

UW Whitewater Police



Missing Person - Child

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I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to guide all members of UW-Whitewater Police Department (UWWPD) in their roles and necessary actions during a missing child investigation.

II. Definitions

Missing Child: A missing child is anyone that is younger than 18 years of age and whose whereabouts are unknown to his or her custodial parent, guardian or responsible party, such as camp staff.

Non-Family Abduction: Involves a child who has been wrongfully taken by a nonfamily perpetrator through the use of physical force, persuasion or threat of bodily harm.

Family Abduction: Involves a known family member who takes a child in violation of a court order or other legitimate custodial right; or a member of the child's family, or someone acting on behalf of a family member, takes or fails to return a child.

Runaway: A child, often a teenager, leaves home voluntary for a variety of reasons. This would include any child 17 years of age or younger.

Juvenile: Under WI State Statute a person that is under 18 years of age may be reported as missing by their parent or legal guardian.

III. Policy

It shall be the policy of UW-Whitewater Police Department (UWWPD) to thoroughly investigate all reports of missing or unidentified children. Additionally, every child reported missing to this agency will be considered at risk until significant information to the contrary is confirmed.

UWWPD will respond swiftly to any report of a missing or unidentified child. They will take information down on the circumstances in which the child is missing. There is no requirement that a certain amount of time to pass before the department begins an investigation. This agency will also follow Policy and Procedures developed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

UW Whitewater Police

IV. Procedure

- A. **Reporting a Missing Child:** The National Child Search Assistance Act (NCSAA) and the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act require an immediate response to a report of a missing child without any observance of a waiting period. This includes anyone up to age 18 years of age. An NCIC entry must be made *within 2 hours* of gaining the information necessary for an NCIC entry.
- B. **Jurisdiction:** Jurisdictional conflicts are to be avoided when a child is reported missing.
 - 1. If a missing child either resides in, or was last seen in UWWPD jurisdiction, this agency will immediately initiate the required reporting process.
 - 2. If a child resides in this jurisdiction and was last seen in another jurisdiction, but the law enforcement agency covering that jurisdiction chooses not to take a missing-child report, UWWPD will assume reporting and investigative responsibility.
- C. **At Risk Missing Children:** A missing child will be considered at risk when one or more of the risk factors listed below are present:
 - 1. 13 years of age or younger.
 - 2. Believed to or determined to be experiencing one or more of the circumstances below:
 - a. Has mental or behavioral issues.
 - b. Is drug dependent, including prescribed medication and/or illegal substances, and the dependency is potentially life-threatening.
 - c. Has been absent from home for more than 24 hours before being reported to law enforcement as missing.
 - d. Is in a life-threatening situation (high traffic area, severe or inclement weather).
 - e. Is in the company of others who could endanger his or her welfare.
 - f. Is absent in a way inconsistent with established pattern of behavior and the deviation cannot be readily explained.
 - g. Is involved in a situation causing a reasonable person to conclude the child should be considered at risk.
- D. **Interagency Response/Alerting:** If appropriate, existing interagency response protocol, including the AMBER Alert system and or other immediate community notification methods should be used, i.e. crime alerts, TIME system message.
 - 1. Amber Alert: If it has been determined that the child was abducted and there is sufficient suspect information to provide to the public, the State/National Amber Alert System shall be activated.
 - h. The process for initiating the Amber Alert shall be followed. This can be found at the following website: <https://amberalert.widj.gov/>. The Communications Center shall provide the required information to the Wisconsin State Patrol Traffic Management Center who then contacts a DCI Supervisor for approval and activation. Amber Alert is not to be used for

UW Whitewater Police

runaways or family abductions unless the child's life is in danger. All of the following conditions are required prior to initiating the Amber Alert System:

- i. Child must be 17 years of age or younger;
 - ii. Child must be in danger of serious bodily harm or death.
 - iii. Initiating agency must have enough descriptive information about the child, the suspect(s) and/or the suspect vehicle(s) to believe an immediate broadcast alert shall help locate the child.
- i. Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) must be contacted to cancel the alert within one hour of locating the subject of the alert. The supervisor shall notify the Communication Center or other designee to cancel the alert.
2. Data Systems Entry
 - a. Upon report of a missing person, the appropriate entries shall be made in local, state, and national information databases in accordance with established procedures (NCIC and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children).
 - b. For missing persons under 21 years of age, entries should always be made in CIB and NCIC.
- E. **Call Taker Duties:** Upon receiving an initial call regarding a possible missing, runaway or abducted person, the call taker shall broadcast all information received to police.
1. The call taker shall facilitate communications between all responding units.
 2. If the call comes in to the UWWPD non-emergency line during business hours, administrative staff shall forward the call to police dispatch.
- F. **Initial Responding Officer/Detective Duties:**
1. The initial responding officer should immediately speak with the complainant, in person if possible, and all other available officers will respond to the general area.
 2. The officer will interview the parents or person who made the initial report about the circumstances of the missing child separately.
 3. The officer will obtain a detailed description of the missing child, including clothing last seen in, height, weight, hair color, and eye color and then update other officers of this information. The officer should also gather photo(s) of the missing child.
 4. Attempt to verify that the child is, in fact, missing.
 - a. The home or last location the child was seen at should be checked to make sure the child is not hiding or has become trapped in an area where a distraught searcher may have missed.
 - b. In the case of a child at a camp or event at the campus, check with legal guardian(s) and emergency contacts that the person was not picked up.
 5. Verify the child's custody status to ascertain if the custody may have played a role in this incident, such as being taken by another parent or the child went to another parent's address.
 - a. If questions concerning parental custody arise in relation to a missing child it shall be the policy of this agency to accept the report of a missing child even if custody has not been formally established.

UW Whitewater Police

- b. Reporting parties shall be encouraged to obtain legal custody proof as soon as possible, however, since the safety of the missing child is paramount, members of this agency will open a case when it can be shown the child has been removed, without explanation, from his or her usual place of residence.
 - c. If custody has not been established by the court, then the law enforcement responsibility is to ensure the child is safe only.
6. Identify the circumstance or the missing episode to see if any risk factors are present.
7. Determine when, where and by whom the missing child was last seen. This information can narrow down the timeframe of the missing, get witnesses that may have seen information or comments the child may have made.
8. Interview the individual(s) who last had contact with the missing child. Officers should watch for an inconsistency in version of events and possible deceptive behavior.
9. Make an initial assessment of the type of incident.
10. Obtain a description of the suspected abductors, suspicious people in the area or other relevant information, such as photos of possible suspects and video evidence from the area.
11. Determine the correct NCIC Missing Person File category and ensure the notification is promptly transmitted. (Categories are juvenile, disability, endangered, involuntary and catastrophe).
12. Provide detailed description information to Dispatch for broadcast updates. This should include City of Whitewater Police, but may be expanded to other areas depending on circumstances.
13. Identify and separately interview everyone at the scene.
14. Conduct an immediate, thorough search of the scene and surrounding area. The starting areas should be locations that pose a risk for the child, such as old cars, appliances, water, etc.
15. Conduct a canvass of the area for anyone that might have information related to this investigation but might not know it, such as seeing a car that did not belong in the neighborhood earlier in the day
16. Seal/protect scene, area of child's home and areas of interest as potential crime scenes.
17. Inquire if the child has access to the internet, cell phone and/or other communication devices. Determine if they have these devices or any clues on where they are going, such as a message on a computer about meeting up with someone.
18. Complete a detailed report off all the above gathered information and actions taken.
19. Complete any and all follow up to the investigation as needed and complete a detailed report of all actions taken.

G. Reporting Incident to a Supervisor and Supervisor Actions

UW Whitewater Police

1. The initial officer should update the on-duty or on-call supervisor as soon as possible if any risk factors are present. When in doubt, contact the supervisor.
 2. The supervisor should be updated on the circumstances of the missing person, away from family and friends, so that a decision can be made about what resources and actions should occur next.
 3. The supervisor should contact the Chief, or designee, as soon as possible so university contacts can be made.
 4. Consider activation of the AMBER Alert system and/or other immediate community notification methods.
 5. The supervisor or designated officer should establish a command post and staging areas in the vicinity to run the operation, if appropriate.
 6. The supervisor should organize and coordinate search efforts geographically with other responding agencies.
 7. The supervisor will verify all required notifications have been made, such as NCIC entry and legal guardians contacted.
 8. The supervisor will establish a liaison with the family.
 9. The supervisor will ensure all policies and procedures are observed.
 10. The supervisor will manage the media relations, by setting up a media area, if appropriate, and contacting University Marketing and Communications (UMC).
- H. **Unidentified Child:** An officer/detective assigned to the report on an unidentified person, whether living or deceased, who appears to be a child shall:
1. Obtain a complete description of the person.
 2. Enter the unidentified child's description into the NCIC Unidentified Person File.
 3. Use all available resources in aid in identification of the child.
 4. Cancel all notifications after identification is confirmed.
- I. **Recovery/Return of Child:** An officer assigned to the recovery or return of the child shall:
1. Identify that the located child is, in fact, the reported missing child.
 2. Secure medical services, if appropriate.
 3. Arrange the return of the child to his or her legal guardian, or appropriate children's shelter.
 4. In the case of a runaway from another jurisdiction or from out-of-state who has been located and from who a warrant exists or from whom an NCIC missing person "hit" is verified, place the child in custody and transport him or her to appropriate facility for admission.
 5. Complete the appropriate supplemental reports and cancel all notifications, Crime Alert, NCIC, AMBER Alert.