



• you are not alone; families can and do survive • there is no right or wrong way to respond; there is no right or wrong way to feel • hope is essential to your survival • to give your child the best chances of being found, you and law enforcement must treat one another as partners • base your relationship with law enforcement on mutual respect, trust, and honesty; however, you don't have to agree on every detail • trust your feelings, instincts, and gut reactions; share them with law enforcement so they can be checked out • don't be afraid to make suggestions or air differences of opinion • contact the media immediately; they can be a very effective tool in asking for help • if you are unable to speak alone, select someone to function as your media spokesperson • remember that you control the situation, the media do not control you • you have the right to say no to an interview • you have the right to refrain from answering questions if doing so makes you feel uncomfortable • you have the right to completely give your side of the story • you have the right to be treated with dignity and respect • let people know you love your child and need their help in finding and bringing your child home • hold a prayer or candlelight vigil • distributing pictures and information is an essential part of search and recovery • get as many people and organizations as possible to distribute your child's picture • plug into NCMEC's photo distribution services • place reward posters where those people most likely to have information can see them • the many offers of support will carry you through; when people ask what they can do, try to tell them something specific • don't be afraid to ask for what you need . . . people really do want to help • as long as you have specific tasks for volunteers to perform, they won't go away • asking volunteers to help relieves you of the burden of trying to do everything yourself, which you cannot • many organizations are poised to help you find your missing child • do everything you can to take care of yourself • it is okay, even necessary, to take a break from the stress for dinner and a walk • don't blame yourself . . . at any given moment, you are doing the best you possibly can • you do not have to be an "emotional rock" for extended family • seek peace and solace for yourself, encourage family members to do the same • a laugh can be as cleansing as a good cry • your child needs you to be strong • bring the needs of your other children into balance with those of your missing child • don't let your loss become a taboo subject • keep a notebook with you to record your thoughts and review it periodically • keep your focus and exercise caution • never stop looking

When Your Child Is Missing: *A Family Survival Guide*



OJJDP
REPORT

Contact Organizations

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children®

699 Prince Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-3175
800-THE-LOST® (800-843-5678) (Hotline for the
United States, Canada, and Mexico),
800-826-7653 (TTY), or 703-274-3900
703-274-2200 (Fax)
Internet: www.missingkids.com
CyberTipline: www.cybertipline.com

Branch Offices

California: 714-508-0150
Florida: 561-848-1900
Kansas City (MO): 816-756-5422
New York: 585-242-0900
South Carolina: 803-254-2326
Texas: 512-465-2156

Child Protection Division

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency
Prevention
Office of Justice Programs
U.S. Department of Justice
810 Seventh Street NW.
Washington, DC 20531
202-616-3637
202-307-2819 (Fax)
Internet: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp

Office for Victims of Crime

Office of Justice Programs
U.S. Department of Justice
810 Seventh Street NW.
Washington, DC 20531
202-307-5983
202-514-6383 (Fax)
Internet: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc

Federal Bureau of Investigation

See the front of your local telephone book for the
number of your local FBI Field Office.

FBI Headquarters

Special Investigations and Initiatives Unit
Crimes Against Children Unit
935 Pennsylvania Avenue NW.
Washington, DC 20535-0001
202-324-3666
202-324-2731 (Fax)

Association of Missing and Exploited Children's Organizations, Inc.

Internet: www.amecoinc.org

When Your
Child
Is Missing:
*A Family
Survival Guide*



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Office of Justice Programs
U.S. Department of Justice

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I remember standing in the middle
of the chaos thinking, I wish I had
a book to tell me what to do.

—Colleen Nick



Office of the Attorney General
Washington, D.C. 20530

Message From Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr.

Nothing is more important to parents than the safety and welfare of their children. When a child disappears, it is critically important for parents to know that there are resources readily available to help. Law enforcement officers, agencies with expertise in recovering missing children, family members, and neighbors are only some of the people who will do everything in their power to help in the search for a missing child.

When Your Child Is Missing: A Family Survival Guide is another resource that was created for this very purpose. It provides firsthand knowledge and sound advice about what to do when your child is missing, whom to contact, and how to best assist law enforcement.

The U.S. Department of Justice is committed to ensuring that this important work is readily available to every family that needs it. We offer this *Guide* as a practical tool, but also as a visible sign of our concern and support for all families who are working in partnership with their communities for their children's safe return.

Eric H. Holder, Jr.
Attorney General



U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Justice Programs

Office of the Assistant Attorney General

Washington, D.C. 20531

Message From Assistant Attorney General Laurie O. Robinson

As a parent, I cannot imagine anything more difficult than not knowing where your children are or how they are being treated. Every day across America, children are abducted by family members and acquaintances, and sometimes by strangers.

Families traumatized by abduction are faced with the simultaneous challenge of quickly marshaling all available resources to recover their missing child while dealing with the devastation of their loss.

When Your Child Is Missing: A Family Survival Guide was written 12 years ago by parents who had experienced firsthand the trauma of a missing child and who wanted to help other parents facing the same overpowering loss. To ensure that the information it provides is as helpful as possible, it has been thoroughly revised and updated.

I look forward to the day when we no longer have to search for missing children. But until that day arrives, I hope that the *Family Survival Guide* will continue to assist families in their time of greatest need.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "L. O. Robinson", is positioned above the printed name.

Laurie O. Robinson
Assistant Attorney General

Foreword

Each year, nearly 1.3 million children are reported missing. Although the unforeseen absence of a child is always upsetting, fortunately most missing children are returned home in a short period of time. This fact, however, provides little consolation for the parents of children whose whereabouts and welfare remain unknown.

Twelve years ago, *When Your Child Is Missing: A Family Survival Guide* was written by parents and family members who had experienced the loss of a child. The *Guide* provides helpful advice for parents whose children are missing and also offers encouragement and support.

The increased pervasiveness of online media has led to the victimization of a greater number of children via the Internet. It is important for parents to be adequately informed about the dangers their children face online. Accordingly, the *Family Survival Guide* has been updated to include current information on new technologies, particularly those that play a role in facilitating Internet crimes against children.

My heartfelt hope is that you never face the devastation of child abduction. For those who do, however, I hope that these pages prove to be of some assistance in helping you to find your way in such a difficult time.



Jeff Slowikowski

Acting Administrator

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Acknowledgments

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) is grateful to all of the people who gave their time, energy, and talent to developing this *Guide*, especially the following parents who know firsthand the pain, suffering, and hope of families with missing children:

Heather Cox and Marion Boburka, mother and grandmother, respectively, of Shelby Cox, who was found murdered on November 18, 1995.

Colleen Nick, mother of Morgan Nick, who has been missing since June 9, 1995.

Claudine and Don Ryce, parents of Jimmy Ryce, who was found murdered on December 9, 1995.

Patrick Sessions, father of Tiffany Sessions, who has been missing since February 9, 1989.

Patty Wetterling, mother of Jacob Wetterling, who has been missing since October 22, 1989.

This group of parents created this *Guide* as a labor of love and as a message of hope and encouragement for families whose children are still missing. Their courage and strength are greatly admired.

OJJDP also thanks the many professionals who have given their time and effort to find children who are missing, who have worked to prevent children from being abducted, and who have put together this *Guide* for families facing this crisis. This includes Tom Weeden, Nadia Tunstall, and Dave Peifer of Fox Valley Technical College and Nancy McBride of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. OJJDP also acknowledges and thanks the many individuals who painstakingly reviewed the *Guide* to make sure that it provides parents with the information they so desperately need during these crises. Special thanks also go to Ron Laney, Director of OJJDP's Child Protection Division, for his constant guidance, support, and commitment to missing children and their parents and who inspired the creation of this *Guide*.

We especially want to thank Claudine Ryce, the mother of Jimmy Ryce, who passed away in 2009. Her ongoing commitment to and compassion for protecting children provided much strength and hope for families throughout the nation. She will be eternally missed.

This *Guide* is dedicated to all the children who are separated from their families. Our hope is that you always know that the search will continue until you are found.

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Introduction

When your child is missing, your whole world seems to fall apart. You are bombarded by questions from friends, neighbors, the police, and the media and forced to make decisions that you never thought you would have to make. You feel desperate, confused, isolated. You may feel that you have nowhere to go for help or support.

Many parents who have faced similar crises have said that they wished they had a book to tell them where to turn when their child was missing. They felt that they were left on their own to figure out what to do. They longed for someone to give them direction or to tell them where to go for help and what needs to be done. They also wished they had known what to expect and how to respond.

This *Guide* was written by parents and family members who have experienced the disappearance of a child. It contains their combined advice concerning what you can expect when your child is missing, what you can do, and where you can go for help. It explains the role that various agencies and organizations play in the search for your missing child and discusses some of the important issues that you and your family need to consider. The first checklist, *What You Should Do When Your Child Is First Missing*, summarizes the most critical steps that parents should take when their child is first missing, including whom to call, what to do to preserve evidence, and where to turn for help.

The rest of the *Guide* is divided into seven chapters, each of which is structured to allow you to find the information you need quickly and easily. Each chapter explains both the short- and long-term issues and contains a checklist and chapter summary for later reference. Chapter 1, *The Search*, focuses on the search for your child and explains how you as a parent can best participate in the search.

Chapter 2, *Law Enforcement*, describes your relationship with law enforcement and offers tips that will help you work together effectively. Chapter 3, *The Media*, examines issues related to the media, including media packages, press conferences, and interviews. Chapter 4, *Photo and Flier Distribution*, offers suggestions for producing fliers about your child and for managing the photo and flier distribution process. Chapter 5, *Volunteers*, focuses on the many uses of volunteers—both trained and untrained—to help in the search and to provide for the needs of the family. Chapter 6, *Rewards and Donations*, discusses the use of rewards and the management of monetary donations. Chapter 7, *Personal and Family Considerations*, emphasizes the need to take care of yourself, your children, and members of your extended family. A list of recommended readings and a list of public and private resources appear at the back of the *Guide*.

It is important to note that there is no right or wrong way to respond to the disappearance of a child, nor is there a right or wrong way to feel. The path you follow must be right for you. What makes sense for you will be based on your needs, your experiences, and your circumstances. Our hope is that the *Guide* will help you to make informed decisions about what you do and how you go about it.

You may find that the information in this *Guide* is overwhelming right now. If so, ask family members, friends, or other support persons to read it for you. They can help you take the steps needed to help recover your missing child.

Finally, as hard as it may seem, try to remain hopeful. Remember that hope is more than a wish, helping you to clear this hurdle. Hope is essential to your survival.

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