

MISSING CHILDREN

EVERETT POLICE DEPARTMENT POLICY & PROCEDURE NO. 1.25	ISSUE DATE: 16 Aug 2012
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MASSACHUSETTS POLICE ACCREDITATION STANDARDS REFERENCED:	REVISION DATE:

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines and responsibilities regarding the Everett Police Department's response to reports of missing children

II. POLICY

A. It shall be the policy of the Everett Police Department to thoroughly investigate all reports of missing children. Additionally every child reported missing to this agency will be considered **at risk** until significant information to the contrary is confirmed.

B. Jurisdictional conflicts are to be avoided when a child is reported missing. If a missing child either resides in, or was last seen in this jurisdiction, this department will immediately initiate the required reporting process. 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, this department will assume reporting and investigative responsibility.

C. Questions concerning parental custody occasionally arise in relation to missing-child reports. It shall be the policy of the Everett Police Department to accept the report of a missing child even if custody has not been formally

established. Reporting parties shall be encouraged to obtain legal custody as soon as possible; however, since the safety of the missing child(ren) is paramount, members of the department will open a case when it can be shown the child has been removed, without explanation, from his or her usual place of residence. If custody has not been established by the Court, then the law-enforcement responsibility is to ensure the child is safe only.

III. DEFINITIONS

A. The term **missing child** refers to a person who is

1. Younger than 18 years of age and
2. Whose whereabouts are unknown to his or her custodial parent, guardian, or responsible party.

B. A missing child will be considered **at risk** when one or more of the **risk factors** noted in paragraph C are present.

C. **Risk factors** refer to a missing child who is

1. 13 years of age or younger or
2. Believed or determined to be experiencing one or more of the circumstances noted below.
 - a) Is out of the zone of safety for his or her age and developmental stage.
 - b) Has mental or behavioral disabilities
 - c) Is drug dependent, including prescribed medication and/or illegal substances, and the dependency is potentially life-threatening.
 - d) Has been absent from home for more than 24 hours before being reported to law enforcement as missing.
 - e) Is in a life-threatening situation.
 - f) Is in the company of others who could endanger his or her welfare.
 - g) Is absent in a way inconsistent with established patterns of behavior and the deviation cannot be readily explained.
 - h) Is involved in a situation causing a reasonable person to conclude the child should be considered at risk.

D. Actions upon determination of **risk factors**.

1. If it is determined **risk factors** are involved in the report of a missing child, the child will be considered **at risk**, and an expanded investigation, including the use of all appropriate resources, will immediately commence.
2. If appropriate, existing interagency response protocols — including the **AMBER Alert** system and/or other immediate community notification methods, if available — should be considered. While AMBER Alerts are typically for abducted children, there are other tools available such as the Endangered Missing Advisory.

IV. PROCEDURES

A. **Dispatch Personnel/Headquarters Personnel** receiving the report of a missing child shall:

1. Determine if circumstances of the report meet the definition of a missing child as set forth in Section III.
2. Dispatch, in a prompt manner, an officer to the scene of the report.
3. Notify a supervisor.
4. Transmit the appropriate radio alerts and other notifications.
5. Search agency records for related information, specifically any records such as those pertaining to the family, the place where the child was last seen, and the child's residence.
6. Safeguard all pertinent records.

B. The **initial officer or first responding officer** shall:

1. Respond promptly to the scene of the report.
2. Interview the parent(s) or person who made the initial report.
3. Obtain a detailed description of the missing child including photo(s) and videos.
4. Confirm the child is in fact missing.
5. Verify the child's custody status.
6. Identify the circumstances of the missing episode.
7. Determine when, where, and by whom the missing child was last seen.
8. Interview the individual(s) who last had contact with the missing child.
9. Identify the missing child's zone of safety for his or her age and developmental stage.

10. Make an initial assessment of the type of incident.
11. Obtain a description of the suspected abductor(s) and other pertinent information
12. Provide detailed descriptive information to communications unit for broadcast updates.
13. Identify and separately interview everyone at the scene.
14. Conduct an immediate, thorough search of the scene.
15. Seal/protect scene, area of child's home, and areas of interest as potential crime scenes.
16. Inquire if the child has access to the Internet, cell phone, and/or other communications device
17. Prepare necessary reports and complete appropriate forms.
18. Ensure missing child is entered into NCIC as soon as possible.

C. The **OIC/Patrol Supervisor** shall:

1. Obtain a briefing and written reports from the first responder(s) and other agency personnel at the scene.
2. Determine if additional personnel and resources are needed to assist in the investigation.
3. Consider activation of the **AMBER Alert** system and/or other immediate community notification methods (see GO 04-001)
4. Establish a command post.
5. Organize and coordinate search efforts.
6. Ensure all required notifications have been made.
7. Establish a liaison with the victim family
8. Confirm all agency policies and procedures are observed.

D. The **investigator** assigned shall:

1. Obtain a briefing from agency personnel at the scene.
2. Verify the accuracy of all descriptive information.
3. Initiate a neighborhood investigation.
4. Obtain a brief history of recent family dynamics.
5. Explore the basis for any conflicting information.
6. Complete all remaining key investigative and coordination steps.

7. Implement effective case management.
8. Evaluate the need for additional resources and specialized services.
9. Update descriptive information.
10. Monitor media relations.

E. An officer assigned to the report of an **unidentified person**, whether living or deceased, who appears to be a child, shall:

1. Obtain a complete description.
2. Enter the unidentified child's description into the NCIC Unidentified Person File.
3. Use all available resources to aid in identification of the child.
4. Cancel all notifications after identification is confirmed.

F. An officer assigned to the **recovery or return** of a missing child shall:

1. Verify the located child is, in fact, the reported missing child.
2. Secure intervention services, if appropriate
3. Arrange the return of the child to his or her legal guardian or appropriate children's shelter in the case of a runaway or missing child from within department jurisdiction who has been located and who is not wanted on a warrant or other law violation.
4. Place the child in custody and transport him or her to the appropriate facility for admission in the case of a runaway from another jurisdiction or from out-of-state who has been located and for whom a warrant exists or for whom an NCIC missing-person "hit" is verified.
5. Complete the appropriate supplemental reports and cancel all outstanding notifications.