

landmarks, and telephone numbers are of little value if the fliers are sent outside the immediate area. Do not include your home telephone number on the flier, because leads should be forwarded to local law enforcement.

Take advantage of any media attention via radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet to let people know of your child's disappearance. If you have a video of your child, the electronic media may be more willing to assist, as they are a visual medium and people often respond to a moving picture. In these communications be sure to show love and concern for your child's safety and include an appeal asking the child to return home.

• **Use all available technologies to assist in the search.** For instance outgoing messages can be left for your child and others on your answering machine, with an answering service, and/or on voice mail. In order to keep your telephone number free at all times, explore the possibility of getting a second telephone line to be used as a facsimile line, a connection to an online service/the Internet, and/or as an additional telephone line.

Telephone calling features such as Call Trace, Caller ID, and Call Return can help in your search if available in your area. Cellular telephones and/or pagers allow others to reach you at all times. When receiving collect calls ask the operator for "time and charges" to determine the telephone number/location from which the call was placed. Electronic mail can be a means of tracing a person's location when the address is saved and an online service is able to provide information about the user.

• **Consider ordering *When Your Child is Missing: A Family Survival Guide from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse at 1-800-638-8736.*** This book contains helpful information about your role in the search for and recovery of your missing child. It may also be viewed at NCMEC's web site, [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com).

### If Your Child Contacts You But Is Unwilling to Come Home

- **Show love and concern for your child, not anger or fear.** Remember the goal is to help work through problems and have him or her return home.
- **Encourage your child to contact a local runaway shelter or the National Runaway Switchboard at 1-800-621-4000 for assistance.**
- **Ask if you can stay in touch with your child.** If so, set specific plans on a form of contact whether it be through a telephone number, mailing address, electronic mail, or facsimile number.

### When Your Child Returns Home

When your child is recovered or returns home, remember to show love and concern for his or her safety and well-being—**not anger or fear.** If you react angrily, your child may feel unwanted and unloved and may run away again. Make sure your child understands that you care about what happens to him or her.

Promptly notify law enforcement, the state clearinghouse, NCMEC, the National Runaway Switchboard, or anyone else who may have assisted you.

If your child has been away for an extended period of time, a complete medical examination

is needed when he or she returns home including tests for sexually transmitted diseases.

Most importantly, when your child returns, try to resolve the problems in your family that prompted your child to leave home in the first place. In general children run away because of problems or stresses in the family or at home—such as divorce, remarriage, alcoholism, or physical or sexual abuse.

If you are unable to deal with the family problems effectively, seek the assistance of a trained counselor or professional. Families can contact the local department of social services, family services, or other public or private agencies that help families. Members of the clergy, school personnel, or the law-enforcement community can also direct you to available services and resources. Make these arrangements before your child returns, so the services may be accessed immediately upon his or her return.

It may be necessary for your child to go to a temporary residence or runaway shelter while the family works toward resolving its problems. A trained counselor can help you make this decision.

### Preparation...Just in Case

There are several ways families can be prepared in the event that their child runs away. While some of these measures may be more appropriate for a younger child, they all provide valuable information to aid in the quick recovery of a runaway.

- Keep a complete written description of your child including hair and eye color, height, weight, date of birth, and specific physical attributes.
- Take color photographs of your child every six months. Head and shoulder

portraits from different angles, such as those taken by school photographers, are preferable; however, candid photographs are sometimes more representative of how your child looks than posed photographs.

• Make sure your dentist prepares full dental charts for your child and updates them with each exam or when dental work is performed. Also have dental prints taken and update those every two years until your child is 18. If you move, get a copy of these dental records to keep in your files until a new dentist is found.

• Find out from your doctor where your child's medical records are located. All permanent scars, birthmarks, broken bones, and medical needs should be recorded.

- Arrange with your local law-enforcement agency to have your child fingerprinted. The agency will give you the fingerprint card. They will **not** keep a record of your child's prints.

- Consider having a DNA sample taken from your child as this is rapidly becoming the "gold standard" for identification. There are many DNA collection kits available, but it is simple for you to collect a sample. For example an old toothbrush that has been used by your child is rich with his or her DNA. Allow the toothbrush to air dry and place it in a brown envelope, have your child lick the envelope shut, and label the envelope. The same procedure can be used for baby teeth, a hairbrush used exclusively by your child for at least one month, and dried blood on a bandage. Store the envelope in something like a shoebox at room temperature in a dry place away from heat.

### National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), established in 1984 as a private, nonprofit organization, serves as a clearinghouse of information about missing and exploited children; provides technical assistance to the public and law-enforcement agencies; offers training programs to law-enforcement and social-service professionals; distributes photographs of and descriptions about missing children worldwide; creates and coordinates child-protection education and prevention programs and publications; coordinates child-protection efforts with the private sector; networks with nonprofit service providers and state clearinghouses regarding missing-child cases; and provides information about effective legislation to help ensure the protection of children per 42 U.S.C. §§ 5771 *et seq.*; 42 U.S.C. § 11606; and 22 C.F.R. § 94.6.

A 24-hour, toll-free telephone line, **1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)**, is available in Canada, Mexico, and the United States for those who have information regarding missing and exploited children. The "phone free" number when dialing internationally is 00-800-0843-5678. The CyberTipline® is available worldwide for online reporting of these crimes at [www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com). The TTY line is 1-800-826-7653. The NCMEC business number is 703-274-3900. The business number when dialing from other countries is 001-703-522-9320. The NCMEC facsimile number is 703-274-2200. The NCMEC web-site address is [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com).

For information regarding the services offered by our NCMEC branches, please call them directly in California at 714-508-0150, Florida at 561-848-1900, Kansas City at 816-756-5422, New York at 585-242-0900, and South Carolina at 803-254-2326.

A number of publications, addressing various aspects of the missing- and exploited-child issue, are available free of charge in single copies by contacting the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's Publications Department at



Charles B. Wang International Children's Building  
699 Prince Street  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3175  
U.S.A.

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#### **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Sandra Gaines, National Runaway Switchboard, personal communication, February 9, 2004.  
<sup>2</sup>Kenneth A. Hanftand, Robert D. Keppel, and Joseph G. Weis, *Case Management for Missing Children Homicide Investigation: Fact Sheet*. Olympia, Washington: Office of the Attorney General, State of Washington, and U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, May 1997, page 2.  
<sup>3</sup>Lawrence J. Magid, *Teen Safety on the Information Highway*. Alexandria, Virginia: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2003, page 5.

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# Just in case...

## Guidelines in case your child might someday be a runaway



National Center for Missing & Exploited Children®

**1-800-THE-LOST®  
(1-800-843-5678)**

[www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com)



## Guidelines in case your child might someday be a runaway

Running away can be a frightening experience—for both the child and their family. Your child becomes vulnerable as soon as he or she leaves home—potentially falling victim to drugs, alcohol, crime, sexual exploitation, pornography, and/or prostitution. In the face of this many families may feel guilty, depressed, or even paralyzed by fear. It is important to be candid and direct with law enforcement concerning the circumstances that may have led to your child running away.

It is also important for families to remain calm and rational when they discover their child has run away. Don't panic or lose sight of the immediate task at hand—to locate the runaway and return him or her safely home.

### Immediate Action

The first hours following the runaway episode are the most important in locating a child. While many runaway children return home on their own over time, it is critical to take every action available to you to help quickly locate and safeguard your child if he or she should run away. To help locate your runaway child, immediately follow these steps.

- **Think clearly and logically about where your child might be and the reasons why he or she might have run away. Try to remain calm.**
- **Check with your child's friends, school, neighbors, relatives, or anyone else who may know of or have clues about your child's whereabouts.** Ask them to notify you if they hear from your child. If your child has a computer, it should be checked as a source of leads or other information concerning people your child may have been commu-

nicating with online. It may shed light on a planned meeting between your child and someone he or she "met" online.

- **Report the runaway to the local police or sheriff's department.** Have an officer respond to your home to take the report. Write down the officer's name, badge number, telephone number, and the report number. Find out who will follow up the initial investigation.
- **Remember to keep a notebook and record all information about the investigation.** This is a good way to keep track of everyone you talked to about your child and the circumstances and issues you discussed.
- **Make sure your law-enforcement agency enters your child's name and description into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) computer.** Law-enforcement agencies across the country have access to NCIC. This information will **not** give your child a record with law enforcement, but it may aid in his or her safe return.
- **Provide law enforcement with a recent photograph of your child.** Also make fingerprints, deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) samples if you have them, and dental records and prints available to law enforcement. This information may need to be added to the existing NCIC entry.
- If your local law-enforcement agency won't enter information about your child into the NCIC computer, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) will. The Missing Children Act of 1982 mandates this. Contact your nearest FBI field office for help.

**Remember no matter what you have been told, there is no law requiring a waiting period for reporting a child missing to law enforcement or for entry into NCIC.** But, because some law-enforcement agency procedures may still involve a waiting period, you may have to go to the FBI yourself to get your child entered in NCIC.

- **Make sure that law enforcement passes on the necessary information about your child to the missing children's clearinghouse within your state.**
- **Call or visit several local spots that your child may frequent,** and check with area hospitals and treatment centers. If your child was employed, call the employer or coworkers.
- If you have not done so, **report your missing child to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).**
- **Call your local runaway hotline, if there is one, as well as the National Runaway Switchboard at 1-800-621-4000.** Ask if your child has left a message, and leave a message for him or her. Also contact local runaway shelters and those in adjoining states. There are approximately 750 runaway shelters throughout the country, and they will be able to give you assistance and advice.<sup>1</sup>
- Using the poster format in this brochure, **have posters or fliers made.** Place them in store windows, and distribute them to truck stops, youth-oriented

businesses, hospitals, treatment centers, law-enforcement agencies, and local spots your child may frequent.

**NOTE: If you have reason to believe your child may have been abducted or lured away by a nonfamily member or noncustodial family member, do not disturb or remove any of your child's items before law enforcement arrives. Doing so could destroy key clues about the disappearance and/or evidence at a potential crime scene. In the case of a nonfamily abduction, the first three hours are the most critical in recovering a child safely.<sup>2</sup> Thus, do not delay in contacting law enforcement and explaining all of the facts leading to the belief that your child is an abduction victim.**

If your child uses online computer services, be advised that while the number of teens who are molested, abducted, or leave home as a result of contacts made on the Internet are relatively low, when it does happen the results can be tragic,<sup>3</sup> and a quick response is imperative.

### POSTER FORMAT

CHILD'S PHOTO	CHILD'S PHOTO different angle	
Date of photo	Date of photo	
<b>NAME OF CHILD</b>		
Date of birth:	Date missing:	
Age:	Height:	Weight:
Color of hair:	Color of eyes:	Complexion:
Physical characteristics: (braces, glasses, pierced ears, scars, marks, tattoos)		
Clothing description:		
Circumstances of disappearance: (include information about what the child was doing, anyone the child was with, and the city and state where the child was last seen)		
<b>IF YOU HAVE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT</b>		
Name of law-enforcement agency with city and state		
Law-enforcement telephone number including area code		
Officer assigned to case		
Case number		
Insert personal message to runaway such as We all love you. We want to work this out. Please call. Love, Mom and Dad		
National Center for Missing & Exploited Children	1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)	
Note: A missing child <b>must</b> be registered with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children before adding the organization's name and telephone number to this flier.		

### Follow-Up Actions

- **Recheck with your child's friends, school, neighbors, and current employer.** Do not overlook your child's old boyfriends or girlfriends; people from other walks of life including camp, a religious organization, after-school activities, the neighborhood, friends from out of town, friends involved in interests and hobbies; contacts made on the computer, each teacher, guidance counselor, and principal in your child's school, coworkers; anyone who currently works or in the past worked in your home who may know your child; and past employers.

Be sure to explain the seriousness of the situation; ask if anyone else they know is missing; and, in the case of friends, ask to speak to their families to corroborate the information given. Attempt to obtain information about your child using his or her Social Security number through the FBI, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Social Security Administration. Check religious cults or cult-awareness groups in your area for information. Children have also been known to follow their favorite musical group across the country or in some other way travel with other runaway children.

- **Recheck with your relatives** and be sure to include, if applicable, any stepfamily, relatives of a noncustodial family member, and members of a foster family. Again, be sure to explain the seriousness of the situation to each relative, and ask if anyone else they know is missing.

- **Check with other people in your community** who may have seen your child before he or she left or may have information about a "favorite" spot where he or she could have gone. Ask people such as employees on day and night shifts in your neighborhood, employees of local businesses, those who work at child-oriented organizations or clubs who may know where kids like to "hang out," current and past babysitters, mail carriers, and the family doctor. Also check with the armed forces if your child is of age.

- **Search for clues** in your child's room, school locker, journal, notes, letters, computer files, electronic mail, current and past telephone bills, bank account, automatic-teller-machine (ATM) transactions, and credit-card bills. Check with the motor vehicle licensing and registration bureau within your state, and other states, if your child is of age to drive. If your child has taken someone's car other than his or her own, consider reporting the vehicle as being stolen.

- **Publicize the case** by distributing fliers locally, countywide, statewide, nationwide, and internationally, if circumstances warrant, with a current photograph and description of your child along with any known information about the disappearance, using the format provided in this brochure.

Make certain your fliers include a telephone number along with the area code of the local law-enforcement agency as well as the city and state. Local streets,