

Missing Persons

316.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidance for handling missing person investigations.

316.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

At risk - A missing child who meets any of the following conditions (Md. Code FL § 9-402):

- (a) The child has not been the subject of a prior missing persons report.
- (b) The child suffers from a mental or physical handicap or illness.
- (c) The disappearance is of a suspicious or dangerous nature.
- (d) The person filing the report has reason to believe that the missing child may have been abducted.
- (e) The child has previously been the subject of a child abuse report filed with the state or a local law enforcement agency.
- (f) The missing child is under 17 years of age.
- (g) The missing child has not been located within 12 hours of the initial report.

Missing child - A person under the age of 18 who is the subject of a missing person report filed with a law enforcement agency in Maryland and whose location is unknown (Md. Code FL § 9-401).

Missing person - Any person who is reported missing to law enforcement when that person's location is unknown.

Missing person networks - Databases or computer networks that are available to law enforcement and are suitable for obtaining information related to missing person investigations. This includes the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), the Maryland Center for Missing and Unidentified Persons (MCMUP), and the Maryland Electronic Telecommunications Enforcement Resource System (METERS).

316.2 POLICY

The Elkton Police Department does not consider any report of a missing person to be routine and assumes that the missing person is in need of immediate assistance until an investigation reveals otherwise. Priority shall be given to missing person cases over property-related cases. Members will initiate an investigation into all reports of missing persons, regardless of the length of time the person has been missing.

316.3 REQUIRED FORMS AND DNA COLLECTION KITS

The Criminal Investigation Unit supervisor shall ensure the following forms and kits are developed and available:

- The State of Maryland Missing Person Report (SOMMPR) form

Missing Persons

- Missing person investigation checklist that provides investigation guidelines and resources that could be helpful in the early hours of a missing person investigation (including the steps to be taken as set forth in Md. Code FL § 9-402 regarding missing children) [See attachment: EPD Missing Child Investigation Checklist.pdf](#)
- Medical records release form
- Maryland State Police DNA collection kits
- Missing Persons Data Collection Entry Guide

316.4 ACCEPTANCE OF REPORTS

Any member encountering an individual who wishes to report a missing person or runaway shall render assistance without delay. This can be accomplished by accepting the report via telephone or in-person and initiating the investigation. Those members who do not take such reports or who are unable to give immediate assistance shall promptly dispatch or alert a member who can take the report (Md. Code FL § 9-402(e); Md. Code PS § 3-601).

A report shall be accepted in all cases and regardless of where the person was last seen, where the person resides or any question of jurisdiction.

When taking a missing person report, department members shall use the SOMMPR form (Md. Code PS § 3-602).

316.5 INITIAL INVESTIGATION

Officers or other members conducting the initial investigation of a missing person should take the following investigative actions, as applicable:

- (a) Respond to a dispatched call as soon as practicable.
- (b) Interview the reporting party and any witnesses to determine whether the person qualifies as a missing person and, if so, whether the person may be at risk.
- (c) Notify a supervisor immediately if there is evidence that a missing person is either at risk or may qualify for a public alert, or both (see the Public Alerts Policy).
- (d) Broadcast "Be on the Look-Out (BOLO) bulletin" if the person is under 17 years of age or there is evidence that the missing person is at risk. The BOLO should be broadcast as soon as practicable but in no event more than one hour after determining the missing person is under 17 years of age or may be at risk.
- (e) Ensure that entries are made into the appropriate missing person networks:
 1. Immediately, when the missing person is at risk (Md. Code FL § 9-402).
 2. In all other cases, as soon as practicable, but not later than two hours from the time of the initial report (34 USC § 41308).
- (f) Complete the appropriate report forms accurately and completely and initiate a search as applicable according to the facts.

Elkton Police Department

Elkton Police Department Policy Manual

Missing Persons

- (g) Collect and/or review:
 - 1. A photograph and fingerprint card of the missing person, if available.
 - 2. A voluntarily provided biological sample of the missing person, if available (e.g., toothbrush, hairbrush).
 - 3. Any documents that may assist in the investigation, such as court orders regarding custody.
 - 4. Any other evidence that may assist in the investigation, including personal electronic devices (e.g., cell phones, computers).
- (h) When circumstances permit and if appropriate, attempt to determine the missing person's location through their telecommunications carrier.
- (i) Contact the appropriate agency if the report relates to a missing person report previously made to another agency and that agency is actively investigating the report. When this is not practicable, the information should be documented in an appropriate report for transmission to the appropriate agency. If the information relates to an at-risk missing person, the member should notify a supervisor and proceed with reasonable steps to locate the missing person.
- (j) If the person qualifies for a Silver Alert, contact the Maryland State Police as soon as practicable.

316.5.1 SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Upon determining that a missing child is at-risk, investigating officers or supervisors shall immediately take the following additional steps as part of the investigation (Md. Code FL § 9-402):

- (a) Initiate search procedures, including the coordination of volunteer search teams.
- (b) Notify the Criminal Investigation Unit.
- (c) Notify the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.
- (d) Notify local departments and, if applicable, obtain any information that may help with locating the missing person.
- (e) Request the assistance of the Department of State Police, when appropriate.

316.6 REPORT PROCEDURES AND ROUTING

Members should complete all missing person reports and forms promptly and advise the appropriate supervisor as soon as a missing person report is ready for review.

316.6.1 SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

The responsibilities of the supervisor shall include, but not be limited to:

- (a) Reviewing and approving missing person reports upon receipt.
 - 1. The reports should be promptly sent to the Records Department.
- (b) Ensuring resources are deployed as appropriate.
- (c) Initiating a command post as needed.

Elkton Police Department

Elkton Police Department Policy Manual

Missing Persons

- (d) Ensuring applicable notifications and public alerts are made and documented.
- (e) As soon as reasonable under the circumstances, notifying and forwarding a copy of the report to the agency of jurisdiction for the missing person's residence in cases where the missing person is a resident of another jurisdiction.
- (f) Notifying and forwarding a copy of the report to the agency of jurisdiction where the missing person was last seen.
- (g) Notifying and forwarding a copy of the report to the agency of jurisdiction for the missing person's intended or possible destination, if known.
- (h) Forwarding a copy of the report to the Criminal Investigation Unit.
- (i) Ensuring that records have been entered into the appropriate missing person networks.
- (j) Taking reasonable steps to identify and address any jurisdictional issues to ensure cooperation among agencies.
 - 1. If the case falls within the jurisdiction of another agency, the supervisor should facilitate transfer of the case to the agency of jurisdiction.

316.6.2 RECORDS DEPARTMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

The Records Department receiving member shall ensure that the missing person record is entered in the NCIC computer networks updated with additional information obtained from missing person investigations (34 USC § 41308).

316.7 CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION UNIT FOLLOW-UP

In addition to completing or continuing any actions listed above, the investigator assigned to a missing person investigation:

- (a) Shall coordinate the investigation with the Maryland State Police if a missing child has not been located within 24 hours and there is reason to believe the child may be located in another jurisdiction (Md. Code FL § 9-402(d)).
- (b) Should ensure that the missing person's school is notified within 10 days if the missing person is a juvenile.
 - 1. The notice shall be in writing and should also include a photograph.
 - 2. The investigator should meet with school officials as appropriate to stress the importance of including the notice in the child's student file, along with the investigator's contact information if the school receives a call requesting the transfer of the missing child's files to another school.
- (c) Should recontact the reporting party and/or other witnesses within 30 days of the initial report and within 30 days thereafter to keep them informed, as appropriate, and to determine if any additional information has become available.
- (d) Should consider contacting other agencies involved in the case to determine if any additional information is available.

Elkton Police Department

Elkton Police Department Policy Manual

Missing Persons

- (e) Shall verify and update MCMUP, METERS, NCIC and any other applicable missing person networks within 30 days of the original entry into the networks and every 30 days thereafter until the missing person is located (34 USC § 41308).
- (f) Should continue to make reasonable efforts to locate the missing person and document these efforts at least every 30 days.
- (g) Shall maintain a close liaison with state and local child welfare systems and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) if the missing person is under the age of 21 and shall promptly notify NCMEC when the person is missing from a foster care family home or childcare institution (34 USC § 41308).
- (h) Should make appropriate inquiry with the Medical Examiner.
- (i) Should obtain and forward medical and dental records, photos, X-rays, and biological samples, as applicable.
- (j) Shall attempt to obtain the most recent photograph for persons under 18 years of age if it has not been obtained previously and forward the photograph to the Department of State Police and enter the photograph into applicable missing person networks (34 USC § 41308).
- (k) Should consider making appropriate entries and searches in the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs).
- (l) In the case of an at-risk missing person or a person who has been missing for an extended time, should consult with a supervisor regarding seeking federal assistance from the FBI and the U.S. Marshals Service (28 USC § 566).

316.8 WHEN A MISSING PERSON IS FOUND

Upon notification that a missing person has been located, a member of the Elkton Police Department shall conduct an in-person interview so that an accurate identification can be obtained and information regarding the missing person's destination, associations, etc. can be ascertained. If the person is located in another jurisdiction, a request shall be made that an officer from that jurisdiction makes in-person contact with the missing person to obtain the details of their disappearance. All details obtained during that interview shall be documented in an appropriate report. The relatives and/or reporting party shall be notified as appropriate.

Upon receipt of information that a missing person has been located, the Records Supervisor should ensure that the missing person is removed from MCMUP, METERS, and NCIC.

The investigator assigned to a missing person case shall ensure that:

- (a) A missing child's school is notified.
- (b) Entries are made in the applicable missing person networks.
- (c) Notification shall be made to any other law enforcement agency that took the initial report or participated in the investigation.

Missing Persons

316.8.1 UNIDENTIFIED PERSONS

Members investigating a case of an unidentified person who is deceased or a living person who cannot assist in identifying themselves should:

- (a) Obtain a complete description of the person.
- (b) Enter the unidentified person's description into the NCIC Unidentified Person File and the NamUs database.
- (c) Use available resources, such as those related to missing persons, to identify the person.

316.9 CASE CLOSURE

The Criminal Investigation Unit supervisor may authorize the closure or suspension of a missing person case after considering the following:

- (a) Closure is appropriate when the missing person is confirmed returned or evidence matches an unidentified person or body.
- (b) If this department is the lead agency, the case should be kept under active investigation for as long as the person may still be alive. Exhaustion of leads in the investigation should not be a reason for closing a case.
- (c) If this department is not the lead agency, the case can be suspended if all investigative leads have been exhausted, the lead agency has been notified and entries are made in the applicable missing person networks, as appropriate.
- (d) A missing person case should not be closed or reclassified because the person would have reached a certain age or adulthood or because the person is now the subject of a criminal or civil warrant.

316.10 TRAINING

Subject to available resources, the Support Services Commander should ensure that members of this department whose duties include missing person investigations and reports receive training that includes:

- (a) The initial investigation:
 - 1. Assessments and interviews
 - 2. Use of current resources, such as Mobile Audio Video (MAV)
 - 3. Confirming missing status and custody status of minors
 - 4. Evaluating the need for a heightened response
 - 5. Identifying the zone of safety based on chronological age and developmental stage
- (b) Briefing of department members at the scene.
- (c) Identifying NCIC Missing Person File categories (e.g., disability, endangered, involuntary, juvenile and catastrophe).
- (d) Verifying the accuracy of all descriptive information.

Elkton Police Department

Elkton Police Department Policy Manual

Missing Persons

- (e) Initiating a neighborhood investigation.
- (f) Investigating any relevant recent family dynamics.
- (g) Addressing conflicting information.
- (h) Key investigative and coordination steps.
- (i) Managing a missing person case.
- (j) Additional resources and specialized services.
- (k) Update procedures for case information and descriptions.
- (l) Preserving scenes.
- (m) Internet and technology issues (e.g., Internet use, cell phone use).
- (n) Media relations.

Attachments

EPD Missing Child Investigation Checklist.pdf



ELKTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

MISSING CHILD INITIAL RESPONSE / INVESTIGATIVE CHECK-LIST

COMMUNICATIONS

- _____ Intake report from parent/caller
- _____ Obtain basic facts, details, and a brief description of missing child and abductor (if applicable)
- _____ Dispatch officer to scene
- _____ Search incident records for previous incidents related to missing child and prior police activity in the area including suspicious persons, indecent exposure, and attempted abductions. Inform responding officers of pertinent information
- _____ Maintain records/recordings of telephone communications/messages
- _____ With approval from shift commander broadcast known details to other patrol units and agencies

FIRST RESPONDING OFFICER

- _____ Interview parent(s)/person who made initial report
- _____ Determine when, where, and by whom the missing child was last seen. Was anyone with the child at that time?
- _____ Identify the circumstances of the disappearance. Is anything unusual?
- _____ Was there a significant event that preceded the child's disappearance?
- _____ Identify the child's zone of safety for his or her age and developmental stage. What places does the child frequent?
- _____ Does the child have any physical or mental disabilities?
- _____ Verify that child is in fact missing
 - Obtain permission from parents to search the home, even if the child is reported missing from another location
 - Look in any places a child might be able to crawl or hide
 - Be alert to signs of violence or foul play
 - Have 2nd officer search if the child is not found
 - Are there items in the child's room that he/she would normally not leave behind?

Are there clothes/backpack/suitcase missing from the home?

Is the child's bicycle missing?

Check for child's telephone directory/journal/diaries, etc.

Consider the use of a canine to search outside the home. Include vehicles (look in trunk) and other places of concealment.

_____ Treat the area as a crime scene

_____ Seal/protect scene and area of child's home (including child's personal articles such as hairbrush, diary, photographs and items with the child's fingerprints/footprints/teeth impressions) so that evidence is not destroyed during or after the initial search and to help ensure that items which could help in the search for and/or to identify the child are preserved. If possible photograph/videotape these areas

_____ Ensure that everyone on the scene is identified and interviewed separately. Make sure that their interview and identifying information is properly recorded. To aid in this process, if possible, take pictures or record video images of everyone present.

Note name, DOB, address, home/business telephone numbers of each person

Determine each person's relationship to the missing child

Note information that each person may have about the child's disappearance

Determine when/where each person last saw the child.

Ask each one, "What do you think happened to the child?" "Where do you think the child is?"

Obtain names/addresses/telephone numbers of child's friends/associates and other relatives and friends of the family

_____ Conduct a neighborhood canvass

_____ Interview (separately) the individuals who last had contact with the child

_____ Based on the available information, make an initial determination of the type of incident whether *nonfamily abduction*, *family abduction*, *endangered runaway*, or *lost, injured or otherwise missing*

_____ Obtain a detailed description of the missing child, abductor and any vehicles used

_____ Relay descriptive information to communications center for broadcast updates

_____ Shift Supervisor will determine the need for Investigative assistance and additional personnel

_____ Consider use of "**A Child is Missing**" alert

_____ Shift Supervisor initiate **AMBER ALERT** system if applicable

_____ Ensure that information regarding child is entered into the NCIC Missing Person File. Parent or guardian must complete and sign the entry forms

_____ Obtain photographs/videotapes of missing child/abductor

_____ Brief and bring up-to-date all additional responding personnel including supervisors and investigative staff

INVESTIGATIONS

- _____ Obtain briefing from first responding officer and other on-scene personnel
- _____ Verify the accuracy of all descriptive information and other details developed during the preliminary investigation
- _____ Conduct a criminal history check on all principal suspects and participants in the investigation
- _____ Interview other family members, friends/associates of the child and friends of the family to determine
 - When and where each last saw the child. Was there anyone with the child at that time?
 - What they think happened to the child
- _____ Correct and investigate the reasons for any conflicting information offered by witnesses and other individuals submitting information
- _____ Obtain a brief, recent history of family dynamics
 - Did the child talk about running away or suicide?
 - Were there family problems affecting the child?
 - Does the child use alcohol or drugs?
 - Have there been any school problems? Who is the child's teacher or counselor at school?
 - Was there a significant event that preceded the child's disappearance
- _____ Verify child custody status. Who has legal custody?
- _____ Obtain consent to view the child's computer files and e-mails for possible leads
- _____ Obtain the child's and/or the parents cell phone information (if applicable)
- _____ Does the child have any credit or debit cards? Savings or checking accounts?
- _____ Prepare and update bulletins with the child/abductor's photograph and descriptive information for local law enforcement agencies, FBI, and other appropriate agencies
- _____ Ensure that details of the case have been reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).
- _____ Establish a command post away from the child's residence
- _____ Establish a telephone hotline for receipt of tips and leads
- _____ Review and evaluate all available information and evidence collected
- _____ Determine what additional resources and specialized services are required
- _____ Secure the child's last medical and dental records

- _____ Execute investigative follow-up plan
- _____ Establish a leads management system to prioritize leads and ensure that each one is reviewed and followed up on
- _____ Utilize media (including radio, television and newspapers) to assist in the search for the missing child and maintain media relations, per established protocols, throughout the duration of the case

NON-FAMILY ABDUCTION INVESTIGATIVE CHECKLIST

INITIAL INVESTIGATION

- _____ Assign officer to victim's residence with the ability to record and "trap and trace" all incoming calls. Consider setting up a separate telephone line or cellular telephone for agency use
- _____ Conduct neighborhood/vehicle canvass
- _____ Compile list of known sex offenders in the region
- _____ Obtain consent to view all files and e-mails on the child's computer for any leads
- _____ Develop profile on possible abductor
- _____ Consider use of polygraph for parents and other key individuals
- _____ In cases of infant abduction, investigate claims of home births made in the area
- _____ Fully load NCIC Missing Person File (involuntary category) with complete descriptive information, medical information, dental information, and use the Child Abduction ("CA") flag
- _____ Utilize the National Law Enforcement Telecommunication System (NLETS) and other information systems to alert local, state, regional, and federal law enforcement agencies
- _____ Review records found in various law-enforcement databases, including NLETS, for attempted abductions with case similarities
- _____ Provide support for family through the Police Chaplain

PROLONGED INVESTIGATION

- _____ Reread all reports and transcripts of interview
- _____ Revisit the crime scene
- _____ Review all potential witness/suspect information obtained in the initial investigation and consider background checks on anyone identified in the investigation
- _____ Review all photographs and videotapes

- _____ Re-examine all physical evidence collected
- _____ Review Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) records for reports of abuse on the child
- _____ Develop time lines and other visual exhibits
- _____ Re-interview key individuals
- _____ Interview individuals such as delivery personnel; employees of gas, water, electric and cable companies; taxi drivers; post office personnel; and garbage collectors
- _____ Critique results of the on-going investigation with appropriate investigative resources
- _____ Arrange for periodic media coverage
- _____ Utilize rewards and crime stopper programs
- _____ Contact NCMEC for photo dissemination, age progression, and other case assistance
- _____ Update NCIC Missing Person File information as necessary

RECOVERY/CASE CLOSURE

- _____ Arrange for a comprehensive physical examination of the victim
- _____ Conduct a careful interview of the child, document the results of the interview and involve all appropriate agencies
- _____ Provide effective reunification techniques
- _____ Cancel alarms and remove case from NCIC and other informational systems
- _____ Perform constructive post-case critique

FAMILY ABDUCTION INVESTIGATIVE CHECKLIST

THE INITIAL INVESTIGATION

- _____ Examine court records
- _____ Conduct background investigation on both parents
- _____ Provide tasks for left-behind parent
- _____ Interview family and friends of suspect-parent
- _____ Enter information about the child and suspect-parent into NCIC Missing Person File (Involuntary Category)

- _____ Obtain and evaluate all information that may indicate locations of suspect-parent
- _____ Coordinate the issuance of an arrest warrant against the suspect-parent with States Attorney Felony Review
- _____ Assure entry of warrant information into NCIC Missing Person File (child) and Wanted Person File (suspect-parent)
- _____ Consider use of civil procedures such as writ of habeas corpus and writ of assistance
- _____ Provide support for family through the Police Chaplain

THE PROLONGED INVESTIGATION

- _____ Secure federal Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution (UFAP) warrant, if facts support issuance
- _____ Identify and “flag” all pertinent sources of information about both child (such as school, medical, birth) and suspect-parent (such as employment, education, and professional).
- _____ Contact credit card companies, banks and cell phone provider’s suspect-parent uses and flag accounts for activity.
- _____ Utilize information sources such as credit bureaus, database systems, motor vehicle bureaus and Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS) to search for suspect-parent through identifiers such as social security number, name and date of birth
- _____ Request US Postal Service authorities to provide change-of-address information and assistance in setting up a mail cover on selected family members or friends of the suspect-parent
- _____ Identify and evaluate other information about suspect-parent that may provide information such as employment records, occupational licenses, organization memberships, social interests, hobbies and other lifestyle indicators
- _____ Assist left-behind parent in missing-child poster preparation and distribution

INTERNATIONAL ABDUCTIONS

- _____ Become familiar with laws of suspect-parent’s country concerning custody matters
- _____ Contact US Department of State for assistance in civil aspects of the abduction and potential for return of child through legal and diplomatic channels
- _____ Seek information from the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), concerning criminal proceedings against the suspect-parent

RECOVERY/CASE CLOSURE

- _____ Arrest suspect-parent away from child, if possible

- _____ Notify DCFS about possible need for temporary shelter care until left behind parent or investigator arrives
- _____ Conduct a thorough interview of the child and abductor separately, document the results of the interviews, and involve all appropriate agencies
- _____ Provide effective reunification techniques
- _____ Cancel alarms and remove case from NCIC and other informational systems

RUNAWAY INVESTIGATIVE CHECKLIST

THE INITIAL INVESTIGATION

- _____ Check agency records for recent contact with child (arrests, other activity)
- _____ What places does the child frequent?
- _____ Review school record and interview teachers, other school personnel, classmates
- _____ Check contents of school locker
- _____ Enter information about the child into NCIC Missing Person File
- _____ Investigate DCFS records for abuse reports
- _____ Was there a significant event that preceded the child's disappearance?
- _____ Contact the National Runaway Switchboard at 1-800-621-4000 where parents can leave a message for their child and check to see if their child has left a message for them.

THE PROLONGED INVESTIGATION

- _____ Contact credit card companies, banks and cell phone provider's suspect-parent uses and flag accounts for activity.
- _____ Update initial NCIC entry by fully loading NCIC Missing Person File with all available information including medical and dental records
- _____ Consider upgrading investigation to "Endangered" if the facts warrant.
- _____ Re-interview friends, classmates and other informational sources
- _____ Assist family members in the preparation and distribution of missing-child posters
- _____ Provide support for family through police chaplain
- _____ Consider a search of NCIC's Unidentified Person File, utilization of NCIC's Off-Line Search capabilities, and notification of state medical examiners by providing descriptive information and photograph of the missing child.

RECOVERY/CASE CLOSURE

- _____ Conduct a thorough interview of the child, document the results of the interview and involve all appropriate agencies
 - Why did the child leave?
 - Where did the child go?
 - How did the child survive?
 - Who helped the child during his/her absence?
 - Will the child leave again?
- _____ Consider a comprehensive physical examination for the child
- _____ Make child/family aware of community services to deal with any unresolved issues
- _____ Complete an agency report of the episode that can be promptly accessed and reviewed if the child leaves again
- _____ Cancel alarms and remove the case from NCIC and other informational systems