



INVESTIGATIVE CHECKLIST

for Investigative Officers

The Investigative Officer Checklist below is a resource to facilitate effective communication and documentation of valuable information in response to reports of endangered missing or abducted children. Investigative processes are crucial to all parties involved in the search and recovery of a missing or abducted child. This checklist presents specific techniques for handling non-family abductions, family abductions, and runaways, and important considerations for obtaining information and transitioning the incident from patrol first responders. Investigative officers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with this checklist prior to any reports of missing or abducted children.

- 1. Obtain a briefing from the first responding officer(s) and other on-scene personnel. Verify the accuracy of all descriptive information and other details developed so far during the preliminary investigation.**

Meet with the first responder(s) to obtain pertinent information about the investigation. This briefing should be conducted prior to interviews with family members of the missing child or witnesses who may have been identified during the initial stage of the case. The verification process should include all details developed during the preliminary investigation. During the interview process the investigator should be alert to facts or statements in conflict with those gathered by the first responder(s).

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DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____



2. Conduct initial neighborhood/area canvassing operations using a standardized approach and questionnaire to create consistency of approach and questions, and thorough documentation, by all officers involved.

A thorough canvass of the neighborhood or area should be conducted without delay. The objective is to identify and interview all people within the abduction/incident zone who may be able to provide information related to the incident.

- Verify that a command post has been or is actively being established. If not, make the necessary arrangements to correct the situation with the supervisory officer prior to canvassing.
- Call out pre-selected and trained volunteers or execute a defined process for soliciting and vetting ad hoc volunteers if a pre-established volunteer group is not in place.
- Assign officers and staff on hand as supervisors to oversee canvass teams and/or volunteer groups. (The ideal ratio of supervisor to canvassing officers/volunteers is 1:5.)
- Determine how far the canvass should extend geographically.
- Work with your communications center to run sex offender queries and identify offenders residing and/or working in the area.
- Use an assignment sheet to record assignment updates throughout the investigation and make this available to all personnel working on the case.
- Assign someone to serve as an evidence recorder and an entry/exit recorder (also responsible for maintaining an event timetable).
 - » [Example of Crime Scene Entry Log](#) (see final page, p. 180)
 - » [Example of Lead Sheet Assignment Log](#)

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DATE COMPLETED: _____ TIME COMPLETED: _____

3. Obtain a brief, recent history of family dynamics.

The investigative officer should interview the following individuals toward developing a victimology/victim profile in the case.

- Family members
- Neighbors or nearby families
- Teachers & classmates/friends and bus drivers
- Any individuals or organizations that the child has been known to spend time with
- Employers & coworkers (with working-age missing juveniles)
- Any individuals or organizations with which the child has been known to spend time
- Witnesses
- Other individuals with information/knowledge of history/dynamics, as appropriate

NOTES:

DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____

4. Identify and further investigate reasons for any conflicting witness and/or interviewee information, working toward resolution of the conflicting elements.

The first responder and the investigative officer should discuss and compare all field notes, incorporating any recent updates received from telecommunications. This collaborative evaluation will provide the investigative staff with a solid foundation upon which to structure future case directions. Further investigate toward resolution of any conflicting elements gathered through interviews and canvassing.

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DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____

- 5. Collect article(s) of the child's clothing for scent-tracking purposes. Review and evaluate all available information and evidence collected. Secure the child's latest medical and dental records.**

These items may contain hair and other material useful as DNA evidence. Also look for pencils or toys that contain impressions the child's teeth. Obtain a description of birthmarks, scars, tattoos, missing teeth, eyeglasses or contacts, speech patterns, and other noticeable behavioral traits. If possible, collect any child ID kits information from the family. Obtain photographs that show the child as he/she looks currently. Collect fingerprints from the child's room and/or personal items. Obtain medical and dental records.

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- 6. If applicable, contact landfill/ transfer station management and request they delay or at least segregate garbage and dumping containers from key investigative areas in cases where it is suspected there may be imminent danger to the missing child.**

Obtaining garbage and/or recycling from the child's residence and/or other areas associated with the case can result in finding evidence that is essential to the investigation. Work proactively to establish agreements with public works, garbage and recycling collection companies, and landfills in your jurisdiction to mitigate delays when minutes matter during an actual case.

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7. Develop an investigative plan to focus the investigation and ensure it remains on track.

Prior to developing an investigative plan, conducting a scene assessment will be necessary to identify valuable evidence, and supports coordinated identification, collection, and preservation of physical evidence and identification of witnesses. An effective investigative plan also allows for accurate and timely exchange of information amongst law enforcement personnel and clearly establishes the investigative strategies to be used.

The investigator(s) in charge should perform the following actions

- Communicate with the first responder(s) regarding observations/activities.
- Evaluate safety issues that may affect personnel entering the scene(s) (e.g., blood-borne pathogens, hazardous materials, geography hazards)
- Evaluate search/seizure issues to determine the necessity of obtaining consent to search and/or executing a search warrant
- Evaluate and establish a path of scene entry and exit for authorized personnel
- Evaluate initial scene boundaries and expand/contract as necessary
- Determine the number and size of scene(s) in the case and prioritize them to ensure the best use of investigative resources to effectively and thoroughly process each
- Establish a secure area appropriately close to the scene(s) for the purpose of consultation and equipment staging
- If multiple scenes exist, establish and maintain communication with personnel at each
- Establish a secure area for temporary evidence storage in accordance with rules of evidence/chain of custody
- Determine and request additional investigative resources as required (e.g., specialized personnel/units, legal consultation/prosecutors, equipment)
- Ensure continued scene integrity (e.g., document entry/exit of authorized personnel, prevent unauthorized access to the scene)

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8. Conduct a criminal history background check on all principal suspects, witnesses, and participants in the investigation.

Conduct criminal background checks on all parties involved in the investigation, including parents, family members, witnesses, suspects, and volunteers. Keep in mind ALL suspects (including family members) are high priority.

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DATE COMPLETED: _____ *TIME COMPLETED:* _____



9. Determine what additional resources and specialized services are required to support the investigation.

- **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)** – If you believe the child is in fact missing/abducted, especially if it warrants the activation of an AMBER Alert, the FBI should be contacted as they can provide significant investigative resources. Note: When the Child Abduction (CA) or AMBER Alert (AA) flags are applied to the missing child NCIC record, automatic notifications are made to the FBI and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).
- **State/Local Police or Sheriff** – To ensure you can respond fully to any activity occurring outside of (or has moved across) state and/or tribal boundaries, you need to include law enforcement from those jurisdictions and likely surrounding areas depending on suspected direction of travel, vehicle(s) and persons involved, etc.
- **State Missing Children Clearinghouse** – For assistance with case registration, records/intelligence analysis, photo dissemination, and logistical needs such as transportation of recovered children, etc.
- **Specialized Units** – Including the following
- **Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Forces**
- **Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS)**
- **National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC)** – requested through the FBI
- **S. Marshalls Service**
- **Victim-Witness Services** – Contact local crime victim services or tribal crisis support. If you need assistance in working with the family of the missing child, you can include NCMEC’s Family Advocacy Division and/or Exploited Children Division for first response social services support in providing updates and resources to the family as the investigation progresses.
- **NCMEC’s Project ALERT®/Team Adam** – Investigative support for rapid response (Team Adam), and for longer-term and/or cold cases (Project ALERT®).
- **Child Abduction Response Teams (CART)** – A multi-disciplinary (and often multi-jurisdictional) team to provide a wide base of investigative, specialized and volunteer management support. CARTs are a major force multiplier in critical missing and child abduction cases. Work proactively to identify the CART(s) serving your area and build relationships and agreements to promote effective call out and communications when minutes matter when cases occur.

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10. Report all case information to NCMEC and work with your communications department or assigned investigators to update case details with NCMEC as the investigation progresses.

Call NCMEC toll-free at 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678) if your agency has not already been contacted by NCMEC as a result of the case NCIC entry(ies). Note: NCMEC has a Sex Offender Tracking Team (SOTT) available to any law enforcement agencies to serve as an information clearinghouse.

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11. Prepare and update bulletins for local law enforcement agencies, the state missing children clearinghouse, the FBI, and other appropriate agencies.

At a minimum, include the following:

- Name
- Sex
- Race
- Date of birth
- Date of emancipation
- Height/Weight/Eye color
- Date and location of last known contact
- Any critical endangerment factors of the incident (caution-medical, caution-weapons, etc.).
- NCIC case/record number
- Originating (handing agency) ORI number and contact phone number
- Public leads/tips contact number/email (see next item)

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12. Establish a phone hotline for receipt of tips and leads. Consider establishing an email address and other methods of electronically receiving leads as well.

An information management system is an essential part of the overall investigative process. Depending on the resources available, it is best to utilize a computerized system to record, index, cross-reference, and retrieve the facts amassed during an investigation. Note: NCMEC can provide assistance with case management tools. Contact them at 800-THE-LOST (800-843-5678).

Effective leads/tips intake systems should include the following elements.

- Proper staffing and supervision structures
- Vetted/Background-checked, specially trained personnel
- Call intake protocols: scripted questions organized on a checklist to promote consistency and minimized missed/overlooked questions
- Call/number rollover and stacking capability to minimize missed and delayed handling of calls
- Phone recording capabilities to capture and log all conversations
- Coordination with other emergency operations centers to provide back up and staffing support
- A toll-free number for those who need it

NOTES:

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13. Establish a leads management system to prioritize leads and help ensure each one is reviewed and followed up on.

NCMEC can assist with leads management tools designed to manage and prioritize leads in missing child investigations. Contact them at 800-THE-LOST (800-843-5678).

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