

North Aurora Police Department Crime Prevention Tips: Child Abductions

Protecting Our Children from Abductions

Around the country, thousands of children are reported missing each year. Some children are found and returned, others return home on their own. Some of our children are never found or returned. There is nothing that devastates parents, friends, and a community more than a reported child abduction or attempt kidnapping of a child. Child abduction is not only committed by a stranger, it could be committed by someone they know and trust, like a parent.

Illinois Statutes

Illinois statute (720 ILCS 5/10-5) defines child abduction in a number of ways. Generally, child abduction involves concealing or detaining a child, or removing a child from the jurisdiction, in derogation of the rights of the lawful custodian, and/or in violation of judicial process. This may, for example, involve the violation of a custody order by a parent; the luring of a child under 16 into a building, for a non-lawful purpose; or the removal and concealment of a child for payment, by a person with no legal right to custody.

What Parents Can Do

- Know where your child is at all times.
- Never leave a small child alone at home or in a car.
- Make sure your child knows his or her full name, address and telephone number.
- Make sure your child know where you work, and that telephone information.
- Know your child's friends and where they live.
- Teach your child about strangers. Tell him or her to never talk, take candy, or go with a stranger without your consent.
- Make sure your child knows never to get into a stranger's car.
- Tell your child that if approached by a stranger, run and scream.
- Let your child know that no one has a right to touch any part of his or her body that a bathing suit would cover.
- Inform your child to report to you, a police officer or school authority, anyone that exposes his or her private parts to them.
- Report to the police immediately, if your child informs you that they were lured or assaulted by a stranger

Children should...

- Never go to a friend's home without informing their parents where they are going and when they will return.
- Never talk to strangers.

- Never take candy or gifts from strangers.
- Never wander off when they are with their parents.
- Move away from a car or van that pulls up next to them, if they do not know the driver.
- Scream and run away from any stranger that calls them to a vehicle or attempts to touch them.
- Be suspicious of any stranger asking for assistance.
- Try to remember what the stranger looks like, as well as the vehicle and license plate number.
- Immediately inform parents or police of any strangers that attempt to call them to a car or van.

What the Community Can Do

- Be aware of all strangers in their neighborhood, especially if they pay undue attention to a child.
- Write down information about strangers in your neighborhood.
- Write down information about strange vehicles in their neighborhood.
- Call the police/sheriff immediately if someone is screaming or being chased by anyone.

Calling the Police to Report a Suspicious Person or Vehicle:

When calling the police it is very important to give the call taker an accurate description of the suspect along with any vehicle being used.

Try to note the following information about a suspicious vehicle:

- Make and Model
- Body style
- Color
- Number of Doors
- License Plate Number
- Any damage or anything unusual about the vehicle
- Where the vehicle is located or direction it was headed.

When describing a suspect, pay close attention to the following details:

- General Description
- Sex and race
- Estimate age, height, and weight
- Build (fat; husky; medium; slim)
- Hair (color; texture; style; length)
- Eyes (color; shape; are the eyelashes and eyebrows heavy or light)

- Complexion (color; pores; pockmarks; acne; bumps)
 - Facial Hair (clean-shaven; beard; mustache; goatee)
 - Peculiarities (large or small nose; large or small ears; marks, scars, deformities, voice, speech, how they walk or talk, etc.)
 - Clothing Description
 - Hat (color; style - e.g., cap, fedora, hood; any printing on the hat)
 - Coats (color; style; length; any printing on the coat or jacket)
 - Shirt/Blouse (color; design; sleeves; collar; any printing on it)
 - Pants: (color; style; length)
 - Socks: (color; pattern; length)
 - Shoes: (color; style)
 - Accessories: (sweater; scarf; gloves; tie)
 - Jewelry: (watch; rings; bracelet, earrings)
 - General Appearance: (neat; sloppy; clean or dirty)
 - Oddities: (clothing too large or too small; patches)
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How You Can Help Preserve and Gather Evidence

One of the most critical aspects in the search for a missing child is the gathering of evidence that may hold clues about a child's disappearance or whereabouts. The mishandling of evidence can adversely affect an investigation. Similarly, the collection and preservation of evidence are key to finding a missing child. Parents play a vital role in finding a missing child by providing critical information to law enforcement, by protecting evidence in and around the home, and by gathering information about persons or situations that might hold clues. The following are some tips on what you should do to help law enforcement conduct a thorough and complete investigation.

SECURE YOUR CHILD'S ROOM.

Even though your child may have disappeared from outside the home, your child's room should be searched thoroughly by law enforcement for clues and evidence. Don't clean the child's room, wash your child's clothes, or pick up your house. Don't allow well-meaning family members or friends to disturb anything. Even a trash bin or a computer may contain clues that lead to the recovery of the child.

DON'T TOUCH OR REMOVE ANYTHING FROM YOUR CHILD'S ROOM OR FROM YOUR HOME THAT MIGHT HAVE YOUR CHILD'S FINGERPRINTS, DNA, OR SCENT ON IT.

This includes your child's hairbrush, bed linens, worn clothing, pencil with bite marks, diary, or address book. With a good set of fingerprints or a sample of DNA from hair, law enforcement may be able to tell whether your child has been in a particular car or house. With good scent material, tracking dogs may be able to find your child.

DO NOT ALLOW ANYONE ELSE TO SLEEP IN YOUR CHILD'S BED, PLAY WITH HIS OR HER TOYS, OR USE HIS OR HER BEDROOM FOR ANY PURPOSE.

Law enforcement dispatch should advise you not to disturb any part of the house until a thorough search of the scene has been conducted. Investigators should let you know when their search is complete.

BE PREPARED TO GIVE INVESTIGATORS ALL THE FACTS AND CIRCUMSTANCES RELATED TO THE DISAPPEARANCE OF YOUR CHILD.

This includes knowing where your child was last seen, where your child normally went to play, what your child was wearing, and what personal possessions your child had with him or her.

DESCRIBE IN DETAIL THE CLOTHING YOUR CHILD WAS WEARING AND ANY PERSONAL ITEMS IN THE CHILD'S POSSESSION AT THE TIME OF THE DISAPPEARANCE.

Specify color, brand, and size. If possible, have someone obtain replicas of clothing, hats, purses, backpacks or other items your child had or wore at the time of the disappearance. Give these articles to law enforcement for them to release to the media and to show the searchers. Make sure you mark these items as duplicates or replicas.

MAKE A LIST OF PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION MARKS AND SPECIFIC PERSONALITY TRAITS.

Describe birthmarks, scars, tattoos, missing teeth, eyeglasses, contacts, speech patterns, and behavioral traits. If possible, find photographs that show these unique features. If you have fingerprints of your child or a DNA blood sample, also give these to law enforcement.

GATHER TOGETHER PERSONAL ITEMS, SUCH AS BABY TEETH, OLD BASEBALL CAPS, OR OLD TOOTHBRUSHES.

These items may contain hair or blood samples that may be useful as DNA evidence. Also look for pencils or toys that contain impressions of your child's teeth.

THINK ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOR AND ROUTINE.

Be prepared to discuss where your child played or hung out, what was the usual route taken to and from school, and what other paths of travel might have been taken. Be specific about what your child did for recreation, including playing outdoors, surfing the Internet, and other activities.

TRY TO REMEMBER ANY CHANGES IN YOUR CHILD'S ROUTINE OR ANY NEW EXPERIENCES.

Look at personal and family calendars to see if they contain clues as to your child's whereabouts or the identity of an abductor. For example, during the past year, did your child join a soccer team, change teams, or get a new coach? Did your child start playing or hanging out in a different area? Did your child keep a diary that might hold clues?

TRY TO REMEMBER IF YOUR CHILD MENTIONED ANY NEW FRIENDS.

Talk with your child's friends and teachers to see if they know of any new friends or other contact your child recently made.

FIND RECENT PHOTOGRAPHS OF YOUR CHILD IN BOTH COLOR AND BLACK AND WHITE, THEN HAVE SOMEONE MAKE MULTIPLE COPIES OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS AND KEEP THE ORIGINALS IN A SAFE PLACE.

Check your cameras for undeveloped film, because the most recent photos of your child may be found there. Ask family members and friends to do the same. Give law enforcement multiple photos showing different poses. Steer away from formal or posed photos that do not look like your child. Being careful not to damage the photo, mark the back of each picture with your child's name, address, date of birth, and age when the picture was taken.

FIND VIDEOTAPES OR MOVIES OF YOUR CHILD AND MAKE COPIES.

Also ask family members and friends if they have videotapes or movies of your child, perhaps at birthday parties, soccer games, and so forth. Give law enforcement copies that show your child's expressions and mannerisms.

MAKE A LIST OF FAMILY MEMBERS, FRIENDS, ACQUAINTANCES, COACHES, TEACHERS, AND OTHER SCHOOL STAFF.

Write down as many telephone numbers and addresses as you can. Offer information for prior in-laws and relatives as well. Include on your list anyone you feel might have something against you and your family.

MAKE A LIST OF EVERYONE WHO ROUTINELY COMES TO YOUR HOME.

Your list should include postal workers, meter readers, garbage collectors, repair persons, salespeople, pizza delivery persons, and so forth.

MAKE A LIST OF NEW, DIFFERENT, OR UNUSUAL PEOPLE OR CIRCUMSTANCES IN AND AROUND YOUR HOME OR SCHOOL WITHIN THE PAST YEAR.

Think about if you or any of your neighbors had any home remodeling or house repairs done within the past year. Were any houses listed for sale in your neighborhood in the past year? Has there been any road construction or building in the area? Have any traveling carnivals passed through the area?

ASK YOUR CHILD'S DOCTOR AND DENTIST FOR COPIES OF THE CHILD'S MEDICAL AND DENTAL RECORDS AND X-RAYS.

Give copies of all medical and dental records to law enforcement for use in the investigation.

Using Technology to Help Further the Investigation

With technological tools so readily available, it's possible for the parents, family and friends of a missing child to use this technology to help gather tips and spread the word about their missing child and save you precious investigative time in the process.

Here are a few of the tips on technology the guide offers to parents:

TELEPHONE TIPS:

1. If you do not already have one, buy a cellular phone or pager so you can be reached when you are away from home.
2. Ask law enforcement to install a trap and trace on your phone.
3. Install a phone with the ability to tape calls
4. Ask your telephone company to install caller ID on your telephone line.
5. Keep a phone log, a pad of paper, or a spiral notebook next to the phone to record the date and time of phone calls, the name of the caller, and other information.

FAX MACHINES:

If you do not own a fax machine, look for one you can rent or borrow, or get permission to use the fax machine or a nearby business or police station. You can use it for quick and inexpensive communication with law enforcement, news media, missing child agencies, state missing children's clearinghouses and other individuals and organizations that are willing to help.

When a face-to-face meeting cannot take place--or if information needs to be disseminated quickly--a fax machine can provide you with an important link to your law enforcement agency as you work together to prepare and review press releases, set up interview schedules, or provide lists of the names and telephone numbers of individuals who may hold clues to the whereabouts of your child. A fax machine in your home will also enable you to call organizations devoted to missing child issues, ask them to fax their intake forms to you, and then fill out, sign, and fax back the forms immediately.

Broadcast faxing: The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has the capability to broadcast fax posters and other case-related information to more than 9,000 law enforcement agencies, FBI Field Offices, State missing children's clearinghouses, the Border Patrol, and medical examiners' offices throughout the country. NCMEC can send your child's picture to its network of agencies as soon as your law enforcement agency or the investigating agency makes a request. NCMEC case management personnel are available on call to make emergency posters, broadcast faxes, and distribute photographic images in the evenings and on weekends.

THE INTERNET:

If you are not hooked up on the Internet, contact someone who is. The Internet allows you to transmit clearer pictures of your child more quickly and less expensively than you could by fax. First, you must have your child's photo scanned and digitized--that is, put on a computer disk. A print or computer shop can provide this service to you. Next, call individual organizations to obtain their e-mail addresses. Now, you can use your disk to simultaneously send your child's picture by e-mail to a wide variety of organizations.

The alternative is to purchase separate color pictures and then send your child's picture to each organization via overnight mail, which is a far slower and more expensive process than digitizing and sending them via e-mail.

(Further, as many of you already know, there are scores of Web sites that post pictures and descriptions of missing children. Search for these sites and contact them to help get the word out.)