of immediate community-notification systems when case circumstances warrant.

Once this protocol is completed it must be shared with and understood by all staff members directly or indirectly impacted by it.

A well-written **memorandum of understanding** (MOU) may help ensure smooth implementation of joint protocols and improve practice by providing written guidelines for duties, roles, and responsibilities of member agencies in investigations and other multidisciplinary functions, serving as a reference when questions arise about practice, establishing consistency, and reducing the need for on-the-spot decision making by defining protocols in advance. The result is faster response, greater efficiency, more effective prevention, and reduced trauma for families and caregivers.

An MOU between child-welfare and law-enforcement agencies on the subject of children missing from care should, at a minimum, include

- Statement of purpose
- Discussion of joint/respective missions and organizational responsibilities

- Roles and responsibilities of different professionals such as appointing a victim advocate or guardian ad litem to represent the needs of the child who is missing and subsequent to post recovery
- Definitions and types of missing episodes covered
- Procedures for handling each type of missing episode including investigative techniques
- Procedures for joint response to reports of missing children
- Establishment of points of contact between agencies and birth families, foster parents or other caregivers, media, and other community service providers
- Information to be shared and procedures for sharing information about the child/family and about the investigation
- Procedures for return of children once located
- Procedures for safeguarding or removing other children in the shelter if victimization is suspected
- Procedures for follow-up investigations about reports of victimization or other criminal acts occurring at the shelter/foster home
- Procedures for debriefing children and families
- Provisions for joint or cross-training
- Criteria/procedures for working with other agencies
- Provisions for multidisciplinary consultation, which will establish the framework for the future addition of other parties to the protocol
- Concrete tips for handling special issues such as when cases not covered by the protocol arise
- Methods of oversight, evaluation, and renewal of agreement
- Relevant appendices such as selected portions of statutes, regulations, and forms

Several items may present challenges when law enforcement and child welfare are formulating joint protocols and accompanying MOUs. If not addressed at that stage, they will complicate the search for the missing children. Those challenges include shared definitions, confidentiality issues, sharing information with the public, and emancipation.

The need for clear, consistent **definitions of “missing”** in both statute and policy is essential for effective communication and coordination of efforts to locate children who are missing. Standardized definitions facilitate a more expeditious and appropriate response by all parties when terminology and level of risk is clearly understood by all. Agency partners should establish mutually acceptable categories of absences within the framework of state statutes, each with its own level of risk and expected response as part of the framework of joint practice.<sup>22</sup>

Law-enforcement agencies employ a number of mechanisms for capturing, storing, and **sharing information about missing children**. They include the

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<sup>22</sup>CWLA *Best Practice Guidelines*, op. cit., n. 3, pages 33-34.



NCIC and state law-enforcement system, NCMEC and state missing children clearinghouses, the Federal Parent Locator Service, and agency-proprietary databases. Child-welfare agencies also capture, store, and share information about children in out-of-home care, primarily for use in providing required services and coordinating efforts.

It is imperative for child-welfare and law-enforcement agencies to develop mechanisms and databases to collect and use common data elements that may be easily accessed when a child is reported missing.

The creation and maintenance of integrated local information systems is essential in order to meet the needs of child welfare and law enforcement and facilitate cross-system information sharing and a coordinated response. While issues may surface with regard to costs and confidentiality of records, efforts to develop a structured information system should be pursued.

In regard to **confidentiality**, law-enforcement agencies seek to gather as much information as possible in order to conduct investigations. Child-welfare agencies may operate under statutes and guidelines including specific regulations concerning the types of information that may be disclosed about children and families and to whom.

It is recognized this may create significant challenges during a missing-child investigation. Protocols should clarify and streamline confidentiality requirements so pertinent information may be shared among professionals, agencies, and jurisdictions involved in the investigation of a missing-child case. Such protocols should also delineate what information may and may not be shared with caregivers and members of the birth family and the procedures to be followed in doing so.

When collaborating to develop operational procedures, it is strongly recommended law-enforcement and child-welfare agencies consult with legal counsel. It is imperative issues are addressed in advance to help ensure investigation-related information, including photographs, may legally be released by the child-welfare agency in a prompt manner.

Protocols should also be in place to govern what **information** may be **released to the public** to assist in the search for a child missing from care. For instance release of a poster with a photograph and key biographical information should not include the fact the child is missing from care simply the last location where the child was seen.

Child-welfare agencies, in most cases, do not have care and custody of children once they have reached **emancipation**. Following a child's emancipation most child-welfare agencies close their case on missing "emancipated" children; however, they may or may not notify the investigating law-enforcement agency. It is important for child-welfare agencies to notify law enforcement when the case is closed due to the child's emancipation and identify whether or not the child has been located.

Without specific and correct lines of communication and policies, the law-enforcement agency may remove information about the child from the NCIC

missing-person database eliminating the possibility for identification of the child if found at a later time. The law-enforcement agency of jurisdiction should keep the case active and information about the child entered into NCIC, until the location and safety of the child, now an adult, is determined.

Once protocols and MOUs are in place, **cross-system training** should be employed. Child-welfare and law-enforcement agencies may benefit from joint training efforts that share specific information about agency and collaborative protocols for handling cases of children missing from care as well as the values and beliefs shaping each agency's policy and practice.

By having an opportunity to interact with employees of other professions during training, child-welfare and law-enforcement personnel gain a better understanding of the specific problems and issues faced by their counterparts.

### **NCIC: The Need for Good Information and Correct Entry**

The importance of collecting and recording detailed information cannot be emphasized enough. That along with updating and on-going sharing of information is imperative during these investigations. Information forms the foundation for the ensuing missing-child investigation. Detailed and properly recorded information is not only important to help ensure the local investigation is thorough, but needed to broaden the scope of the investigation to regional and national levels.

This most effective mechanism to widely disseminate information to law enforcement is use of NCIC and the state law-enforcement system. By entering detailed information into these databases, virtually all law-enforcement agencies in the nation have access to it. As already mentioned, use of NCIC and the state law-enforcement system is not only an appropriate step, it is legally required.

It is also important to point out this information is needed by NCMEC and state clearinghouses when assisting investigating law-enforcement agencies. With respect to publicizing cases, it is used for everything from preparing and distributing traditional printed missing-child posters to placing information on missing-child web sites to broadly disseminating information via nationwide alert systems. Immediate dissemination of accurate and detailed information to the public does result in recoveries. Of the children featured in NCMEC's Picture Them Home<sup>®</sup> campaign 1 in 6.6 is recovered.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the best way to emphasize the importance of collecting and then entering detailed information about a missing child into NCIC and the state law-enforcement system is through the examples below.

When information about a runaway child is properly entered by a law-enforcement agency in Maine, the child could be located after interacting with an officer in Florida. The officer in Florida, thinking the child is acting in a suspi-

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<sup>23</sup>*Quarterly Progress Report*, op. cit., n. 9, page 16. NCMEC's Picture Them Home campaign maximizes the dissemination of missing-child photographs through a partnership with more than 2,400 private-sector participants who, from October 1985 through September 2005, have printed 388,440 photographs/biographies of 15,614 individual missing children.

scious manner, can run a simple NCIC file check and come up with a “hit.” This, of course, assumes the child gives his or her actual name and date of birth to the officer, but the point is the potential for locating the child only exists if the information is accurately recorded and promptly entered by the investigating agency.

After a court proceeding was not decided in his favor, a noncustodial father abducted his daughter from foster care in Texas using his own car. If the investigating law-enforcement agency enters information about the child in NCIC’s Missing Person File and enters the vehicle and/or abducting-parent information in NCIC’s Wanted Person File, an apprehension can occur if the vehicle is merely “file checked” by an officer in Virginia. The vehicle may not even be stopped for a law violation, perhaps information is run on the vehicle simply because of suspicious activity by the driver. The result is notification from NCIC that the vehicle is associated with the child’s disappearance. But this will only occur if information about the child and vehicle are properly entered and **all entries are properly cross-referenced**.

And in the worst-case scenario, a deceased child missing from Illinois can be identified in California through physical characteristics, even if no other identification is present, but only if detailed identifying physical characteristics, such as scars, marks, and tattoos, are included with the missing-person information entered into NCIC and the state law-enforcement system by the investigating law-enforcement agency.

For additional information about NCIC and its on- and off-line capabilities, please view, download, and/or order *Missing and Abducted Children: A Law-Enforcement Guide to Case Investigation and Program Management* from the “More Publications” section of [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com) or order a hard copy by calling 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).

To facilitate the entry of information about the missing child through **standardized-intake and missing-person report** forms for entry into NCIC and other key databases, use of a comprehensive intake form is critical. Law-enforcement and child-welfare personnel should create and implement a standardized intake form in which the information listed below is documented.

- Child’s full name and any nicknames or aliases
- Child’s gender and race
- Child’s height and weight
- Child’s hair and eye color
- Child’s previous addresses
- Child’s age and date of birth
- Child’s place of birth
- Child’s physical characteristics including detailed descriptions of scars, marks, tattoos and their locations
- Child’s Social Security Number
- Child’s E-mail addresses and cellular telephone number if applicable
- Names and contact information for both birth parents and/or guardians including the birth mother’s maiden name

- Names and contact information for siblings, other relatives, romantic interests, and friends
- Name and location of the school attending or last school attended including grade
- Medical information including medical conditions, medications used, doctors visited, anomalies, deformities, and previous fractures
- Description of interests, hobbies, places frequented, and places of interest
- Name and location of employment if applicable
- Other relevant information such as details and documents regarding custody
- Names of and contact information for all involved child-welfare representatives
- Prior placements and residences including those residences prior to state custody<sup>24</sup>

The immediate availability of a recent photograph of the child is also extremely important when a law-enforcement agency is asked to take action in a missing-child case. Therefore it is suggested law-enforcement agencies make every effort to help ensure out-of-home care providers, through a mutually agreed upon policy, have photographs on file.

It is also recommended, if legally permissible, fingerprints and DNA samples be obtained for identification purposes in case a child is found and unable to verbally assist in an identification.

### **Recovery, Reunification, and Addressing Any Victimization During the Missing Episode**

The partnership between child welfare and law enforcement does not end when a child is located. Depending on the laws in a jurisdiction, law enforcement may not be able to detain or take a missing child into custody once found. Thus it is imperative to have a plan in place governing the specific steps law enforcement and child welfare may take to safeguard the child and expedite his or her transfer to a secure placement.

Resolution may involve changing exiting protocols, processes, systems, and laws. For example one of the limitations of NCIC is while law enforcement may hold stolen property entered into NCIC when found, they do not have the same right to hold a child entered as a missing person once found. Working together, child welfare and law enforcement need to find solutions to such limitations that will better safeguard children by ensuring immediate recovery once located.

Once the child is recovered it is critical an interview be conducted, ideally by both child welfare and law enforcement. In general the interviewers must identify needs for a physical and psychological examination and any needs for a new placement rather than return to the one prior to the missing episode. With regard to abduction by a family member, an interview may reveal important information to be used in prosecuting the abductor(s). It may also assist in determining

<sup>24</sup>CWLA *Best Practice Guidelines*, op. cit., n. 3, pages 58-59.

details regarding what happened to the child during the episodes and help in developing a strategy to avoid future incidents.

The same holds true for children who run away. Interviewing a runaway who has been located may reveal the underlying reasons for the episode. Without this information, it is difficult to take action to reduce the likelihood of a future episode. It may also assist in determining details regarding what happened to the child during the episode. This may assist in taking any needed legal action against individuals who took advantage of the child while absent from care.



## Improving Prevention

Perhaps the most effective place to dedicate prevention efforts is with the improvement in the quality of out-of-home-care services. Developing, implementing, and assuring compliance with an array of organizational, managerial, supervisory, and front-line practices may lessen the risk of a child running away or being abducted. Quality assurances include, but are not limited to, the capacity and ability to

- Provide adequate preparation for placement
- Offer sufficient placements allowing for ample and mutually acceptable selection
- Conduct quality risk assessment
- Triage problems as they arise and promote placement stability
- Provide regular opportunities for visitation with family members and visit frequently as indicated by assessment
- Visit and photograph the children regularly
- Develop and provide formal guidance to foster parents and workers about strategies to prevent unauthorized absences from placement
- Provide personal safety training for all children in out-of-home care
- Inform children about risks of and alternatives to running away
- Address the need for and availability and provision of services for children in care
- Conduct a periodic census by the agency of children in placement<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, adequate preparation of children, their birth parents, and foster parents may provide a foundation for placement to ease the transition and reduce the number of unanticipated problems. When these problems are not avoided it may lead to high stress, poor coping, and placement disruption. The child, birth family, and foster family should all be given thorough information about the placement plans and have an opportunity to fully discuss the placement with staff members.<sup>26</sup>

Law enforcement needs to partner with child-welfare agencies in this prevention effort, especially in regard to stopping repeated runaway incidents. For example law enforcement has the opportunity to play a significant role in preventing subsequent occurrences during encounters with recovered runaways. This is dependent on what actions are taken during the recovery. Does the law-enforcement officer conduct/participate in a forensic interview to determine why the child was missing from placement? Is pertinent information turned over to the child-welfare agency?

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<sup>25</sup>Caren Kaplan. *Children Missing from Care: An Issue Brief*. Washington, DC: CWLA Press, 2004, pages 31-32.

<sup>26</sup>*Id.*, page 32.

The importance of structured risk assessment also plays a major role in prevention. Whenever evidence of risk surfaces, it is imperative for child-welfare authorities to flag records associated with children deemed to be potential runaways or at-risk of a family abduction. Flagging of records provides a clear indication to all persons associated with the case of the situation and better allows them to take appropriate precautions. This includes bringing concerns and details to the attention of law enforcement whenever risk is deemed to be significant.

If there are multiple missing episodes at a particular out-of-home-care setting, there may be problems with the placement that are the impetus for children running or seeking alternate living arrangements. For example are the children running away from exploitation, neglect, substandard living conditions, or even assaults by other children?

Another measure of prevention law-enforcement agencies may provide is through School Resource Officers. Many law-enforcement agencies have officers who perform roles within the schools. These officers may interact with children who are in out-of-home care. These officers may have positive impacts on these children, which could play a role in averting a voluntary or involuntary missing episode.

Often these officers are in a position to develop personal relationships, offering children a direct resource to help them cope with their changing placements, perceptions, and other troubling issues. School Resource Officers also know friends and associates of children in care. These people may be able to render valuable information in locating a child in care who becomes missing.



## Resources<sup>27</sup>

### **Child Welfare League of America**

440 First Street, Northwest, Third Floor  
Washington, DC 20001-2085  
202-638-2952  
[www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)

The Child Welfare League of America is the nation's oldest and largest membership-based, child-welfare organization. They are committed to engaging people everywhere in promoting the well-being of children and their families, and protecting every child from harm. They offer research data, conferences and training, consultation, publications, and advocacy.

### **National Center for Missing Adults**

2432 West Peoria Avenue, Suite 1286  
Phoenix, Arizona 85029-4739  
602-749-2000  
1-800-690-FIND  
[www.theyaremissd.org](http://www.theyaremissd.org)

The National Center for Missing Adults is dedicated to the prevention of abduction and safe recovery of missing persons with primary focus on adults determined by law enforcement to be endangered due to foul play, diminished mental capacity, physical disability, or suspicious circumstances.

### **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children®**

Charles B. Wang International Children's Building  
699 Prince Street  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3175  
1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678)  
[www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com)

NCMEC is law enforcement's direct link to many investigative services and resources including case management, case enhancement, information analysis, imagery and identification services, age progression and regression, photo distribution, and web-site postings. In addition NCMEC offers key assistance to programs needed during the investigation of a missing-child case. They include the AMBER Alert, LOCATER™, Project ALERT, and Team Adam.

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<sup>27</sup>The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children endorses the practices noted in this report and provides information about the services offered by certain organizations as a public service without sponsorship or endorsement of them.

NCMEC assists cities, towns, states, and regions across the United States in the implementation of **America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response**, a voluntary partnership between law-enforcement agencies and broadcasters to activate **AMBER Alerts**, an urgent bulletin "over the airwaves" in the most serious child-abduction cases, and promotes use of these alerts in conjunction with entry of information about those missing children in the FBI's NCIC computer.

NCMEC's **Lost Child Alert Technology Resource** provides law enforcement the tools and technology needed to rapidly disseminate missing-child images and information through an advanced, web-based computer program available, free-of-charge, to law enforcement. **LOCATER** helps law enforcement immediately create and disseminate professional-looking posters locally, statewide, or across the nation.

**Project ALERT, America's Law Enforcement Retiree Team**, was launched by NCMEC in 1992 and has the endorsement of 18 leading, national, law-enforcement associations. The team is comprised of more than 150 active Representatives who have retired after serving an average of more than 20 years each from a federal, state, or local law-enforcement career. Their experience and skills are made available as on-site Representatives to **requesting agencies** in need of immediate assistance, long-term case review, surveillance, follow-up of leads from state-to-state, assistance with witness interviews, a family liaison, a public speaker, and a roll-call trainer.

**Team Adam**, launched in 2003, is patterned after the National Transportation Safety Board's system for sending specialists to the site of serious transportation incidents. Team Adam sends experienced, investigative specialists to the site of serious child abductions and cases of child sexual exploitation. Cases "intaked" by NCMEC are monitored by the Team Adam Project Manager, and Team Adam Consultants are deployed as case circumstances dictate. The emphasis is on nonfamily abductions and cases involving lost, injured, or otherwise missing children.

Team Adam is staffed by more than 50 talented, retired federal, state, and local investigators chosen through a formal selection process involving an evaluation by a committee with representatives from the FBI, state law enforcement, and local law-enforcement executives experienced in the investigation of crimes committed against children.

Team Adam assistance to law enforcement includes search, analysis, technical support, investigation, and equipment/resources. Team Adam assistance offered to family members includes family advocacy services, personal assistance, child-safety education, stress management, and media relations.

**National Runaway Switchboard**

3080 North Lincoln Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60657-4208  
1-800-621-4000  
[www.nrscrisisline.org](http://www.nrscrisisline.org)

The National Runaway Switchboard operates a hotline for teens to call when on the run. They facilitate relationships to help ensure youth and families have access to resources in their communities; which includes child advocacy, runaway prevention training, teenage bulletin board, education and solution-focused intervention, nonsectarian and nonjudgmental support.

**Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention  
Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse**

PO Box 6000  
Rockville, Maryland 20849-6000  
1-800-851-3420  
[www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org)

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) provides national leadership, coordination, and resources to prevent and respond to juvenile delinquency and victimization. OJJDP supports states and communities in their efforts to develop and implement effective and coordinated prevention and intervention programs and improve the juvenile-justice system so it protects public safety, holds offenders accountable, and provides treatment and rehabilitative services tailored to the needs of juveniles and their families.

**State Clearinghouses**

Each state has a Missing Children Clearinghouse designed to collect, store, and disseminate information to assist in the location of missing children. They provide liaison among individuals, private organizations, and law-enforcement officials regarding missing-children information. Some clearinghouses provide analytical and investigative support to the officers assigned to these cases. Contact information for each state clearinghouse may be obtained online by visiting [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com) and clicking on the links to “More Services” and “NCMEC Clearinghouse Program” or calling 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).



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# **Children Missing From Care: The Law-Enforcement Response**

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**Self-Assessment of Law-Enforcement Agencies**

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