

# Checklist: What You Should Do When Your Child Is First Missing

*The first 48 hours following the disappearance of a child are the most critical in terms of finding and returning that child safely home – but they also can be the most troublesome and chaotic. Use this checklist during those first hours to help you do everything you can to increase the chances of recovering your child – but if more than 48 hours have passed since your child disappeared, you should still try to tend to these items as quickly as possible.*

## The First 24 Hours

- ❑ **Immediately** report your child as missing to your local law enforcement agency. Ask investigators to enter your child into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing Persons File. There is no waiting period for entry into NCIC for children under age 18.
- ❑ **Request** that law enforcement put out a Be On the Look Out (BOLO) bulletin. Ask them about involving the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the search for your child.
- ❑ **Limit** access to your home until law enforcement arrives and has collected possible evidence. Do not touch or remove anything from your child's room or from your home. Remember that clothing, sheets, personal items, computers, and even trash may hold clues to the whereabouts of your child.
- ❑ **Ask** for the name and telephone number of the law enforcement investigator assigned to your case, and keep this information in a safe and convenient place.
- ❑ **Give** law enforcement investigators all the facts and circumstances related to the disappearance of your child, including what efforts have already been made to search for your child.
- ❑ **Write** a detailed description of the clothing worn by your child and the personal items he or she had at the time of the disappearance. Include in your description any personal identification marks, such as birthmarks, scars, tattoos, or mannerisms that may help in finding your child. If possible, find a picture of your child that shows these identification marks and give it to law enforcement.
- ❑ **Make** a list of friends, acquaintances and anyone else who might have information or clues about your child's whereabouts. Include telephone numbers and addresses, if possible. Tell your law enforcement investigator about anyone who moved in or out of the neighborhood within the past year, anyone whose

interest in or involvement with the family changed in recent months, and anyone who appeared to be overly interested in your child.

- ❑ **Find** recent photographs of your child in both black and white and color. Make copies of these pictures for your law enforcement agency, the media, your State missing children's clearinghouse, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), and other nonprofit organizations.
- ❑ **Call** NCMEC at 800-THE-LOST (800-843-5678) to ask for help with photo distribution. Also, ask for the telephone numbers of other nonprofit organizations that might be able to help.
- ❑ **Contact** your State missing children's clearinghouse to find out what resources and services it can provide in the search for your child.
- ❑ **Ask** your law enforcement agency to organize a search for your child. Ask them about using tracking or trailing dogs (preferably bloodhounds) in the search effort.
- ❑ **Ask** your law enforcement agency for help in contacting the media.
- ❑ **Designate** one person to answer your telephone. Keep a notebook or pad of paper by the telephone so this person can jot down names, telephone numbers, dates and times of calls, and other information relating to each call.
- ❑ **Keep** a notebook or pad of paper with you at all times to write down your thoughts or questions and record important information, such as names, dates, or telephone numbers.
- ❑ **Take** good care of yourself and your family, because your child needs you to be strong. As hard as it may be, force yourself to get rest, eat nourishing food, and talk to someone about your tumultuous feelings.

## The Second 24 Hours

- ❑ **Talk** with your law enforcement investigator about the steps that are being taken to find your child. If your law enforcement investigator does not have a copy of *Missing and Abducted Children: A Law Enforcement Guide to Case Investigation and Program Management*, suggest that he or she call NCMEC at 800-THE-LOST (800-843-5678) to obtain one. Also, your law enforcement investigator can contact the Crimes Against Children Coordinator in the local FBI Field Office to obtain a copy of the FBI's *Child Abduction Response Plan*.
- ❑ **Expand** your list of friends, acquaintances, extended family members, yard workers, delivery persons, and anyone who may have seen your child during or following the abduction.

- ❑ **Look** at personal calendars, community events calendars, and newspapers to see if there are any clues as to who was in the vicinity and might be the abductor or a possible witness. Give this information to law enforcement.
- ❑ **Expect** that you will be asked to take a polygraph test, which is standard procedure.
- ❑ **Ask** your law enforcement agency to request that NCMEC issue a broadcast fax to law enforcement agencies around the country.
- ❑ **Work** with your law enforcement agency to schedule press releases and media events. If necessary, ask someone close to you to serve as your media spokesperson.
- ❑ **Talk** to your law enforcement agency about the use of a reward.
- ❑ **Report** all extortion attempts to law enforcement.
- ❑ **Have** a second telephone line installed with call forwarding. Get caller ID and call waiting. Ask law enforcement to install a trap-and-trace feature on your phone. Get a cellular phone or pager so you can be reached when you are away from home.
- ❑ **Take** care of yourself. Don't be afraid to ask others to take care of your physical and emotional needs and those of your family.
- ❑ **Make** a list of things that volunteers can do for you and your family.
- ❑ **Call** your child's doctor and dentist and ask for copies of medical records and x-rays. Give them to law enforcement.

Source:

*When Your Child Is Missing: A Family Survival Guide*, U. S. Department of Justice