

Cobb County Police Department

Policy 5.04

MISSING PERSONS

Effective Date: May 1, 2016
Rescinds: Policy 5.04 (February 1, 2015)
Related Orders: None
Issued By: Chief J.R. Houser Page 1 of 7
The words “he, his, him,” which may appear in this policy, are used generically for clarity and ease of reading. These terms are not meant to imply gender and relate to all employees of the Department.

The purpose of this policy is to establish responsibilities and guidelines for the investigation of missing persons.

I. POLICY

- A.** All reports of missing persons will be given full consideration and attention by members of this Department to include careful recording and investigation of factual circumstances surrounding the disappearance.
- B.** Particular care will be exercised in instances involving missing children, those who may be mentally or physical impaired, those who are insufficiently prepared to take care of themselves, and unidentified children who have been located.

II. PROCEDURES

A. Initial Description and Information to be Gathered

- 1. There is no waiting period for reporting a missing person. Missing person reports shall be taken at the time a person is reported as missing.
- 2. The initial report taker must gather as much pertinent information as possible in order to properly classify a missing person report and initiate proper response. This includes the following information:
 - a. Name, age, physical description, and photograph (if available) of the subject and the relationship of the reporting party to the missing person.
 - b. Time and place of the last known location and the identity of anyone accompanying the subject.

- c. Identity of the last persons(s) to have seen the subject, as well as friends, relatives, co-workers, or associates who were, or may have been, in contact with the subject prior to his disappearance.
 - d. The extent of any search for the subject.
 - e. Whether the subject has been missing on prior occasions and the degree to which the absence departs from established behavior patterns, habits, or plans.
 - f. Whether the individual has been involved recently in domestic incidents; suffered emotional trauma or life crises; demonstrated unusual, uncharacteristic, or bizarre behavior; is dependent on drugs or alcohol, or has a history of mental illness.
 - g. The current physical condition of the subject and whether the person is currently on prescription medication.
 - h. Whether medical and dental records are available.
 - i. Plans, habits, routines, and personal interests of the subject, including places frequented or locations of particular significance to the subject.
 - j. Indications of missing personal belongings, particularly money and other valuables.
3. In the case of missing children, officers shall be particularly cognizant of information that may suggest the potential for parental abduction or the possibility of stranger abduction, as well as:
- a. The presence of behavioral problems;
 - b. Past instances of running away, or threats to do so;
 - c. Signs of an abusive home environment or dysfunctional family situation;
 - d. Whether the child is believed to be with adults who may pose a danger; and
 - e. The name and location of the school attended by the child and any persons who may be responsible for private transportation to and from the location.

Reports of juveniles who are missing should be classified as “runaway” only after a thorough investigation.

B. Dissemination of Collected Information

1. Upon verification of a missing person, the missing person shall be entered in state and national information databases (i.e. GCIC/NCIC) in accordance with established procedures. Runaways and missing persons under 21 must be entered into GCIC within two (2) hours after enough information is obtained to complete the entry.
2. If the missing person is considered critically missing or at-risk, the 911 center should be requested to broadcast a description of the missing person and any known facts or circumstances which might aid in locating the subject to:
 - All patrol frequencies
 - Adjacent law enforcement agencies
 - Any law enforcement agencies in the jurisdiction of any known or suspected destinations

C. Follow-up Investigation and Search

On-going investigations of missing persons should include, but should not be limited to, the following actions and activities:

1. Thoroughly check the location at which the missing person was last seen.
2. Conduct interviews with family, friends, work associates, schoolmates, and teachers, as well as school counselors and social case workers, to explore the potential for foul play, voluntary flight, or, in the case of juveniles, parental snatching or running away.
3. Contact homeless shelters, jails, hospitals, coroner's office, etc., as appropriate, for persons fitting the description of the missing person.
4. Request release of dental records and any fingerprints available.
5. The lead investigator shall maintain routine on-going contact with the reporting party concerning progress of the investigation. The reporting party and any other relevant individuals should be informed that they must notify the lead investigator as soon as any contact is made with the missing person.
6. Runaway reports will be sent to the precinct where the child lives, for follow-up calls/visits. A precinct officer should be dispatched to physically view the child. However, a confirmation of the child's return from the parents, in corroboration with the child's school records indicating attendance after the runaway report was made, will serve as proof of the child's return.

D. Recovery of Missing Persons

1. Upon location of a missing person, all agencies and information systems previously contacted for assistance will be notified or updated.
2. Missing persons should be questioned to establish the circumstances surrounding their disappearance and whether criminal activity was involved.
3. Competent adults, having left home for personal reasons, cannot be forced to return home. Officers locating such individuals shall advise them that they are the subject of a missing person investigation and ask if they desire the reporting party or next-of-kin to be notified of their whereabouts. In all cases, the reporting party should be advised of the well-being of located missing persons, however, unless criminal matters necessitate other action, the desires of missing persons not to reveal their whereabouts shall be honored.
4. In cases involving juveniles, officers should:
 - a. Question the youth about circumstances surrounding the child's disappearance, the whereabouts, actions, and activities of the juvenile while missing, and/or whether an abusive or negligent home environment was a contributory factor;
 - b. Notify the parents/guardians as soon as possible.
5. Periodically, a person who has not yet been reported as missing is located either by the police or a concerned citizen. If, due to the person's age or mental capacity, he is unable to tell you who he is or where he lives, the appropriate detective unit will be called (Crimes Against Children for juveniles, and Crimes Against Persons for Adults). If deemed necessary, the detective will take the person into protective custody and coordinate with DFACS for placement of said person.

III. CRITICALLY MISSING/AT-RISK PERSONS

Based on the outcome of the initial inquiries, a decision should be made concerning the potential danger posed to the missing person and the urgency of police response.

- A.** An individual should be considered "critically missing" or "at risk" based upon, but not limited to the following circumstances:
1. May be the subject of foul play,
 2. Because of age (young or old), may be unable to properly safeguard or care for himself,

3. Suffers from diminished mental capacity, or medical conditions that are potentially life threatening if left untreated/unattended,
 4. Is a patient of a mental institution and is considered potentially dangerous to himself or others;
 5. Has demonstrated the potential for suicide; or
 6. May have been involved in a boating, swimming, or other sporting accident or a natural disaster.
- B.** A supervisory officer shall be notified immediately upon classification of a report as “critically missing” or “at risk.” The supervisor should ensure that:
1. Information is broadcast in accordance with policy, and
 2. Resources are mobilized as necessary, and appropriate, for an area search.

IV. LEVI’S CALL (GEORGIA’S AMBER ALERT)

Levi’s Call is a voluntary partnership between law enforcement, emergency management, and broadcasters to issue an urgent bulletin in child abduction cases.

A. How to Activate Levi’s Call

1. The responding officer will determine if the “activation criteria” exist to warrant a Levi’s Call alert.
2. If the criteria for a Levi’s Call are evident, the responding officer will notify his supervisor, a Crimes Against Children detective, and the PIO.
3. The Crimes Against Children Unit will be responsible for:
 - a. Completing and forwarding the “Levi’s Call bulletin” to the GBI (if available, a current photograph of the missing person should be provided with the bulletin).
 - b. Ensuring that the Levi’s Call is “deactivated” if the missing person is located.
4. The Public Information Officer (PIO) will be responsible for notifying local media outlets of the Levi’s Call.

B. Activation Criteria

1. Before Levi’s Call can be activated, the following “activation criteria” must be met:

- a. Law enforcement officials have a reasonable belief that an abduction has occurred.
 - b. Law enforcement officials believe that the child is in imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death.
 - c. Enough descriptive information exists about the victim and abductor to issue a Levi's Call.
 - d. The victim of the abduction is a child age 17 years or younger.
 - e. The child's name and other critical data elements – including the child abduction and Amber Alert flags – have been entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) system.
2. Activation will not be granted for:
- a. Non-custodial abductions where no danger exists to the child
 - b. Runaways

V. MATTIE'S CALL (SAFE RETURN PROGRAM)

Mattie's Call is an emergency missing alert for disabled or elderly persons.

A. How to Activate Mattie's Call

1. The responding officer will determine if the "activation criteria" exist to warrant a Mattie's Call alert.
2. If the criteria for a Mattie's Call are evident, the responding officer will notify his supervisor, a Crimes Against Persons detective, and the PIO.
3. The Crimes Against Persons Unit will be responsible for:
 - a. Completing and forwarding the Mattie's Call bulletin to the GBI (if available, a current photograph of the missing person should be provided with the bulletin).
 - b. Ensuring that the Mattie's Call is "deactivated" if the missing person is located.
4. The Public Information Officer (PIO) will be responsible for notifying local media outlets of the Mattie's Call.

B. Activation Criteria

1. A local law enforcement agency believes a disabled person is missing and

is in immediate danger of serious bodily injury or death.

2. Through its own investigation, the law enforcement agency verifies the disappearance and eliminates alternative explanations for the disabled person's disappearance.
3. Sufficient information is available to disseminate to the public that could assist in locating the disabled person.
4. The missing disabled person is entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database.
5. The law enforcement agency must issue a statewide broadcast to law enforcement/911 centers and contact local media regarding the missing person.