



Sheridan Police Department
Policies and Procedures
28.2
Chapter 28 – Call Response
Section 2 – Missing Persons

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Signature:

The Sheridan Police Department will investigate and document all reports of missing persons. Particular care will be exercised in cases of persons who may be mentally or physically impaired. Every child reported as missing will be considered at risk until information to the contrary is confirmed.

28.2.1 General Information

- A. A person is considered missing when his or her whereabouts is unknown and unexplained for a period of time that is considered unusual or suspicious in relation to that person's normal behavior patterns or routines.
- B. An adult who appears to be physically and mentally healthy, left home voluntarily, and there appears to be no evidence the person is in danger will not normally be considered a missing person. In these instances, the reporting officer should explain to the complainant that the police have no authority to compel the adult to return home. While these situations may not always merit investigative resources, the complaint shall still be documented in an incident report.
- C. The role of the responding officer is critical in identifying the circumstances surrounding missing persons and in identifying persons at risk. Officers shall conduct thorough investigations of missing persons, with particular care in instances:
 - 1. Involving missing children;
 - 2. Where there appears to be immediate danger or harm to missing persons including suicidal threats or when there is evidence of foul play;
 - 3. Involving people who through mental or physical impairment cannot care for themselves; and
 - 4. Involving elderly persons that are believed to be lost.
- D. Jurisdictional conflicts are to be avoided. If a missing person either resides in, or was last seen in Sheridan, a missing persons report will be completed by the responding officer. When in doubt as to the last known location of the person, officers shall investigate to the fullest extent possible and make a report.

28.2.2 Procedures/Responsibilities

- A. Dispatchers shall obtain initial information and dispatch an officer to the scene of the report.
- B. Dispatchers should obtain sufficient information to alert other officers about the circumstances of the person's disappearance.
- C. In the event of a reported possible abduction, the dispatcher will obtain and broadcast all available information on the suspect, vehicle and direction of travel.

- D. The assigned officer will respond promptly to the scene of the report. Officers will obtain all of the pertinent information including, but not limited to, the following:
1. Full name;
 2. Date of birth;
 3. Race;
 4. Sex;
 5. Height and weight;
 6. Hair and eye color;
 7. Scars, marks, tattoos and location of each;
 8. Clothing description, if known;
 9. Other identifying characteristics;
 10. Last known contact time and location;
 11. A recent photo of the person;
 12. Recent behavior of the missing person;
 13. A description of the habits, routines and personal interests of the person;
 14. Recent history of problems or trauma such as illness, domestic violence, substance abuse, history of mental illness, use of prescription drugs;
 15. A list of any personal belongings, money and other valuables that might also be missing; and
 16. Extent of any search conducted for the missing person.
 17. Cellular telephone number and carrier information.
- E. As part of the preliminary investigation, the responding officer will, at a minimum:
1. Broadcast to all units, the person's name, age, physical description, clothing description, point last seen and any other specific information that might assist in locating the person;
 2. Contact friends or witnesses and check possible locations obtained through statements by the complainant or witnesses;
 3. Promptly notify his or her immediate supervisor if information is obtained indicating the reported person falls under the criteria of section 28.2.1.C.
- F. The supervisor will notify the patrol operations commander when a reported person falls under the definition of section 28.2.1.C or when the time of day, weather conditions and/or length of time missing mandates immediate action be taken.
- G. The patrol operations bureau commander will make a judgment as to further manpower needs.
- H. As soon as possible, the responding officer will submit the known information to communications staff for the information to be entered into NCIC or Wyoming Highway Patrol's Endangered Person Alert (EPA).
- I. After an investigator has been assigned to the case, the investigator shall contact the reporting party. During this follow-up interview, the investigator will ensure the reporting party receives contact information so they may report additional information or receive information concerning the status of the case. The department may assign a person to act as a liaison with the victim's family and maintain routine ongoing contact with the missing person's closest relative(s) concerning the progress of the investigation.
- J. Ongoing investigations of missing persons may require specific additional actions when appropriate, such as:
1. Contacting hospitals and/or coroner's offices;
 2. Providing identification and related information to other law enforcement agencies;

3. Providing information to local news media;
 4. Preparing social media alerts with a picture of the missing person and descriptive information; and
 5. Obtaining dental chart records, DNA, and/or fingerprints.
- K. If an officer or investigator locates a subject that has been reported as missing, the locating officer shall:
1. If a competent adult missing person is located, officers shall advise the person that he or she was the subject of a missing-person investigation and:
 - a. Ascertain if the person wishes his or her family or the reporting party notified of his or her whereabouts; and
 - b. Arrange to notify the reporting party or family member, if permitted.
 2. Contact the reporting party or a responsible person to whom the found person may be released.
 3. If there are circumstances which lead the officer to believe that releasing the person would not be in the person's best interest, the officer should make other arrangements for the person's safety.
 4. Returned missing persons will be questioned to establish the circumstances surrounding their disappearance and whether criminal activity was involved.
 5. Cancel requests to locate the person. If the individual was entered into NCIC, the entry shall be removed.

28.2.3 Missing Children

- A. There are four types of missing juvenile cases: the non-family abduction case, the family abduction case, the runaway, or the lost child case.
1. See section 28.3 for abduction cases.
 2. The runaway child incident involves a child who could be in great danger depending upon factors such as age, maturity and intelligence.
 3. The lost child incident generally involves a child who is dependent upon a parent's direct care due to young age, maturity or diminished mental or physical capacity.
- B. Officers taking initial missing children reports will obtain sufficient information from the person making the report to properly classify the incident and initiate an appropriate response. In addition to information listed in section 28.2.2.D the officer should obtain:
1. The apparent reason for the juvenile's disappearance;
 2. Whether the subject has been missing on prior occasions and where the subject was located;
 3. Whether the juvenile was recently involved in a crisis or traumatic situation, such as an altercation or domestic incident;
 4. Whether the missing juvenile is on medication, including the reason for the medication;
 5. Signs of behavioral problems,
 6. Any current custody disputes involving the child; and
 7. The name and location of the school attended by the missing juvenile.
- C. Officers will be alert for information that may suggest an abusive home environment or a dysfunctional family situation.
- D. Officers should obtain permission to search the home or building where the child was last seen. An immediate, thorough search of the missing child's home will be conducted even if the

child was reported missing from a different location. If the child is not located at the home or last seen location, a thorough search of the neighborhood will be conducted. Searches should include any closed or locked spaces or rooms such as vehicles, closets or chests, outbuildings such as sheds or garages, and any other places of concealment. Searching of neighbor's homes should be done when permission has been granted.

- E. Missing persons under the age of twenty-one (21) will be entered into NCIC within two (2) hours.
- F. Reporting officers will explain to the parent or legal guardian that if the juvenile is located outside the geographic boundaries of Sheridan, they will be obligated to arrange and pay the costs of transporting the juvenile home. The reporting officer will obtain the signature of a parent or legal guardian to acknowledge his or her agreement with this requirement.