

**Oakland County Sheriff's Office
General Order # 4.5**



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| SUBJECT: Investigation of Missing Persons under the Age of 18 | | NUMBER: 4.5 |
| EFFECTIVE DATE: 08/18/2023 REVIEW DATE: Annually | | MACP Standard Impact: 4.5.5 |
| REPLACES AND RESCINDS: P&P 68 Missing Person, P&P 153 Missing Person – Update and P&P 194 | DISTRIBUTION: All Personnel | NUMBER OF PAGES: 9 |

This order replaces and rescinds all previously issued orders, procedures, rules and regulations, notices and/or practices in conflict with this General Order.

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this general order is to establish responsibilities and guidelines for the investigation of missing persons under the age of 18.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Oakland County Sheriff's Office 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 of harm" until sufficient information to the contrary is confirmed.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Missing Child: A person who is younger than 18 years of age, whose current location is unknown to his or her parent(s), guardian or caregiver. A child is also considered missing when a concerned party reports a child's location as unknown, and that party has a reasonable belief the child is at risk of harm by being in the custody of their parents, guardian or caregiver. (i.e., custodial kidnapping or parent suffering from a mental health crisis).
- 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 exposed to any of the following:
 - 1. Out of the zone of safety for his or her age and developmental stage.
 - 2. Affected by a psychological or behavioral condition.

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3. Requiring the regular administration of medication to treat a physical or mental illness.
 4. Drug involvement (i.e., using illegal substances)
 5. A potential victim of foul play or sexual exploitation.
 6. A life-threatening situation
 7. Reported to the police as missing after a delay on the part of the parents, guardian or caregiver, without a plausible explanation for the delay.
 8. With adults (including parent, guardian or caregiver) or older juveniles who could endanger their welfare.
 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 he or she would most likely be at risk of injury or exploitation based on age, developmental stage and related matters.
- E. AMBER Alert: The Michigan AMBER Alert plan is a partnership between law enforcement and the media to help in the immediate dissemination of information to the public about an abducted child. AMBER Alerts are urgent bulletins issued utilizing the Emergency Alert System to interrupt radio and television broadcasting in the most serious child-abduction cases.
- F. Suzanne's Law: A law requiring that agencies immediately enter missing persons who are under the age of twenty-one into LEIN/NCIC. The law also requires that no waiting period be established before taking a report or making an entry and that the LEIN/NCIC entry be made within two (2) hours of when the agency receives the information.

IV. PROCEDURES

- A. Responsibilities of Communication
1. Communication will be the responsibility of Oakland County Sheriff's Emergency Operation Center. Reports of missing children will be processed in accordance with their current Dispatch protocols. **(MACP Standard 4.5.5 e)**
- B. The First Responder (MACP Standard 4.5.5 e)
1. The deputy receiving a report of a missing child, or the deputy assigned as a first responder to the incident, should prioritize and perform the following tasks as appropriate based on all available information:
 - a. Make an initial determination of the type of investigation, the need for additional resources and whether the incident involves elevated risk factors as defined in this order.
 - i. If, based on the initial available information, elevated risk factors or suspicious/exigent circumstances exist, the first responding deputy should notify the shift supervisor of the circumstances so that determination can be made for the deployment of additional resources. **(MACP Standard 4.5.5 a,b)**

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- ii. When elevated risk factors exist, issue a radio alert to all agency personnel and cause an alert on LEIN to be entered. Initiate established protocols for working with the media, including activation of the AMBER Alert system through the operation center and social media alerts when appropriate. **(MACP Standard 4.5.5 b)**
2. Criteria for activation of an AMBER Alert: **(MACP Standard 4.5.5 c)**
- a. Law enforcement believes a child under 18 has been abducted and is in imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death.
 - b. A child may be considered at imminent risk of great bodily harm or death if:
 - i. The child suffers from a severe mental or health condition that greatly impairs the child's ability to care for him/herself.
 - ii. The child is a victim of stranger or acquaintance kidnapping under MCL 750.349.
 - iii. The child is in the company of a person who has a confirmed criminal history of child abuse/neglect, sexual assault, domestic assault, or a crime involving the victimization of children.
 - iv. The person has made statements of intent to commit suicide or harm the missing child.
 - v. The child has been abducted by a non-custodial parent whose parental rights have been terminated by a court.
 - c. An AMBER ALERT can be issued by calling the Michigan State Police Operations Desk at 517-241-8000 or by contacting the Oakland County Sheriff's Emergency Operation Center **(MACP Standard 4.5.5 c)**
 - d. Regardless 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. **(MACP Standard 4.5.5 d)**
 - e. Conduct a thorough home search even if the child's disappearance occurred elsewhere. The home search should be conducted with the assistance of additional personnel, to include any outbuildings and other structures, vehicles and related property. If permission is refused, the deputy should contact his or her immediate supervisor. **(MACP Standard 4.5.5 d)**
 - f. Obtain a detailed description of the missing child to include race, sex, height, weight, hair/eye color, scars/marks/tattoos, possible clothing description, several recent photographs and any recent videos as available and forward to the operation center.
 - g. If an AMBER Alert is to be issued, the reporting deputy must receive the parent's/guardian's permission to release the missing child's name.
 - h. If the child was abducted, obtain a description of the abductors if available, the mode of travel, vehicle description and any related information and transmit to communications. If the abductor is a family member, obtain photographs of the suspect.
 - i. Identify the zone of safety for the child's age and developmental stage.
 - j. 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.
 - k. Identify any areas of the incident scene or the home that have been disrupted since the child's disappearance. Secure and protect the child's bedroom, bed clothing and related areas and items until evidence and identification material such as hair

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and fingerprints can be collected.

- l. 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.
- m. Inquire if the child has access to the Internet, a cellular telephone or other communication device and preserve any physical devices identified.
- n. Determine the correct NCIC Missing Person File category (disability, endangered, involuntary, juvenile or catastrophe) and request that 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.
- o. Continue to provide updates to the operation center as new information is obtained.
- p. Prepare a chronological account of actions taken and information obtained from point of contact to relief. This written report shall be filed before the end of the shift.

C. Supervisor's Responsibilities (MACP Standard 4.5.5 e)

- 1. When a child is missing and elevated risk factors are involved, a supervisor will ensure that the following measures are taken:
 - a. 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.
 - b. Ensure that first responder responsibilities, as outlined in the foregoing section, are met.
 - c. Determine if additional personnel and resources are needed to assist in the investigation and contact the on-call detective to respond.
 - d. The supervisor shall notify the Sheriff's Search and Rescue Team (SSRT) Command as well as the Command Sergeant in the Emergency and Operations Center (dispatch). If no supervisor is on scene, the Command Sergeant shall be responsible for contacting the SSRT Command.
 - e. If not already completed, consider activation of the AMBER Alert system, social media postings and a press release.
 - f. If necessary, establish a command post away from the child's residence.
 - g. Appoint a search operations coordinator to organize search efforts.
 - h. Determine whether members of the Canine Unit are available and if they are appropriate for use under the immediate circumstances.
 - i. Appoint a media liaison deputy if the PIO has not yet arrived to handle media inquiries and, if deemed appropriate, solicit media assistance in locating the missing person.
 - j. Ensure that all required notifications have been made, including (where appropriate) deputies and investigative units of the agency, other law enforcement agencies and available community resources.
 - i. The Duty Captain shall be notified anytime the Amber Alert is activated. The Duty Captain shall notify the Major of Law Enforcement, the Undersheriff and the Sheriff.
 - k. Establish a liaison with the family who can explain law enforcement's efforts and work with the family to uncover any information useful to the investigation.

D. Investigator's Responsibilities (MACP Standard 4.5.5 e)

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1. Where a case involves elevated risk factors as defined in this order, the assigned investigator shall ensure that the following measures are taken:
 - a. Obtain a briefing from agency personnel at the scene.
 - b. 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.
 - i. The investigator shall provide, when appropriate, the public phone number for the Operation Center for citizens to provided tips. Tips may also be emailed at saysomething@oakgov.com. The Operation Center Command Center Sergeant will be responsible to forwarding the tips to the appropriate investigator.
 - c. 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. The area should also be canvased for possible home surveillance cameras.
 - d. 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.
 - e. Conduct in-depth fact-finding interviews with all witnesses, friends or relatives of the missing child, teachers, classmates or others who know and/or routinely interact with the child, placing particular emphasis on identifying any conflicting information offered by these or other individuals.
 - f. Obtain access to and review the contents of the child's social media accounts.
 - g. Review any records generated about the family or child from CLEMIS, social service agencies, schools and related organizations.
 - h. Implement a system to record, cross-reference and retrieve information generated through the investigation.
 - i. Reassess the need for additional resources and specialized services to include specialized search-and-rescue operations state resources NCMEC and federal agencies, such as the FBI.
 - j. If the case is not resolved promptly, update descriptive records and those entered into state and federal missing persons databases to include dental characteristics, scars and marks, fingerprints and additional articles of clothing, jewelry or possessions not previously itemized.
 - k. Determine whether a polygraph examination is warranted and request such an examination from parents, guardians or other persons.
 - l. Monitor media relations to include review of all agency releases to the media to ensure that any information released will not compromise the investigation.
 - m. Provide the family with whatever support is possible and appropriate.
 - n. Develop an investigative plan for follow-up for all latent or unsolved investigations to include determining a frequency to re-visit the case or classify as a 'cold case,' determining if other records may be needed (such as medical or dental) and ensuring the LEIN/NCIC entry is current. **(MACP Standard 4.5.5 f)**
- E. A deputy 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. In coordination with a parent or guardian, ensure that the child receives a full medical exam to identify and treat any injuries, if appropriate.
 3. In coordination with a parent or guardian, secure support services, such as mental

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health services, if appropriate.

4. During the verification process, determine whether intervention services are needed to ensure that the child can safely remain in the home. Investigators shall consider filling out a state DSS Form 3200 to ensure social service assessment and intervention.
5. Arrange the return of the child to his or her legal guardian or, in the case of a runaway or missing child who has been located (and who is not wanted on a warrant or other law violation), an appropriate children's shelter from within department jurisdiction,
6. 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, place the child in protective custody and transport him or her to the appropriate facility for admission.
7. Complete the appropriate supplemental reports and cancel all outstanding notifications, including the NCIC entry. Supplemental reports shall describe in detail the child's activities while missing and the circumstances of the recovery/return.

F. Unidentified Children

1. A deputy 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:
 - a. 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.
 - b. Enter the child's description into the NCIC Unidentified Person File.
 - c. Utilize available resources to identify the child, including:
 - i. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
 - ii. State Missing and Exploited Children Clearinghouse via MSP
 - iii. Oakland County Medical Examiner's Office.
 - iv. Local and National Media
 - v. Social Media
 - d. Once the identification has been made, cancel all notifications.

G. Missing Children with Special Needs

Deputies should note that 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 presents 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 the actions outlined in Section IV (A-F) in addition to the following:

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1. Responsibilities of Sheriff's Office Emergency Operations Center
 - a. When a call is received involving a missing child with special needs, the dispatcher should obtain a full description of the child including gender, ethnicity, height, weight, hair color and clothing worn, then ask the questions found in Appendix A.

2. Initial Response
 - a. First responders to reports of a missing child with special needs should notify their supervisor and initiate the following actions as additional resources arrive:
 - i. 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.
 - ii. Secure identified hazardous areas near where the child was last seen to prevent the child from entering those areas.
 - iii. Determine if the child was wearing or carrying a tracking device; if so, immediately initiate tracking measures to locate the child.
 - iv. 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.
 - v. Determine if the child is sensitive to or frightened by noise and how he or she will typically react to noise.
 - vi. Establish containment measures of the child's known routes using all appropriate means such as road, bike and air patrol to prevent him or her from wandering farther away from the place last seen.
 - vii. Contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to request assistance from their search and rescue and search management experts.
 - viii. Determine if all possible community notification programs have been used, including Endangered Missing Advisories and the media.

3. Investigative Measures
 - a. Investigators assigned to a case involving a missing child with special needs should do the following:
 - i. Contact the child's parent or guardian to further assess the child's special needs condition.
 - ii. If not already done so by the dispatch or first responding personnel, obtain answers to the questions found in Appendix A.

4. Search and Rescue Measures
 - a. The scene supervisor shall ensure all the following are completed regarding search and rescue:
 - i. 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.
 - ii. Preserve the place the child was last seen.
 - iii. Use personnel accustomed to the existing geography whether urban, suburban or rural.
 - iv. Consider using the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's Missing Children with Special Needs Lost Person Questionnaire (Appendix A).
 - v. Initiate search and rescue efforts with an emphasis on bodies of water, high-hazard areas, travel corridors, routes to favorite places, previous locations

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- visited and any other areas of interest suggested by those who know the child.
- vi. 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.
 - vii. 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.
 - viii. 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
- a. The interaction between law enforcement, 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, deputies should do the following:
 - i. Check for any identification such as a medical bracelet or tracking device.
 - ii. Maintain a calm and relaxed environment.
 - iii. Contain the child in a passive way to keep them from fleeing and avoid use of restraints whenever possible.
 - iv. Bring a parent or guardian immediately to the recovery site, whenever possible, and tell the child that person is on the way.
 - v. Approach the child at his or her level, kneeling if necessary, and speak in a normal tone of voice using simple phrases.
 - vi. Use a task-and-reward process to ease anxiety and enhance compliance using phrases such as, "First we are going to stay here, then your father/mother is going to come here."
 - vii. Avoid assuming the child understands everything being said and done at the recovery scene.
 - viii. Use communication aids, written instructions, drawings or prompts, if possible.



ISSUED BY: Sheriff Michael J. Bouchard

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 was he or she found and what physical features associated with those episodes may have attracted him or her?
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 he or she 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 or physical conditions or dietary issues and requirements?
19. Is the child taking any medications? If so, what type of medication and what are 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 him or her?