



Sheridan Police Department
Policies and Procedures
28.3
Chapter 28 – Call Response
Section 3 – Child Abduction

Date: January 1, 2013
Revised: 07/10/2020 & 06/17/2022

Signature:

Child abduction cases shall receive a complete, thorough, and timely investigation.

28.3.1 Initial Response

- A. The purpose of the initial response is to gather sufficient information to determine what occurred. The accuracy of this determination or assessment is critical in that an actual abduction requires prompt and detailed investigation.
- B. A rapid and thorough investigation may develop additional information that will indicate that the matter is not an abduction. It may be a pretense to cover up a homicide or domestic problem of the reported missing victim, or a child may be lost, injured, or has run away.
- C. It is important to remember that both the last place the child was reported to have been seen, and the child's residence are both potential crime scenes. Officers shall minimize the amount of activity at both scenes to prevent potential evidence from being destroyed. Officers should direct supportive family and friends to gather at a different location than the victim's house.
- D. The initial assessment should include the following pertinent considerations:
 - 1. Witnesses' accounts of the incident (if any);
 - 2. Victim's age (toddlers do not run away but can wander and become lost);
 - 3. Activity the victim was engaged in when last seen;
 - 4. History of disappearances;
 - 5. Prior history of the family (child abuse/neglect calls, disturbances); and
 - 6. Previous similar incidents in the area that were reported to police (i.e. - attempted abductions, prowlers, suspicious persons).

28.3.2 Receipt of Initial Complaint

- A. Dispatchers' Responsibilities
 - 1. Dispatchers need to obtain the basic facts from the caller to include a brief description of the victim, suspects, and any vehicles involved and assign an officer to handle the call.
 - 2. Broadcast all critical details to other officers and other agencies and consider using the National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (N.L.E.T.S.) for regional and national notification.
- B. Initial Officer's Responsibilities
 - 1. The initial officer should verify the accuracy of the complaint information, description of the victim, circumstances at the time of the disappearance, health, and custody status of the child.

2. The initial officer should determine what has already been done to locate the missing child, noting the nature of these efforts and the complainant's disposition or level of emotion (i.e. - frantic, concerned).
3. Conduct a search of the immediate area, especially areas where the child may hide, including areas inside of the victim's residence.
4. Locate any witness(es) to the incident, to include the complainant and the last person to have had contact with the victim. Separate the witnesses and conduct interviews comparing details known to each individual.
5. Identify the exact place the victim was last seen and secure the scene until it can be searched and examined for possible evidence.
6. Identify and secure the areas where the child regularly visits or plays as a potential crime scene or source of relevant information.
7. Determine the time frame from when the victim was last seen and when the victim was discovered missing. This "window of opportunity" is critical (realize that persons responsible for a child may attempt to reduce the window of opportunity). Keep the window of opportunity in mind when conducting interviews of possible witnesses.
8. Evaluate all information gathered noting any discrepancies or conflicting information. Attempt to immediately resolve differences.
9. Based upon the information developed, make an initial assessment as to the type of incident: abduction, parental kidnapping, runaway, or possibly a false report to conceal some other type of incident (i.e. - homicide, accidental death, or other problems).
10. If not enough information is developed to formulate an assessment as to the type of incident, treat the disappearance as an abduction until information is developed to suggest otherwise.
11. Update local and regional broadcasts and ensure information about the missing child is entered into the NCIC missing person files.
12. Notify and request response of a supervisor upon initial determination of an abduction.

C. Initial Follow-Up

1. The initial officer should request additional personnel as needed to assist with the investigation including supervisory personnel and/or detectives.
2. Establish a command center separate from the crime scene and/or victim's residence. Initiate the incident command system.
3. Brief responding units with complete details as known and update dispatch as to new pertinent information.

D. Patrol Supervisor's Responsibilities

1. Assign personnel to initiate a search including a neighborhood canvas.
2. Assign personnel to secure any and all possible crime scenes.
3. Assign personnel to establish and maintain liaison with the victim's family and initiate a detailed account of the victim's lifestyle and personality to assist in determining the nature of the disappearance, the risk level of the victim, and the type of person who could have committed the crime. (Refer to section 28.3.5).
4. Ensure that documentation is kept in regards to all personnel on sites and their assignments.
5. Review all developed information.

6. Determine what additional resources are needed and assign personnel to contact and obtain resources.
7. Ensure all information on the victim is accurately entered and updated into the NCIC missing person files.

28.3.3 Motivation for Abductions

Personnel need to keep an open mind about possible motivations for child abductions to include:

- A. Sexual - Children abducted primarily for sexual gratification of the offender.
- B. Killing - Children abducted to be killed by the offender. For some individuals, the act of killing itself may bring arousal or gratification.
- C. Non-Traditional – Usually very young children abducted predominately by women to fill a perceived void in the offender's life.
- D. Ransom - Children abducted to obtain financial benefit from the victim's family.
- E. Profit – Children abducted to obtain financial benefit from a third party.
- F. Family – Children abducted by a relative.
- G. Miscellaneous – Children abducted for a wide variety of reasons related to criminal activities. Common examples include crimes such as stealing a vehicle with the children in it, taking a child as a hostage to facilitate escape, and abducting a child in retaliation for a personal or criminal dispute or to prevent testimony in court.

28.3.4 Searches

- A. Searches are of two types, crime scene search and general area search. All searches must be well coordinated, controlled, and conducted preferably by personnel trained in search and rescue techniques. If volunteers are used, they must be closely supervised and their actions documented. The identity of all participating personnel should be verified and recorded to include the areas they searched and the times that they searched.
- B. Crime scene search
 1. The goal of any crime scene search is to properly document, collect, and analyze all items of physical evidence within a targeted area. Each crime scene investigation should incorporate the general categories of documentation listed below:
 - a. Documentation of all major events, times, and movements related to the crime scene effort.
 - b. Documentation of the general appearance of the crime scene as it is initially observed.
 - c. A photographic log providing a detailed description of each photograph.
 - d. A crime scene diagram documenting the location of each item of recovered physical evidence.
 - e. An evidence recovery log documenting the collection of each item of seized physical evidence.
- C. Crime scene search areas consist of the abduction site or if unknown, the area the victim was last seen, the victim's residence to include his or her bedroom, the evidence recovery sites, areas of any documented sighting of the victim, and if applicable, searches of the offender's residence, vehicles, storage area, and other places that the offender is known to have access to.
 1. Victim's Residence/Room
 - a. Process for physical evidence to include latent fingerprints, fibers, forensic type of evidence and weapons.

- b. Attempt to obtain samples of the victim's hair (hair brushes, hooded clothing, hats, pillow cases).
 - c. Attempt to obtain unwashed clothing of the victim's for possible forensic evidence.
 - d. If known fingerprints of the victim are unavailable, attempt to develop latent prints from items known to have been handled by the victim.
 - e. Obtain elimination fingerprints from anyone known to have access to that area.
- 2. Abduction and Recovery Site
 - a. Seal off and restrict access, logging identities of all persons entering the area.
 - b. Process for physical evidence to include latent fingerprints, forensic type of evidence, weapons.
- 3. Subject Search
 - a. Obtain known samples of blood, saliva, hair, and pubic hair, fingernail scraping, dental impressions, photographs.
 - b. Obtain fingerprints (offender's major case prints and presence of victim's latent prints).
 - c. Process the offender's residence, storage areas, vehicles (including rentals and any other vehicles the offender may have had access to), and trash containers for physical evidence to include latent fingerprints, forensic type evidence, and weapons. Search employment sites to include lockers, vehicles, and computers.
 - d. Seize any available computer logs, diaries, articles of interest (newspaper clippings, etc.), video recordings, photographs, negatives, address books, receipts, credit card receipts and records, telephone billings, gasoline receipts, and cash withdrawals.
 - e. Search for clothing, especially any matching eye witness account of what the offender was wearing at the time of the incident (any evidence of laundering clothes or disposal of the same).
 - f. Check for recent sales, repair, and maintenance of vehicles, including recent cleaning of exterior and interior.
 - g. Consider additional forensic technology that may not have been available during initial crime scene search (alternate light sources, etc.)
- D. The general area of search includes any uninhabited area not far from the victim's residence or the area the victim was last seen, including bodies of waters and other areas that might attract curious children (vacant building, holes, underpasses, neighbor's backyard), neighborhood hang-outs, abandoned vehicles, and secluded area the offender(s) could have used to assault and/or dispose of the victim. General area searches should:
 - 1. If possible, be completed by trained search and rescue teams.
 - 2. Use a systematic approach.
 - 3. Be conducted after K-9 units have completed their searches.
 - 4. Use high ground or aerial resources to oversee the search area.
 - 5. Include the search of dumpsters and coordination with trash companies for information about trash collection.
 - 6. Documentation of the search and any recovered evidence.
 - 7. Documentation of all search participants.

28.3.5 Detailed History

- A. A detailed account of the victim's lifestyle and personality assists in determining the nature of the disappearance, the risk level of the victim, and the type of person who could have committed the crime. Complete information regarding the victim's physical description, normal behavior patterns, the family dynamics, and known friends and acquaintances should be obtained as soon as possible.
- B. Physical Characteristics
 - 1. Obtain a complete detailed description of the victim, including birth marks, scars, tattoos, and peculiarities.
 - 2. Obtain detailed description of all items of last known clothing, jewelry worn, or personal belongings (such as backpacks or purse), including brand name, size, and date and location purchased.
 - 3. Obtain current photographs or recent video recordings.
 - 4. Document any recent physical changes.
 - 5. Determine if the victim has any disabilities or injuries.
 - 6. Obtain medical and dental records to include x-rays, eyeglass prescriptions, and any medication being taken at the time of the abduction.
 - 7. Determine normal style of dress.
- C. Behavior and Personality
 - 1. Develop and verify detailed timeline of victim's last known activities up to the time noticed missing.
 - 2. Determine habits, hobbies, interests, and favorite activities.
 - 3. Note any recent changes in behavior or activity patterns, any unusual recent events, or recent stressors (failed relationships, pregnancies, school problems, etc.).
 - 4. Identify normal activity patterns to include areas the victim frequents or in which he or she regularly plays.
 - 5. Identify and separately interview close friends, school mates, teachers, class counselors, church youth leaders, and other significant persons.
 - 6. Determine verbal skills and how the victim normally interacts with others.
 - 7. Determine any history of drug or alcohol abuse or gang activities.
 - 8. Identify and interview boyfriends and girlfriends.
 - 9. Identify memberships to any clubs, sports teams, or other organizations.
 - 10. Obtain and review personal writings, diaries, drawings, school work, including any entries on a personal computer or interest in or interaction with social network sites. Search lockers at school if applicable.
 - 11. Determine any history of running away or discontentment with home life.
 - 12. Identify and interview employment associates or co-workers.
 - 13. Determine the victim's history of victimization (being the victim of other crimes).
 - 14. Determine victim's online habits to include social media and gaming accounts.
- D. Family Dynamics
 - 1. Identify and separately interview all immediate and extended family members.
 - 2. Determine who has normal parental control over the victim and the relationship and location of the same.
 - 3. Determine the relationship of the victim with the immediate family members.
 - 4. Prepare a detailed timeline of the significant family member's whereabouts during the "window of opportunity".

5. Determine if there are any custody visitations disputes between parents.
6. Document the parental reaction to the disappearance.
7. Determine parents' employment and interview employers and co-workers as to recent behavior of parents.
8. Determine the level of parental supervision normally provided to the victim.
9. Determine any history of drug or alcohol abuse by family members.
10. Identify recent stressors within the family (termination of employment, separation, death, fight).
11. Identify any criminal history activity and/or psychiatric history of all family members.
12. Determine family financial status including any large or recent debts and insurance policies on victims.
13. Identify and interview all babysitters / caretakers of the victim.
14. Consider and evaluate the culture of the family and any bearing that may have on the incident.
15. Determine whether or not the Department of Family Services or similar agencies have responded to the residence and if so, the nature of the incident.

28.3.6 Liaison with the Victim's Family

- A. The responding law enforcement officials must keep in mind the emotional needs of the victim's family. A contact person will be appointed to establish and maintain appropriate liaison with the family (not to be the lead investigator).
- B. Regularly update the family as to the status of the investigation within the boundaries of investigative integrity and legal properties.
- C. Address the emotional aspects the family is experiencing, furnishing counseling if applicable and contact the Victim/Witness Assistance Program.
- D. Consent from the victim's family is necessary for initiating some of the following techniques. Absent consent a court order should be sought.
 1. Install a trap or trace on the family's phone.
 2. Establish a secured tactical phone inside the residence for law enforcement use when applicable.
 3. Record and document all incoming calls.
 4. Retain a log of all activities and events.
 5. Discuss family role and possibly ransom payoff.
 6. Monitor and coordinate the activities of support agencies.

28.3.7 Neighborhood Investigations

The objective of a neighborhood investigation is to identify and interview, in person, all individuals within the abduction or last known sighting area during the "window of opportunity". Unless a neighborhood investigation is conducted immediately and thoroughly, valuable information that may assist in the resolution of the disappearance may be lost.

- A. Conduct a neighborhood investigation at each location the child is known to have been (abduction, recovery, disposal site) and any place the child was reported to have been seen or was likely to have visited.
- B. Conduct the neighborhood investigation as soon as possible upon receipt of the missing person complaint to verify and document the last sighting of the victim.
- C. Clearly define parameters for the neighborhood as to what areas to be included.

- D. Interview each occupant of a residence separately from other occupants.
- E. Obtain consent to conduct a search of the residence and vehicles for the child emphasizing this is for the safe return of the child.
- F. Determine the dynamics of the neighborhood including recent criminal activity in the area.
- G. Develop the identity of current and recently relocated neighbors or any relevant criminal history and/or unusual behavior of the same.
- H. Identify guests of neighbors who frequently visit and/or have extended stays.
- I. Identify all registered or known sex offenders residing in or adjacent to the area.
- J. Identify area businesses (bars, liquor stores, convenience stores, banks) that use video equipment for security purposes. Review recordings for possible lead information.
- K. Document the presence of all vehicles within the area. Conduct vehicle registration inquiries on these vehicles and match the names of the registered owners against the neighborhood investigation interviews.
- L. Identify any contractors or businesses recently conducting work projects in the area.

28.3.8 Media Strategies

- A. The media can provide valuable assistance in the resolution of a child abduction case. Positive relationships will minimize criticism of investigative efforts, deter untimely interviews with the victim's family and/or witnesses and discourage the premature release of information.
- B. Utilize the media as appropriate to immediately disseminate posters and descriptions of missing children.
- C. Coordinate all press releases through the public information officer.
- D. Schedule regular briefings to deter attempts by the media to discover details that might obstruct investigative activities.
- E. Release only details of the investigative activities that are deemed essential to the recovery of the child. Always consider the risk to the child created by releasing information.

28.3.9 AMBER Alerts or EPA (Endangered Person Alert)

- A. The investigating officer in consultation with the supervisor shall determine if activation of the AMBER Alert system is appropriate.
- B. Wyoming's AMBER plan (America's Missing Broadcast Emergency Response) is a voluntary partnership between law enforcement and broadcasters to send out an emergency alert when a child has been abducted and it is believed the child's life is in grave danger.
- C. The AMBER plan is only activated by law enforcement and only for serious child abduction cases. It is not for runaways or custody disputes unless the circumstances are life threatening for the child. The following is required for activation:
 - 1. Law enforcement believes a child has been abducted;
 - 2. The child is seventeen (17) years of age or younger;
 - 3. Law enforcement believes the victim is facing imminent danger, serious bodily injury or death; and
 - 4. Sufficient information is available to disseminate to the public that could assist in locating the child, suspect or suspect vehicle.
- D. AMBER alerts shall be requested by submitting the AA form provided by Wyoming Highway Patrol, located in the communications center, to the Wyoming Highway Patrol's dispatch center.

- E. Circumstances involving a missing child that do not meet the AMBER Alert criteria may still qualify for an EPA. Supervisors should consider an EPA. EPAs are also coordinated through the Wyoming Highway Patrol.