

## DEKALB POLICE DEPARTMENT

Subject: **Missing Children**

Policy #: **402.9**

Effective Since: 12-1-03

Revision Effective: 1-1-19

FTO Training Task: # 38

Reference Material: Illinois Amber Alert System, Public Act 92-0259; IACP "Missing Children" Research Paper

ILEAP Standards Covered: NA

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**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this policy is to establish responsibilities and guidelines for this agency's response to reports of missing children.

**POLICY:** It is the policy of this agency to expeditiously respond to and thoroughly investigate all reports of missing children. A child who is missing under unusual circumstances shall be considered "at risk" until sufficient information to the contrary is confirmed. The department will make every effort to locate any at-risk missing child, and will diligently seek to identify any lost children that are found whose identification is unknown. The department takes reports of children who are missing for any reason, and there is no "waiting period" necessary before reporting a child as missing.

### DEFINITIONS:

**MRAI:** Minor Requiring Authoritative Intervention

**Amber Alert:** An Amber Alert is a statewide alert message regarding a missing child. The Illinois State Police and the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) disseminate an Amber Alert after receiving the child's descriptors and photo from the investigating police agency. Guidelines for the issuance of an Amber Alert are more specific than the general guidelines in this policy.

**Lost Child Alert Technology Resource (LOCATER):** LOCATER is a computer system that creates posters of missing children. These posters are disseminated to law enforcement, media, and the public via e-mail, fax, and print.

**Missing Child:** This term refers to a person who is younger than eighteen years of age and whose whereabouts is unknown to his or her parents, guardian or responsible party under circumstances that are uncustomary for the child or that would cause reasonable concern.

**Technology to Recover Abducted Kids (TRAK):** TRAK is a computer system that creates posters of missing children, wanted subjects, sex offenders, and others. These flyers are disseminated to other TRAK users and selected fax machines.

**Unusual Circumstances:** For purposes of this policy, the term unusual circumstances refers to a missing child who is thirteen years of age or younger, or whose disappearance involves circumstances that would cause a reasonable person to conclude that the child should be considered "at risk". Those circumstances could include the child being:

- Out of the zone of safety for his or her age and developmental stage (see below);
- Mentally incapacitated (e.g., developmentally disabled or emotionally disturbed);
- Medically dependent (e.g., insulin dependent);
- Drug involved;
- A potential victim of foul play or sexual exploitation;
- In a life threatening situation;
- Reported to the police as missing after a delay on the part of the parents, guardians, or other responsible person;
- Believed to be with adults or older juveniles who could endanger his or her welfare; and/or
- Absent under circumstances inconsistent with established patterns of behavior.

**Zone of Safety:** The distance a child could travel from the location where last seen before he or she would most likely be at risk of injury or exploitation based on the child's age, developmental stage, and related matters.

### PROCEDURE:

- A. **Responsibilities of Telecommunicators:** A telecommunicator who receives a report of a missing child is responsible for ensuring that appropriate information is collected to assist the responding officer. This includes but may not be limited to the following:
1. Determine if the circumstances of the report meet the definition of a missing child

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- as set forth in the Definitions Section of this policy.
2. Prioritize the call based on the factors determining unusual circumstances and dispatch officers accordingly.
3. Collect essential information from the caller to transmit appropriate radio alerts providing descriptive information about the child, where the child was last seen, and any information concerning potential abductors and their means and direction of travel.
4. Inform the parent or guardian that they should not disturb or tamper with the home, school, or location where the child might have been or any of the child's belongings.
5. Where possible and appropriate, search police agency records for information that may facilitate the search and investigation. These include but are not limited to records that establish whether incidents have been reported in the vicinity that may have some bearing on the case, including but not limited to:
  - a. Complaints of attempted abductions, prowlers, public lewdness, and suspicious person.
  - b. Residents in the vicinity of the missing child's home or place last seen who are designated as sexual predators;
  - c. History of household abuse or domestic violence calls;
  - d. Criminal history of family members or others at the child's home address;
  - e. Runaway reports on the child or siblings; and
  - f. Juvenile delinquency reports of the child or siblings.
6. Safeguard all pertinent records for future investigative reference, to include communications related to the incident, written notes, radio broadcasts, and all subsequent notifications.
7. Where unusual circumstances exist, issue a radio alert to all agency personnel and arrange for an ISPERN dispatch.
8. Ask the parents to stay in place until police personnel arrive.

- B. **Responsibilities of the Responding Officer** : The officer assigned as a first responder to the incident should prioritize and perform as appropriate the following tasks:
1. Unless acting in direct response to the child's safety, respond directly and promptly to the individual who made the initial report.
  2. Based on available information, make an initial determination of the type of case, the need for additional resources, and whether the incident should be initially classified as "unusual circumstances" as defined in this policy.
  3. In some cases, a child is reported missing not because of unusual circumstances of an at-risk child, but because the child is an habitual runaway or a MRAI. In these cases, the officer shall make a report and attempt to locate the child if leads are known. The runaway child should be entered into LEADS as missing-runaway. There is usually not a need to investigate these cases in the same way as those classified as unusual circumstances or otherwise at risk. Officers should be aware that a child who is initially reported as a runaway or MRAI may meet or at some time may meet the criteria of being endangered. The remainder of this policy deals with procedures involving children who are missing-endangered. For more information on MRAI situations, see Policy 404.3, Juvenile Procedures.
  4. Irrespective of any search that may have been conducted previously by parents or others, verify that the child is missing by conducting a consensual search of the house and grounds to include places where a child could be hiding, trapped,

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- or asleep.
5. Conduct interviews with parents or other person who made the initial report in order to gain insight into the circumstances surrounding the disappearance and gather other information needed to conduct an initial assessment of the case.
  6. If it is believed that the child is missing under unusual circumstance and is thus "at risk" as described in the Definitions section of this policy, the officer shall notify the shift supervisor to ensure the status of the missing child is known.
  7. Obtain a detailed description of the missing child and a recent photograph. With the parent's permission, arrange to have the photograph copied and distributed as needed.
  8. Confirm the child's custody status, whether a custody dispute or similar problem exists between the parents, whether a restraining order is in effect, or if the child has expressed an interest in living with the non-custodial parent.
  9. Determine when, where, and by whom the child was last seen. Interview those who last saw the child and treat the location as a crime scene. Arrange for a canvass of this area.
    - a. If the child is missing after school, contact the bus-driver (if applicable) to ensure that the child rode the bus home. If necessary, obtain a list of that route's bus passengers and contact each one. Consider canvassing the area of each bus stop on the route.
    - b. Contact the school to ensure that the child didn't leave with a classmate. Obtain a class roster and contact each classmate.
    - c. Contact any relatives who could have picked the child up. Consult the school's information sheet on the child for any other pertinent information.
    - d. If the child walks home (or if the route can be walked) consider a canvass of the route.
  10. Secure and safeguard the incident scene or place last seen as a potential crime scene. Where possible, take photographs and/or videotape of the incident scene and ensure that personnel do not tamper with potential evidence.
  11. Identify any areas of the incident scene or the home that have been disrupted since the child's disappearance. In particular, the child's bedroom, bed clothing, and related areas and items should be secured and protected until evidence and identification material such as hair, fingerprints, or bite marks can be collected.
  12. Identify the zone of safety for the child's age and developmental stage.
  13. If a child is missing under any unusual circumstances, appropriate notifications within the department and to outside agencies should be made as soon as possible. This includes passing on the information to on-duty officers, passing on information to incoming shifts, notifying the Investigations Division, and notifying area law enforcement agencies by phone, fax, radio, or computerized messages. The Chief of Police or Division Commander may make media notifications or announcements as deemed appropriate.
  14. If the child was abducted, obtain a description of the abductors if available, the mode of travel, vehicle description, and related information and transmit to communications. If the abductor is a family member, obtain photographs of the suspect. If applicable, contact FBI.
  15. Determine the correct NCIC Missing Person File category - disability, endangered, involuntary, juvenile, or catastrophe - and request that communications or other authorized personnel promptly enter this into the NCIC file. Family abductions are normally entered as "involuntary" and non-family abductions are entered as "endangered."

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16. If the criteria for an Amber Alert are met, arrange for one to be issued (see Attachment A). Criteria include that the child is under the age of 16 **or** has proven mental or physical disability, **and** police must believe the child is in danger of death or serious bodily harm.
  17. Fully identify and separately interview anyone at the scene of the disappearance.
  18. Even if the child has disappeared elsewhere, a thorough home search should still be conducted. Under these circumstances, written permission should be obtained prior to conducting the search. With the assistance of additional personnel, search the residence, out buildings, other structures, vehicles, and related property.
  19. Prepare a chronological account of actions taken and information obtained from point of contact to relief.
- C. **Supervisor's Responsibilities:** Where a child is missing under unusual circumstances, a supervisor will ensure that the following measures are taken:
1. Obtain a briefing from the first responder and other agency personnel at the scene sufficient to determine the scope and complexity of the case and develop an appropriate response. Conduct the briefing away from family, friends, and other involved individuals.
  2. Ensure that first responder responsibilities, as outlined in the foregoing section, have been fully and properly carried out.
  3. Determine if additional personnel and resources are needed to assist in the investigation. Consider if activation of the DeKalb County Major Case Squad is appropriate.
  4. If necessary, establish a command post (away from the child's residence) to assist in field management of the search and investigation.
  5. Detail an officer to organize search efforts. Determine if bloodhounds are available and if they are appropriate for use under the immediate circumstances.
  6. Detail an officer to deal with media inquiries and, if deemed appropriate, solicit media assistance in locating the missing child.
  7. Ensure that all required notifications have been made; to include, where appropriate, officers and investigative units of the agency, other law enforcement agencies, and available community resources. Consider the use of the Reverse 911 System.
  8. Detail an officer to liaison with the family to explain police efforts and work with them to uncover any information useful to the investigation.
  9. Assess the need for additional services and contact the state clearinghouse and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) at 800-843-5678 to determine what services, if any, can be provided.
- D. **Investigator's Responsibilities:** Where a case involves unusual circumstances as defined in this policy, the assigned police investigator shall ensure that the following measures are taken:
1. Obtain a briefing from agency personnel at the scene.
  2. Verify the accuracy of all descriptive information concerning the child, being alert to facts or statements that may conflict with those obtained by the first responder or supervisor.
  3. If not already completed, canvass the neighborhood to identify and interview residents and others within the area where the child was last seen. Identify all vehicles parked within the neighborhood.

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4. Obtain a general history of recent family dynamics from family members, neighbors, classmates, teachers, school counselors, and other persons who may have had close personal interaction with the child and/or family.
5. Conduct in-depth fact-finding interviews with all witnesses, friends or relatives of the missing child, teachers, classmates, or others who knew and/or routinely interacted with the child, placing particular emphasis on identifying any conflicting information offered by these or other individuals.
6. Review any records generated about the family or child from our agency, social service agencies, schools, and related organizations or agencies.
7. Implement an agency system (such as the Major Case Squad Lead Tracking System) or other authorized means to record, cross-reference, and retrieve information generated through the investigation.
8. Reassess the need for additional resources and specialized services to include bloodhounds, specialized search and rescue operations, state resources (e.g., state missing children's clearinghouses), and federal agencies such as the FBI and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Consider utilizing the TRAK and LOCATER Systems.
9. If the case is not resolved promptly, update descriptive records and those entered into state and federal missing persons databases to include dental characteristics, scars, marks and tattoos, fingerprints, and additional articles of clothing, jewelry, or possessions not previously itemized.
10. Determine whether a polygraph examination is warranted and request such an examination where indicated for parents, guardians, or other persons as appropriate.
11. Monitor media relations to include review of all agency releases to the media to ensure that information is not released that will compromise the investigation.
12. Provide the family with whatever support is possible and appropriate. Provide them with a copy of the Family Survival Guide prepared by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention or contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to have one sent to them via overnight mail.

E. **Procedures when Locating an Unidentified Child** : An officer who is assigned to the report of an unidentified person who appears to be a child, whether living or deceased, is responsible for completion of the following tasks, among other responsibilities:

1. Obtain a complete description of the individual using standardized information gathering forms designated by this agency (or others such as the NCIC Unidentified Person File Worksheet).
2. Enter the child's description into the NCIC Unidentified Person File.
3. Utilize available resources to identify the child, to include:
  - a. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children;
  - b. State missing and exploited children clearinghouses; and
  - c. State medical examiner's offices and organizations.
4. Once identification has been made, cancel all notifications.

F. **Recovery and/or Case Closure Procedures** : An officer assigned to the recovery or return of a missing child shall complete the following tasks, among his or her other responsibilities:

1. Verify the identity of the returned child as the missing child while assessing the child's safety and gathering available information about possible predators.
2. During the verification process, determine whether intervention services are

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needed to ensure that the child can safely remain in the home and ensure that arrangements are made for delivery of these services. These include but are not limited to mental health and/or physical health examinations and arrangements for family counseling.

3. Complete designated supplemental reports and cancel all outstanding notifications to include any NCIC Missing Person File entry and the state clearinghouse. Supplemental reports should describe the child's activities while missing and the circumstances of the recovery/return.

G. **Illinois Crime Compensation Act** , 740 ILCS 45:

1. Officers must advise any victim or the victim's family of the Illinois Crime Compensation Act when the victim was injured or killed as a result of a kidnapping.
2. Victims may be eligible for compensation for medical and hospital expenses, counseling, loss of earnings, tuition reimbursement, prosthetic appliances and accessibility costs, personal property replacement costs, temporary lodging or relocation, funeral expenses, and crime scene clean-up.
3. In these cases, the officer "shall inform the victim of the offense or his dependents concerning the availability of an award of compensation and advise such persons that any information concerning this Act and the filing of a claim may be obtained from the office of the Attorney General." [740 ILCS 45/5.1(b)]
4. The victim needs to complete an application available through the Attorney's General Office and can be done on-line at [www.ag.state.il.us](http://www.ag.state.il.us) or requested by phone on the Illinois Victims Assistance Line, 800-228-3368.

H. **Automated Victim Notification (AVN)** . The Illinois Automated Victim Notification System provides victims and concerned citizens with a toll-free number where they can call and get up-to-date information on the custody status and/or case status of an offender. Officers should advise victims about AVN availability. The AVN phone number is 1-866-566-8439. TTY: 1-877-502-2423.

**Policy originally issued 8-21-03; this revision becomes effective on 1-1-19 by authority of the Chief of Police .**

NOTE: This policy and procedure summarizes the department's position on this specific matter. This policy is for general direction and guidance primarily designed for use by the department's members. This policy is for internal use only and does not create or enlarge an officer's liability in any way. This policy shall not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party claims. Violations of this policy, if proven, can only form the basis of an internal departmental complaint and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.