



## Lunenburg Police Department

<b>Policy Number:</b> <b>2.09</b>	<b>Subject:</b> <b>Missing Children</b>
<b>Issue Date:</b> <b>11/03/2021</b> <b>Revision Date(s):</b> <b>2/3/2022</b> <b>Effective Date:</b> <b>11/03/2021</b>	<b>Massachusetts Police Accreditation Standards Referenced:</b> <b>41.2.6</b>
<b>Issuing Authority:</b>  <i>Chief Thomas L. Gammel</i>	

### I. PURPOSE

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

### II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Department to expeditiously respond to and thoroughly investigate all reports of missing children without regard to jurisdiction, coordinate a response with the appropriate jurisdiction, and issue emergency notifications as necessary. A child who is missing shall be considered "at risk" until sufficient information to the contrary is confirmed. [41.2.6(a)]

### III. DEFINITIONS

- A. **Missing Child:** A person who is younger than 18 years of age, or as otherwise defined by state law, whose current location is unknown to his or her parents, guardian, or caregiver.
- B. **Special Needs Child:** A child who has a special needs condition that may be defined as, but not limited to, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, Intellectual Disabilities, traumatic brain injury, or any other condition characterized by physical, social, or cognitive impairments, or communication challenges.
- C. **Elevated Risk Factors:** A missing child who is 13 years of age or younger, or is believed or determined to be:
  1. out of the zone of safety for his or her age and developmental stage;
  2. affected by a psychological or behavioral condition;

3. requires medication;
4. drug involved (i.e., illegal substances)
5. a potential victim of foul play or sexual exploitation;
6. in a life-threatening situation;
7. reported to the police as missing after a delay on the part of the parents, guardians, or caregiver, without a plausible explanation for the delay;
8. with adults or older juveniles who could endanger his or her welfare; and/or
9. absent under circumstances inconsistent with established patterns of behavior and the deviation cannot be explained.

D. Zone of Safety: The distance a child could travel from the location where last seen before they would most likely be at risk of injury or exploitation based on age, developmental stage, and related matters.

#### **IV. PROCEDURES**

A. Nashoba Valley Regional Dispatch District (NVRDD) Responsibilities<sup>1</sup>: [41.2.6(e)]

1. Dispatchers who receive a report of a missing person will gather all of the critical call criteria which will include all descriptive data, as well as the following; DOB, SS#, LIC#, clothing description, vehicle info and then dispatch a patrol car to take the report.
2. Once enough personnel information is gathered and the responding officer confirms the subject is missing, the dispatcher will enter the subject into CJIS as missing. The dispatcher will not wait for a signed missing person's report to enter a person into CJIS as missing.
3. The call for service will also be logged in our CAD system appropriately and all pertinent information will be attached.
4. The Responding Officer will be provided with the Reference and NCIC number that will be obtained from CJIS once the record has been entered for his/her report.
5. A copy of the officers missing persons form will be obtained later and attached to the CJIS paperwork and placed in the appropriate file.
6. The dispatcher will send out a teletype to all of Massachusetts (AGB) notifying other agencies of the missing person. A Broadcast will also be given out (LPS7, Bapern) to the surrounding cities and towns notifying them directly with all of the pertinent information. [41.2.6(c)]
7. All of the documentation from CJIS along with the Commonwealth's form will then be placed in the correct file for proper documentation purposes. An email will then be made to the NVRECC CJIS Representative notifying them that a missing person has been entered into CJIS.

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<sup>1</sup> NVRDD Policy, Section 300.21, 300.22

**B. The First Responder Responsibilities: [41.2.6(e)]**

The Officer assigned as a first responder to the incident should prioritize and perform the following tasks as appropriate:

1. Activate body-worn camera if available.
2. Respond directly and promptly to the scene of the report.
3. Determine when, where, and by whom the child was last seen.
4. Based on available information, make an initial determination of the type of case, the need for additional resources, and whether the incident involves elevated risk factors as defined in this policy.
5. Irrespective of any search that may have been conducted previously by parents or others, verify that the child is missing by conducting a consensual search of the area where the child was last seen or believed to be and surrounding area to include places where a child could be hiding, trapped, or asleep.
6. If the child's disappearance occurred elsewhere, conduct a thorough home search. Obtain written permission to conduct the search and, with the assistance of additional personnel, search the residence, any out buildings and other structures, vehicles, and related property. If permission is refused, the officer should contact his or her immediate supervisor. **[41.2.6(b)]**
7. Obtain a detailed description of the missing child, several recent photographs, and any recent videos as available and forward to communications.
8. If the child was abducted, obtain a description of the abductors if available, the mode of travel, vehicle description, and related information and transmit to communications. If the abductor is a family member, obtain photographs of the suspect.
9. Identify the zone of safety for the child's age and developmental stage.
10. Secure and safeguard the incident scene or place last seen as a potential crime scene. Where possible, take photographs and videotape of the incident scene and ensure that personnel do not tamper with potential evidence.
11. Identify any areas of the incident scene or the home that have been disrupted since the child's disappearance. In particular, secure and protect the child's bedroom, bed clothing, and related areas and items until evidence and identification material such as hair and fingerprints can be collected.
12. Conduct interviews with:
  - a. the parents or other persons who made the initial report;
  - b. those who last saw the child; and
  - c. anyone at the scene of the disappearance.
13. Confirm the child's custody status, whether a custody dispute or similar problem exists between the parents, whether a restraining order is in effect, or if the child has expressed an interest in living with the non-custodial parent.
14. Inquire if the child has access to the Internet or a cellular telephone or other communication device.

15. Determine the correct NCIC Missing Person File category (disability, endangered, involuntary, juvenile, or catastrophe) and request that communications or other authorized personnel promptly enter this into the NCIC file. Family abductions are normally entered as “involuntary,” and non-family abductions are entered as “endangered.” By law, this entry must be made within two hours of receipt of a report of a missing or abducted child.
16. Continue to provide updates to communications as new information is obtained.
17. Prepare a chronological account of actions taken and information obtained from point of contact to relief.

C. Supervisor's Responsibilities: [41.2.6(e)]

When a child is missing and elevated risk factors are involved, a supervisor will ensure that the following measures are taken:

1. Obtain a briefing from the first responder and other agency personnel at the scene sufficient to determine the scope and complexity of the case and develop an appropriate response. The briefing should be conducted away from family, friends, and other involved individuals.
2. Ensure that first responder responsibilities, as outlined in the foregoing section, are met.
3. Determine if additional personnel and resources are needed to assist in the investigation to include activation of interagency response protocols or, if necessary, turning the investigation and/or search over to a larger agency that can bring greater resources to bear.
4. If not already completed, consider activation of the AMBER alert system or other immediate community notification methods.
5. Request an AMBER Alert if the following conditions exist: [41.2.6(d)]
  - a. A child, 17 years of age or younger, has been abducted;
  - b. The child is in danger of serious bodily harm, injury or death; and
  - c. There is enough descriptive information to believe that an AMBER Alert may help locate the child.
6. If necessary, establish a command post away from the child’s residence.
7. Establish a dedicated telephone line for receipt of tips and leads.
8. Appoint a search operations coordinator to organize search efforts. Determine whether tracking dogs are available and if they are appropriate for use under the immediate circumstances.
9. Appoint a media liaison officer if not yet on hand to deal with media inquiries and, if deemed appropriate, solicit media assistance in locating the missing child.
10. Ensure that all required notifications have been made to include, where appropriate, officers and investigative units of the Department, other law enforcement agencies, and available community resources.
11. Establish a liaison with the family who can explain law enforcement efforts and work with the family to uncover any information useful to the investigation.
12. Assess the need for additional services and contact:

- a. Massachusetts Missing Persons Clearing House, MA State Police Fusion Center, 124 Action St. Maynard, MA, (978) 451-3700.
- b. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)

D. Detectives or Other Follow-Up Investigator's Responsibilities: [41.2.6(e), 41.2.6(f)]

Where a case involves elevated risk factors as defined in this policy, the assigned police investigator shall ensure that the following measures are taken:

1. Obtain a briefing from agency personnel at the scene.
2. Verify the accuracy of all descriptive information concerning the child, being alert to facts or statements that may conflict with those obtained by the first responder or supervisor.
3. Canvas the neighborhood as soon as possible to identify and interview residents and others within the abduction zone. Identify all vehicles parked within the neighborhood.
4. Obtain a general history of recent family dynamics from family members, neighbors, classmates, teachers, school counselors, and other persons who may have had close personal interaction with the child and/or family.
5. Conduct in-depth fact-finding interviews with all witnesses, friends or relatives of the missing child, teachers, classmates, or others who knew and/or routinely interacted with the child, placing particular emphasis on identifying any conflicting information offered by these or other individuals.
6. Obtain access to and review the contents of the child's social media accounts.
7. Review any records generated about the family or child from the law enforcement agency, social service agencies, schools, and related organizations.
8. Implement an agency system or other authorized means to record, cross-reference, and retrieve information generated through the investigation.
9. Reassess the need for additional resources and specialized services to include specialized search and rescue operations; state resources (e.g., state missing children's clearinghouses); NCMEC; and federal agencies, such as the FBI.
10. If the case is not resolved promptly, update descriptive records and those entered into state and federal missing person's databases to include dental characteristics; scars and marks; fingerprints; and additional articles of clothing, jewelry, or possessions not previously itemized.
11. Determine whether a polygraph examination is warranted and request such an examination where indicated for parents, guardians, or other persons.
12. Monitor media relations to include review of all agency releases to the media to ensure that information is not released that will compromise the investigation.
13. Provide the family with whatever support is possible and appropriate.
14. Develop an investigative plan for follow-up.

E. An officer assigned to the recovery or return of a missing child shall do the following:

1. Verify the located child is, in fact, the reported missing child.

2. Ensure that the child receives a full medical exam to identify and treat any injuries.
3. Secure support services, such as mental health services, if appropriate.
4. Arrange the return of the child to his or her legal guardian or an 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.
5. Place the child in protective custody and transport them 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.
6. Complete the appropriate supplemental reports and cancel all outstanding notifications, including the NCIC entry.

**F. Unidentified Children:**

An officer who responds to a report of an unidentified person who appears to be a child, whether living or deceased, is responsible for completion of the following tasks, among other responsibilities:

1. Obtain a complete description of the individual using standardized information gathering forms designated by this agency or others such as the NCIC Unidentified Person File Worksheet.
2. Enter the child's description into the NCIC Unidentified Person File.
3. Utilize available resources to identify the child, to include:
  - a. NCMEC;
  - b. state missing and exploited children clearinghouses; and
  - c. state medical examiner's offices and organizations.
  - d. Once identification has been made, cancel all notifications.

**G. Abandoned Children:**

If a child is located anywhere in the Town of Lunenburg, that appears to be alone and have no parent or guardian to provide care, the child may be transported to the police station. Officers will do the following:

1. Interview the child to determine their name, address, age, circumstances of being unaccompanied, etc.

**NOTE:** Mass General Law Chapter 119, Section 39 provides criminal penalties for parents who abandon a child under ten years of age.

2. Notify a supervisor.
3. Provide medical attention, if needed
4. Query the name through CJIS/NCIC to see if the child is a missing person.

5. Attempt to contact a parent/guardian. If successful, arrange for transportation home.
6. If the child is a runaway, but is not wanted on a warrant or other law violation, return to the parent/guardian or DCF.
7. Interview parent/guardian and if abuse or neglect is suspected, file a 51A report with the Department of Children and Families.
8. If no contact can be made with a responsible party, notify the Department of Children and Families to arrange for temporary foster care.

**NOTE:** Mass General Law Chapter 119, Section 39 ½ provides parents the option of leaving newborn infants days of age or less at a hospital, police department or manned fire station without facing criminal penalties.

9. See Lunenburg Policy & Procedure: Safe Haven Law

**H. Missing Children with Special Needs:**

The behaviors and actions of missing children with special needs are often much different than that of a missing non-affected child; therefore, finding and safely recovering these children often present a unique and difficult challenge. While the behaviors will differ from child-to-child, missing children with special needs may (1) run away or “bolt” from a safe environment; (2) exhibit a diminished sense of fear causing them to engage in high-risk behavior (e.g., seeking water or active roadways); (3) elude or hide from search teams; (4) seek small or tightly enclosed spaces concealing themselves from search teams; and (5) be unable to respond to search teams. While cases of missing children with special needs should be treated as critical incidents requiring elevated responses by law enforcement and first responders, children with autism have an unusually high mortality rate and are especially at risk. Therefore, the response to a report of a missing child with special needs should include all of the actions outlined in IV.A-F in addition to the following:

1. Nashoba Valley Regional Dispatch District (NVRDD) Responsibilities<sup>2</sup>:  
**[41.2.6(e)]**
  - a. Dispatchers who receive a report of a missing person will gather all of the critical call criteria which will include all descriptive data, as well as the following; DOB, SS#, LIC#, clothing description, vehicle info and then dispatch a patrol car to take the report.
  - b. Once enough personnel information is gathered and the responding officer confirms the subject is missing, the dispatcher will enter the subject into CJIS as missing. The dispatcher will not wait for a signed missing persons report to enter a person into CJIS as missing.

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<sup>2</sup> NVRDD Policy, Section 300.21, 300.22

- c. The call for service will also be logged in our CAD system appropriately and all pertinent information will be attached.
- d. The Responding Officer will be provided with the Reference and NCIC number that will be obtained from CJIS once the record has been entered for his/her report.
- e. A copy of the officers missing persons form will be obtained later and attached to the CJIS paperwork and placed in the appropriate file.
- f. The dispatcher will send out a teletype to all of Massachusetts (AGB) notifying other agencies of the missing person. A Broadcast will also be given out (LPS7, Bapern) to the surrounding cities and towns notifying them directly with all of the pertinent information. **[41.2.6(c)]**
- g. All of the documentation from CJIS along with the Commonwealth's form will then be placed in the correct file for proper documentation purposes. An email will then be made to the NVRECC CJIS Representative notifying them that a missing person has been entered into CJIS.

2. Initial Response:

First responders to reports of a missing child with special needs should notify their supervisor and initiate the following actions as additional resources arrive: **[41.2.6(b)]**

- a. Identify hazards in the area where the child was last seen and request dispatch of personnel to those locations to search for the child, paying special attention to any bodies of water and specific locations of interest to the child such as his or her favorite places.
- b. Secure identified hazardous areas near where the child was last seen to prevent the child from entering those areas.
- c. Determine if the child was wearing or carrying a tracking device and, if so, immediately initiate tracking measures to locate the child.
- d. Determine if the child is frightened by aircraft, dogs, ATVs, or any other resources used to assist in searches. Search dogs at the onset of the initial response will better ensure successful tracking.
- e. Determine if the child is sensitive to or frightened by noise and they will typically react to noise.
- f. Establish containment measures of the child's known routes using all appropriate means such as road, bike, and air patrol to prevent them from wandering farther away from the place last seen.
- g. Contact NCMEC to request assistance from their search and rescue and search management experts.
- h. Ensure that reverse 9-1-1 system services are being used.
- i. Determine if all possible community notification programs have been used, included Endangered Missing Advisories and the media.

### **3. Investigative Measures:**

Investigators assigned to a case involving a missing child with special needs should do the following:

- a. Contact the child's parent or guardian to further assess the child's special needs condition.
- b. Obtain answers to the questions found in Appendix A.

### **4. Search and Rescue Measures:**

The Supervisor shall ensure all of the following are completed regarding search and rescue:

- a. Immediately provide information to search and rescue personnel about the child's special needs condition and any information about the specific behaviors or interests that may assist in searching for the child.
- b. Preserve the place the child was last seen.
- c. Use personnel accustomed to the existing geography whether urban, suburban, or rural.
- d. Consider using NCMEC's Missing Children with Special Needs Lost-Person Questionnaire.
- e. Initiate search and rescue efforts with an emphasis on bodies of water, high-hazard areas, travel corridors, routes to favorite places, previous locations visited, and any other areas of interest suggested by those who know the child.
- f. Attempt to attract the child by using his or her favorite things such as playing a favorite song or driving a favorite type of vehicle into the search area.
- g. Use night search techniques, if appropriate, such as projected lights and patterns, especially spinning patterns, or other types of favorite visuals to attract the missing child. Exceptional care should be taken to identify and neutralize any hazards prior to the initiation of a night search.
- h. Extend search duration. Some children with special needs have unique behaviors that provide a protective effect, allowing the child to survive longer than what is considered to be a normal survival rate for a child.

### **5. Recovery and Reunification Measures:**

The interaction between law enforcement and search and rescue personnel and a child with special needs at the time of recovery and subsequent reunification can be a traumatic experience. To deescalate and/or minimize any heightened emotions or anxieties the child may experience at the time of recovery, officers should do the following:

- a. Check for any identification such as a medical bracelet or tracking device.
- b. Maintain a calm and relaxed environment.

- c. Contain the child in a passive way to keep them from running or bolting and avoid use of restraints whenever possible.
- d. Bring a parent or guardian immediately to the recovery site, whenever possible, and tell the child that person is on the way.
- e. Approach the child at his or her level, kneeling if necessary, and speak in a normal tone of voice using simple phrases.
- f. Use a task-and-reward process to ease anxiety and enhance compliance using phrases such as, “First we are going to stay here, and then your father is going to come here.”
- g. Avoid assuming the child understands everything being said and done at the recovery scene.
- h. Use communication aids, written instructions, drawings, or prompts if possible.
- i. Use humor and familiar topics when possible. For instance if the child is wearing a shirt with a cartoon character on it, talk to the child about the character to help lessen any anxiety the child may be feeling and calm the child if upset.

## Appendix A

### Children with Special Needs Questions

When a child with special needs is reported missing, answers to the following questions should be obtained in order to tailor the appropriate law enforcement response.

1. Is the child wearing or carrying any tracking technology device? If so, which one and how is location information accessed?
2. Is the child attracted to water? If so, can the child swim?
3. Is the child attracted to active roadways and highways, trains, heavy equipment, fire trucks, park swings, or road signs?
4. Does the child have a fascination with vehicles such as trains, heavy equipment, airplanes, or fire trucks?
5. Does the child have a history of wandering or eloping? If so, where were they found and what physical features associated with those episodes may have attracted them?
6. Does the child have a sibling with special needs? If so, has that sibling wandered away before? If so, where was the sibling found?
7. Where does the child like to go? Does the child have a favorite place?
8. Is the child verbal or nonverbal? What are his or her communication abilities?
9. How will the child likely react to his or her name being called?
10. Will the child respond to a particular voice such as that of his or her mother, father, other relative, caregiver, or family friend?
11. Does the child have a favorite song, toy, or character? If so, what or who is it?
12. Does the verbal child know his or her parents' names, home address, and phone number?
13. Does the child have any specific dislikes, fears, or behavioral triggers? How will they typically react to negative stimuli?
14. How might the child react to sirens, helicopters, airplanes, search dogs, people in uniform, or those participating in a search team?
15. How does the child respond to pain or injury?
16. What is the child's response to being touched?
17. Does the child wear a medical ID tag?

18. Does the child have any other sensory, medical, physical conditions, or dietary issues and requirements?

19. Is the child taking any medications, and, if so, what type of medication, the risks and potential side effects involved with delayed or missed doses.

20. Does the child become upset easily? If so, what methods are used to calm them?