



Germantown Police Department

Policy and Procedure

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Date of Issue</i>	<i>TACP SCD Reference</i>	<i>Amends</i>	<i>Rescind</i>	<i>Dist.</i>	<i>Number</i>
Missing and Abducted Children	August 7, 2012	15.2	NO	ALL	ALL	7-7
	<i>Effective Date</i>		<i>By order of...</i>			
	August 7, 2012		Richard L. Hall, Chief of Police			
	Previously Revised Date: N/A					

I. POLICY PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide dispatchers, officers, detectives, and supervisors with guidelines for recognizing instances and investigating reports of missing or abducted children.

II. POLICY STATEMENT

It shall be the policy of the Germantown Police Department to take immediate and necessary action for all reports of missing and abducted children. A missing child is considered at risk when they meet the criteria in Section Three of this policy. This department holds that every child reported as abducted is at risk until significant information to the contrary is confirmed.

Jurisdictional conflicts are to be avoided when a child is reported missing or abducted. If a child either resides in, or was last seen in the city of Germantown, this department will immediately initiate the required reporting process. If a child resides in the city of Germantown and was last seen in another jurisdiction, but the law enforcement agency covering that jurisdiction chooses not to take a missing child report, this department will assume reporting and investigative responsibility to include working closely with law enforcement in whose jurisdiction the child was last seen.

Questions concerning parental custody occasionally arise in relation to missing or abducted children reports. It shall be the policy of this department to accept the report of a missing or abducted child, if custody has not been formally established. Reporting parties shall be encouraged to obtain and produce legal custody documentation as soon as possible; however, since the safety of the missing child is paramount, members of this department will begin an investigation when it can be shown that the child has been removed, without explanation, from his or her usual place of residence.

III. DEFINITIONS

A. Missing Children

1. The term missing child refers to a person who is
 - a. younger than 18 years of age;
 - b. whose whereabouts are unknown to his or her custodial parent, guardian, or responsible party; and
 - c. who is not a runaway. (See Chapter 7, Section 2 for the Procedure for Runaways.)

2. A missing child will be considered at risk when one or more of the following risk factors present:
 - a. 13 years of age or younger.
 - b. Is out of the zone of safety for his or her age and developmental stage. The zone of safety will vary depending on the age of the child and his or her developmental stage. In the case of an infant, for example, the zone of safety will include the immediate presence of an adult custodian or the crib, stroller, or carriage in which the infant was placed. For a school aged child, the zone of safety might be the immediate neighborhood or route taken between home and school.
 - c. Has mental or behavioral disabilities. If the child is developmentally disabled or emotionally/behaviorally challenged, he or she may have difficulty communicating with others about needs, identity, or home address. The disability places the child in danger of exploitation or other harm.
 - d. Is drug dependent, including prescribed medication and/or illegal substances, and the dependency is potentially life threatening. Any drug dependency puts the missing child at risk. A diabetic or epileptic child requires regular medication or his or her condition may become critical.
The abuser of illegal drugs, on the other hand, may resort to crime or become the victim of exploitation.
 - e. Has been absent from home for more than 24 hours before being reported to law enforcement as missing. While some parents may incorrectly assume 24 hours must pass before law enforcement will accept a missing person case, a delay in reporting might also indicate the existence of neglect, abuse, or exploitation within the family.

- f. Is in a life threatening situation. The environment in which the child is missing may be particularly hazardous. Examples of a dangerous environment could be a busy highway for a toddler, an all night truck stop for a teenager, or an outdoor environment in inclement weather for a child of any age.
- g. Is in the company of others who could endanger his or her welfare. A missing child in such circumstances is in danger of not only sexual exploitation but also of involvement in criminal activity, such as burglary, shoplifting, and robbery or other violent crimes.

B. Abducted Children

- 1. Nonfamily abduction involves a child who has been wrongfully taken by a nonfamily perpetrator through the use of physical force, persuasion, or threat of bodily harm.
- 2. Family abduction occurs when, in violation of a custody order, a decree, or other legitimate custodial rights, a member of the child's family or someone acting on behalf of a family member takes or fails to return a child. This is also referred to as parental kidnapping and custodial interference.

IV. PROCEDURES FOR COMMUNICATIONS PERSONNEL

A. Guiding Principles and Values

- 1. Professionalism
- 2. Compassion
- 3. Respect
- 4. Patience
- 5. Commitment to accuracy and detail

B. Goals for the Initial Intake

- 1. Obtain and verify the incident location along with callback and contact information. Maintain control of the call. Using a firm, yet reassuring tone of voice with the caller, state that you are going to help the caller and will need to ask many questions in order to do so. Communicate the ability to help the caller.
- 2. Let the caller know that it's very important to remain on the line with you the entire time and answer the questions as well as possible to help police find the child.

Explain that you will be dispatching important information to police units throughout the phone call to ensure they respond quickly and with as much information as possible to aid in recovery of the child. Confirm that you will remain on the phone with the caller until police arrive on the scene.

3. Methodically and strategically obtain information through systematic inquiry to be input into the CAD.
4. Recognize the potential urgency of the missing child incident and immediately notify the on duty Communications supervisor.
5. Appropriately disseminate information to field units as it is gathered in each area/element of intake to promote rapid notification and response.

V. COMMUNICATIONS INITIAL INTAKE

A. Call Evaluation

1. When receiving a call about a missing child, the dispatcher will immediately determine if the child is missing or abducted, according to the definitions in Section Three of this policy.
2. The focus of the dispatcher should not be whether or not the case will qualify for an AMBER Alert. AMBER Alert processes do not supersede nor in any way replace the core functions of law enforcement operation and investigative response, but instead support those functions by creating a system of public notification about the incident. In all cases, the ability to effectively utilize an AMBER Alert system in these cases is predicated upon law enforcement and public safety dispatchers' initial intake, first field response, and ongoing investigation.
3. Whether the child is missing or abducted, the dispatcher will immediately notify the on duty Communications supervisor who will notify the on duty Patrol supervisor.

B. Request the exact location of the incident such as structure addresses, street names, intersections, and directional identifiers. If specifics are not known, request landmarks or estimated proximity to landmarks. Advise the caller and any witnesses to remain at their current location, unless determined unsafe, until law enforcement arrives. Obtain names and locations of the caller and any additional witnesses.

C. Ascertain exactly what happened.

D. Determine if there are any known injuries.

E. Ask if weapons were involved.

F. Time Frames

1. When did this happen? Determine if the incident is still in progress.
2. Where was the child last seen?
3. With whom was the child last seen?
4. Direction of travel, if known.
5. When the child was last seen, did he/she have with them a bicycle, skateboard, or other large item? If so, obtain a description including color, style, brand, and additional descriptors, if available.
6. Relationships between the child, caller, and suspect, if applicable.

G. Child

1. Name
2. Sex
3. Race
4. Age and Date of Birth
5. Primary language (Proficiency with English?)
6. Height
7. Weight
8. Hair
9. Eyes
10. Complexion
11. Physical attributes such as marks, scars, tattoos, or limp.
12. Clothing
 - a. Hat/Head
 - b. Coat
 - c. Shirt
 - d. Pants/Shorts

- e. Shoes
- f. Socks
- g. Any unique identifiers such as color, logo, or wording on the clothing?
- h. Any backpack/book bag, toy, or other identifiable possession? If so, obtain color, size, brand, markings, or logos.

- 13. Was the child with any pets?
- 14. Medications being taken, medical conditions, and mental or physical disabilities? If critical medicines are taken, when are next doses needed?
- 15. Does the child have a cellular telephone? (If so, **do not** have anyone try to call the cellular telephone. This information should immediately be forwarded to the Investigations supervisor.)

H. Suspect, if applicable

- 1. Name
- 2. Sex
- 3. Race
- 4. Age and Date of Birth
- 5. Primary language. (Proficiency with English?)
- 6. Height
- 7. Weight
- 8. Hair
- 9. Eyes
- 10. Complexion
- 11. Physical attributes such as marks, scars, tattoos or limp.
- 12. Clothing
 - a. Hat/Head
 - b. Coat

- c. Shirt
- d. Pants/Shorts
- e. Shoes
- f. Socks
- g. Any unique identifiers such as color, logo, or wording on the clothing?
- h. Any backpack/book bag, toy, or other identifiable possession? If so, obtain color, size, brand, markings, or logos.

13. Is the child familiar with the suspect?

- a. If a relative, what relation?
- b. Who allegedly has custody?
- c. Do any custody disputes exist?

14. History of violence or mental illness?

15. Does the suspect have a cellular telephone? (If so, **do not** have anyone try to call the cellular telephone. This information should immediately be forwarded to the Investigations supervisor.)

I. Vehicle, if applicable

- 1. Color
- 2. Year
- 3. Make
- 4. Model
- 5. Body
 - a. Additional descriptors such as rust, dents, other damage, or stickers.
- 6. Ascertain any onboard technology such as OnStar or LoJack. (This information should immediately be forwarded to the Investigations supervisor.)

VI. PATROL RESPONSE – MISSING CHILD

- A. The initial officer assigned to the report of a missing child shall
1. Respond promptly to the scene of the report.
 2. Interview the person who made the initial report and separately interview each family member of the missing child.
 3. Obtain a detailed description of the missing child. The confirmation of information about the missing child, including race, height, weight, hair, eye color, clothing, and other noteworthy features, should be done promptly and relayed to other officers assisting with the search.
 4. Confirm the child is in fact missing. First responders should never assume searches conducted by distraught parents or others have been performed in a thorough manner. Another check of the scene should be made and include places where children could be trapped, asleep, or hiding. Special attention should be paid to enclosures such as refrigerators, freezers, and the interior of parked vehicles where limited breathing air may place the child at even greater risk. In the case of other children, first responders should ask if parents have checked with the child's friends or perhaps overlooked or forgotten something the child may have said that would explain the absence. A thorough search of the home should be conducted even if the missing child was last seen elsewhere.
 5. Obtain at least one most recent photo of the child. The photo should be provided to the Patrol supervisor upon their arrival at the scene.
 6. Verify the child's custody status. First responders should ascertain whether a dispute over the child's custody might have played a role in the missing episode or might constitute a risk factor. Questions regarding whether the reporting party has legal custody, if the noncustodial parent has been contesting custody, or if the missing child expressed a desire to live with the other parent may help an officer gain important insight into the case.
 7. Identify the circumstances of the missing episode. First responders need to ascertain whether circumstances are such that a heightened level of response is warranted. If risk factors exist, as defined in Section Three of this policy, then additional resources will be needed. In other situations where circumstances are not clear, officers should keep the missing child's safety in mind and act accordingly.
 8. Determine when, where, and by whom the missing child was last seen. Interview family members, friends/associates of the child, and friends of the family separately to determine when each last saw the child, what they think happened to the child, and if the child had complained about being approached by anyone. Comparison of information gathered from the

reporting party, witness, and other sources may prove vital to case direction.

9. Interview the individual(s) who last had contact with the missing child. Effective questioning of those individuals who last saw or spoke with a missing child is crucial in the case assessment process. While seeking information about the child's appearance, demeanor, and actions, officers should also be alert to any contradictions made or evasiveness demonstrated by the witness, especially if these statements cannot be readily corroborated. Thorough documentation will allow detectives to later compare those statements with the facts of the case as they are uncovered.
10. Identify the missing child's zone of safety for his or her age and developmental stage. Responding officers should attempt to determine how far a missing child could travel from the location where last seen before he or she would most likely be at risk of injury or exploitation. This perimeter should, under many circumstances, define the first search zone.
11. Provide detailed descriptive information to Communications for broadcast updates. As new information becomes available regarding the missing child's physical appearance and circumstances of the case, the initial officer should ensure other officers and law enforcement agencies are provided with up-to-date facts.
12. Inquire if the child has access to the internet, a cell phone, and other communication devices before and after they were missing. The officer should determine if the child may have left to meet someone he or she encountered while online. Since some offenders are known to use the internet to identify vulnerable children, what appears at first to be a missing child case may, in fact, be a child abducted or enticed to leave by someone the child first met online. Even if a child willingly decides to leave home to join someone first met online, the child should be considered at risk. Additionally, since many children have their own cell phones and other electronic communications devices and may have them while missing, an officer should note these devices during the information gathering process and immediately notify the Patrol supervisor who shall notify the Investigations supervisor.
13. Prepare an offense report as a Matter of Record. If it is determined that a crime has been committed, the report classification shall be changed appropriately.

B. The Patrol supervisor shall

1. Respond with the initial officer and provide information and updates to the Investigations supervisor who will determine if detectives are needed.

2. Determine if additional personnel and resources are needed to assist in the search for the missing child.
3. Organize and coordinate the search efforts.
4. Ensure all appropriate notifications have been made within the department, to the City of Germantown public information officer, and to other law enforcement agencies about the missing child.
5. Show the photo of the child to officers involved with the search and make copies of the photo as needed.

VII. INVESTIGATIONS RESPONSE – MISSING CHILD

- A. The Investigations supervisor shall
1. Obtain a summary of the missing child incident and family dynamics from the Patrol supervisor.
 2. Explore the basis for any conflicting information.
 3. Determine the need for detectives to assist with the search.
 4. Monitor the progress of the search and constantly evaluate the need for utilizing detectives and investigative resources until the child is found.

VIII. PATROL RESPONSE – ABDUCTED CHILD

- A. The initial officer assigned to the report of an abducted child shall
1. Respond promptly to the scene of the report.
 2. Interview the person who made the initial report and separately interview each family member of the abducted child.
 3. Obtain a detailed description of the abducted child, at least one most recent photo of the child, and the most recent video of the child, if available. The confirmation of information about the abducted child, including race, height, weight, hair, eye color, clothing, and other noteworthy features, should be done promptly and relayed to other officers assisting with the search.
 4. Verify the child's custody status. First responders should ascertain whether a dispute over the child's custody might have played a role in the report of abduction. Questions regarding whether the reporting party has legal custody, if the noncustodial parent has been contesting custody, or if the abducted child expressed a desire to live with the other parent may help an officer gain important insight into the case.

5. Determine when, where, and by whom the abducted child was last seen. This information is needed to determine factors such as abduction time frame, windows of opportunity, and verification of previously received information. Interview family members, friends/associates of the child and friends of the family to determine when each last saw the child, what they think happened to the child, and if the child had complained about being approached by anyone. Comparison of information gathered from the reporting party, witness, and other sources may prove vital to case direction.
6. Interview the individual(s) who last had contact with the missing child. Effective questioning of those individuals who last saw or spoke with a missing child is crucial in the case assessment process. While seeking information about the child's appearance, demeanor, and actions, officers should also be alert to any contradictions made or evasiveness demonstrated by the witness, especially if these statements cannot be readily corroborated. Thorough documentation will allow detectives to later compare those statements with the facts of the case as they are uncovered.
7. Obtain a description of the suspected abductor(s) and other pertinent information. Officers need to immediately record witness information, not only for general investigative use but also before witnesses forget or speak to others who may confuse or make suggestions about what was actually observed. If the abduction scene involves a business or other public place, officers may be able to supplement witness information with video from security cameras that might provide crucial information about the suspect, vehicles, and circumstances.
8. Provide detailed descriptive information to Communications for broadcast updates. As new information becomes available regarding the abducted child's physical appearance, circumstances of the case, or description of the potential abductor, the initial officer should ensure other officers and law enforcement agencies are provided with up-to- date facts.
9. Secure and protect the crime scene(s), including the child's last seen location, the child's home, and any other areas of interest.
10. Inquire if the child has access to the internet, a cell phone, and other communication devices before and after the abduction. The officer should determine if the child may have left to meet someone he or she encountered while online. Since some offenders are known to use the internet to identify vulnerable children, what appears at first to be an abducted child case may, in fact, be a child enticed to leave by someone the child first met online. Even if a child willingly decides to leave home to join someone first met online, the child should be considered at risk. Additionally, since many children have their own cell phones and other electronic communications devices and may have them while missing, an officer should note these devices during the information gathering process

and immediately notify the Patrol supervisor who shall notify the Investigations supervisor.

11. Prepare an offense report for Kidnapping/Abduction and include names, addresses, phone numbers, and other pertinent information for witnesses and all immediate family members of the abducted child.

B. The Patrol supervisor shall

1. Respond with the initial officer and provide information and updates to the Investigations supervisor.
2. Acquire additional personnel and resources to assist in the search for the abducted child.
3. Initiate a neighborhood investigation. A thorough canvass of the neighborhood should be conducted without delay. The objective is to identify and interview all people within the abduction zone who may be able to provide information related to the incident. According to a key child homicide study, unknowing witnesses are those who see some aspect of a crime but, at the time, do not realize they are witnessing part of a crime or potential abduction. It has been found that there were unknowing witnesses in 32.9% of those cases studied. This indicates a neighborhood or area canvass would be of great importance in generating investigative leads. Officers should use a standardized set of questions during the canvass to ensure completeness and uniformity of information and facilitate establishment of a database to track leads. A record should also be made of all vehicles parked within the neighborhood and any other conditions that may have future investigative value.
4. When the following criteria are met, activate the AMBER Alert system (see Section Ten of this policy):
 - a. There is a reasonable belief by law enforcement that an abduction has occurred;
 - b. the child is 17 years of age or younger;
 - c. the law enforcement agency believes that the child is in imminent danger of bodily injury or death; and
 - d. the law enforcement agency has accurate information for the description of the child, description of the suspect, or description of a vehicle used in the abduction.
5. Establish a command post to organize and coordinate the search efforts.
6. Establish a police department liaison with the victim's family.

7. Ensure all appropriate notifications have been made within the department, to the City of Germantown public information officer, to the TBI, and to other law enforcement agencies about the abducted child.
8. Notify the abducted child's family about the availability of a Germantown Police Department chaplain and then to contact the department chaplain if the victim's family would like to meet with the chaplain.

IX. INVESTIGATIONS RESPONSE – ABDUCTED CHILD

- A. The Investigations supervisor shall
 1. Respond to the command post and obtain a summary of the abduction and the family dynamics from the Patrol supervisor.
 2. Verify the accuracy of all previously obtained information.
 3. Explore the basis for any conflicting information.
 4. Assign a detective to access sex offender registries to determine if individuals designated as sex offenders reside, work, or are otherwise associated with the area.
 5. Assign a detective to utilize the LOCATER system to create an AMBER Alert poster with the photo obtained from the abducted child's family. The detective will give the AMBER Alert poster to the public information officer and to the Communications supervisor. The public information officer will distribute copies of the poster to the news media.
 6. Complete all remaining key investigative and coordination steps. Key investigative steps include, when applicable, collecting articles of the abducted child's clothing for scent tracking purposes; reviewing and evaluating all available information and evidence collected; securing the child's last medical and dental records; contacting landfill management and requesting delay or segregation of garbage and dumping containers from key investigative areas; developing and executing an investigative plan; conducting a criminal history background check on all principal suspects, witnesses, and participants in the investigation.
 7. Implement effective case management to record, index, cross-reference, and retrieve the facts amassed during an investigation.
 8. Evaluate the need for additional resources and specialized services. The complexity of many missing child incidents may necessitate the use of resources and services both from within the agency and other organizations, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

9. Update descriptive information. If it appears the case will not be promptly resolved, detectives should ensure the descriptive record, especially the information entered into the NCIC Missing Person File, is updated to include dental characteristics, scars, marks, tattoos, and fingerprints, along with additional articles of clothing, jewelry, or unique possessions.
10. Coordinate with the public information officer for receiving information from and disseminating information to the news media.

X. AMBER ALERT SYSTEM

A. Communications Responsibilities

1. The abducted child will immediately be entered into the NCIC Missing Person File.
2. An AMBER Alert BOLO will immediately be distributed to all appropriate law enforcement agencies.
3. Immediately contact the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation at 1-800-TBI-FIND (1-800-824-3463) to activate the Emergency Alert System. The TBI will then contact the Tennessee Department of Transportation to activate the “Intelligent Transportations Signs” with an AMBER Alert. The TBI will also contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), Tennessee Emergency Management Agency, and the Tennessee Highway Patrol.
4. The AMBER Alert poster obtained from a detective will be distributed to all appropriate law enforcement agencies by e-mail, which is preferred, or by fax.

B. Patrol Responsibilities

1. The Patrol supervisor will verify that the first three Communications responsibilities have been completed.

C. Investigations Responsibilities

1. The Investigations supervisor will verify that the fourth Communications responsibility has been completed.

XI. RECOVERY PROCESS

A. An officer assigned to the recovery or return of a missing or abducted child shall

1. Personally verify the located child is, in fact, the reported missing or abducted child.

2. Have the child examined by medical personnel to ascertain the health status of the child.
3. Coordinate the return of the child to his or her legal guardian with the Investigations supervisor.
4. Complete the appropriate supplemental reports and cancel all outstanding notifications to other law enforcement agencies and NCIC.

XII. REVIEW PROCESS

An annual review of this policy shall be conducted to determine if it should be revised, cancelled or continued in its present form.

This order shall remain in effect until revoked or superseded by competent authority.