





POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

	MISSING CHILDREN	
	POLICY NUMBER: 41-6	ISSUING AUTHORITY 
	EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 2025	Christine A. Elow Police Commissioner

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

Reports of missing children are among the most challenging and emotionally charged cases a police department will experience. Each stage of the case, from initial investigation through successful recovery, forms a critical component of a thorough response.

When a child is reported missing, it is important to reassure the parents that everything will be done to find their child and begin to utilize whatever resources may be available in ascertaining the circumstances surrounding the case.

When a child disappears, there is often no immediate explanation. A child might go missing for any number of reasons including abduction, is absent with no apparent reason, has run away, or is experiencing disorientation caused by mental illness or serious cognitive issues such as autism. It is the investigating officer's responsibility to sort through these possibilities to attempt to establish the cause or reason for the disappearance.

Also, a child may be confused, nonverbal, or unable to provide an explanation of where they live or who to contact for assistance. However, whatever the circumstances, a child shall be considered at risk until information is discovered to prove otherwise.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Cambridge Police Department to:

- A. promptly record, investigate, and attempt to locate missing children;
- B. enter and remove from the applicable databases information regarding missing children;
- C. conduct follow-up investigations when necessary;
- D. notify the child's last known public or private school; and
- E. assume urgency in locating a child reported missing as all children are considered at risk.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. *Absent*: A child who has left or run away from their parent, guardian, or responsible party, whose whereabouts are known and refuses to return.
- B. *Amber Alert (America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response)*: A voluntary, cooperative effort involving the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association, State Police, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, and local broadcasters. Radio, cable, and television stations statewide will receive a child abduction alert message and may broadcast it every thirty minutes for up to four hours to solicit the public's assistance in recovering an abducted child and to quickly apprehend the suspect.
- C. *DCF*: Massachusetts Department of Children and Families.
- D. *Missing Child*: A missing child is a person who is younger than 18 years of age and whose whereabouts are unknown to their custodial parent, guardian, or responsible party.
- E. *NCMEC*: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, which offers law enforcement powerful resources free of charge to help investigate cases of missing and sexually exploited children.

IV. PROCEDURES

- A. 41.2.6 (M) Missing Children
 - 1. Regarding missing children, the Cambridge Police Department will adhere to the following procedures.
 - a. Whereas all children are considered at risk, the department shall attempt with a high degree of urgency to locate and return a missing child to their caregivers, assuming that the caregivers have been determined to be capable of caring for the child.
 - b. Based upon post-recovery interviews with the children, detectives may conduct additional investigations that could lead to the discovery of further serious offenses committed or permitted by adults associated with the missing children.
 - c. By law, the department shall notify a missing child's last known public or private school.
 - 2. Supervisory notifications will be made as soon as possible.
 - a. In all cases of a report of a missing child, the Shift Commander shall be notified immediately and the Lieutenant of the Family and Social Justice Section or CIS supervisor as soon as possible.
 - 3. The following notification and information shall be forwarded immediately to appropriate inter-and intra-agency units for coordination.

- a. The member of the department taking the report should gather as much information as possible including:
 - (1) the identities of the missing child and the reporting party including contact information for both the reporting party and the child;
 - (2) a full description of the child and age (date of emancipation);
 - (3) the circumstances surrounding the disappearance;
 - (4) risk factors including medications and any mental or emotional conditions;
 - (5) if abduction is suspected, any details to aid in the search; and
 - (6) notification of the school where the child normally attends.
- 4. The criteria for activation of alert systems or other public notification are as follows.
 - a. The AMBER alert system may be activated providing that:
 - (1) the child is under 18 years of age; a Silver Alert, originally intended for elders, has been redefined to become available for anyone over the age of 17 and can be activated directly by the department;
 - (2) the police believe the child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death; and
 - (3) there is enough descriptive information about the child, abductor, and/or the suspect's vehicle to believe the immediate broadcast alert will help.
 - b. An Amber Alert is not appropriate in cases where:
 - (1) no foul play is suspected;
 - (2) the child is absent/runaway;
 - (3) the child is missing as a result of a custodial dispute and the child is not considered to be at risk of bodily harm or death; or
 - (4) an adult is missing.
 - c. The request shall be reviewed by a supervisor to ensure that, in the supervisor's opinion, the criteria for such an activation request have been met and that such an activation is appropriate.
 - d. The request shall be made either:
 - (1) orally by telephone by calling the State Police Communications Section at 508-820-2121; or
 - (2) by faxing an AMBER Alert request to the State Police Media Relations at 508-820-2150.

- e. The request will be screened by a State Police AMBER Alert Activation Officer. The supervisor shall be prepared to confirm the information with the State Police AMBER Alert Activation Officer.
 - f. The State Police Communication Section shall be notified immediately if the child is found or recovered, or if the circumstances no longer meet the activation criteria.
5. Responsibilities of call takers, first responders, supervisors, and investigators are as follows.
- a. Call taker responsibilities shall be determined by the director of the Emergency Communications Department.
 - b. First responders
 - (1) Officers shall respond in the same manner as for a missing adult to include:
 - (i) going to the place of residence;
 - (ii) gathering information;
 - (iii) taking and filing the report, which is sent to ECD; and
 - (iv) if there are risk factors, detectives will respond and determine what resources are needed and which procedures should be followed depending on the circumstances.
 - c. Supervisors should perform the following.
 - (1) Notify a Family and Social Justice or CIS supervisor.
 - (2) Obtain a briefing and written reports of the investigation.
 - (3) Determine if additional personnel are needed to assist.
 - (4) The Shift Commander shall notify members of the command staff as appropriate.
 - (5) Consider activation of the AMBER Alert System.
 - (6) Establish a liaison with the family.
 - (7) Confer with the department Director of Communications and Media Relations.
 - (8) Notify The District Attorney's Office if needed. Also, the Massachusetts Missing Persons Clearing House should be notified: Commonwealth Fusion Center, 124 Acton Street, Maynard, MA, 01754, Voice (978) 451-3700, FAX: (978) 451-3707.
 - (9) In cases of apparent stranger abductions, the FBI field office should be contacted.
 - d. Investigators should perform the following.
 - (1) Verify the accuracy of all descriptive information.
 - (2) Initiate a neighborhood investigation.
 - (3) Obtain a brief history of recent family dynamics.

- (4) Explore the basis for any conflicting information.
- (5) Implement effective case management.
- (6) Notify the NCMEC hotline at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).

e. Follow-up responsibilities include:

- (1) confirming a report that a missing child has returned home;
- (2) completing incident reports; and
- (3) making notifications to the media.

B. Parental Kidnapping

1. A non-custodial parental kidnapping case requires a thorough investigation, as the abducting parent is in violation of the law, and the juvenile abducted by a parent may be in danger. The investigation should focus on the abductor parent, their friends and relatives, and on the needs of the child for public care.
2. A thorough check of bank records, employment, credit bureaus, and any other governmental agencies should be made to attempt to locate the abductor.
 - a. Child Support Enforcement, Massachusetts Department of Revenue: 1-800-332-2733.
 - b. Federal Parent Locator Service: (202) 260-7855 FAX: (202) 401-5647.
3. If friends or relatives are thought to be in contact with the abductor through the mail, the postal inspector's office may be asked to place a *cover* on that individual's mail.
4. When sufficient supporting data is provided, criminal charges should be filed against the abductor parent and an arrest warrant obtained.
 - a. The District Attorney's office should be notified in non-custodial parental kidnapping cases to expedite court procedures.
 - b. In certain cases, the District Attorney's office may seek a Federal Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution Warrant through the United States Attorney's office.

C. Stranger abduction cases require that the child be considered in extreme danger and, therefore, every available resource of the department shall be utilized to find the child and ensure their safety.

1. A command post should be set up away from the child's home. An officer should be stationed at the house to maintain communication between the command post and the parents.
2. The District Attorney's office and State Police Missing Persons Unit should be notified in all stranger abduction cases. The FBI should also be informed of the abduction.
3. Children missing for unknown reasons shall be assumed to be at risk and investigated aggressively.

- D. In cases where children have been reported to be, or appear to be abandoned, and an officer has reason to believe that such child is abandoned, the following procedures apply.
 - 1. Take the child into protective custody.
 - 2. Provide any medical assistance needed on scene and transport to a hospital for evaluation and clearance, if necessary.
 - 3. Interview the child in an attempt to determine:
 - a. the identity of the caretaker(s);
 - b. identity of any relatives in the immediate area; and
 - c. circumstances of the abandonment.
 - 4. Notify the Department of Children and Families to transfer custody.
 - 5. Conduct an appropriate investigation to:
 - a. locate the parent, guardian, or caretaker;
 - b. determine the circumstances of the abandonment; and
 - c. identify any criminal violations.
- E. Reported Missing in this Jurisdiction and Recovered in an Outside Jurisdiction
 - 1. Upon notification that a missing child has been found outside the department's jurisdiction, the Officer-in-Charge shall ensure the following.
 - a. Notification to all agencies previously notified or involved.
 - b. The removal of the information from NCIC.
 - c. Notification of the investigating officer that the missing child has been located.
 - 2. The investigating officer shall notify the reporting party.
 - 3. The investigating officer shall file a report detailing the conclusion of the missing child's investigation in accordance with departmental procedures.
- F. Reported Missing Outside of this Jurisdiction and Recovered in this Jurisdiction
 - 1. The outside jurisdiction shall be notified of the recovery, circumstances, and condition of the recovered missing person.
 - 2. The supervisor will ensure that any needed or requested investigative assistance is provided.
 - 3. The department shall assist in arranging accommodations or contact DCF.
 - 4. Children Requiring Transportation and Accommodations: The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's (NCMEC) Hotline coordinates a program to assist families in the reunification process by arranging for transportation and lodging for families who cannot

afford these costs when picking up their missing child once found: 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).