

# SDDFS NOTES

## on Missing Children

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### **Don't Forget!**

## **Florida's Missing Children's Day**

**November  
18th**

**(rescheduled  
from September  
13, 2004)**

## **Missing Children : Introduction**

The disappearance of a child is a disturbing circumstance for everyone. Family members, in particular, suffer considerable anxiety when a child cannot be found.

Likewise, people in law enforcement, educators, and those working in child protective services are equally distressed when any child disappears from the safety of a home or community. Some of these children become victims of crimes that result in emotional or physical harm, or even death. To complicate matters, missing children are categorized several ways: 1) family abductions, 2) endangered runaways, 3) non-family abductions, and 4) lost, injured or otherwise missing. In response to this growing problem, state and federal laws have been passed to protect children from persons who intentionally cause undue harm. Also, aggressive pursuit and prosecution of perpetrators who victimize

children has escalated awareness nationwide.

How serious is the problem of missing children? It is very serious. The National Incidence Studies of Missing Children in 2002 estimated 797,500 children were reported missing. Of those, 58,000 children were abducted by non-family members, 115 were kidnapped, and 203,900 were taken by family members. Furthermore, annual FBI data confirm we should be more aggressive in reducing child victimization. According to the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) 85% to 90% of the persons reported missing are juveniles or young people under 18 years of age. This alarming figure implies that many parents or primary caregivers call upon law enforcement each year to locate a missing child. To further illustrate the enormity of this problem, in the year



2000 there was a 468% increase in the number of missing persons since 1982.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) coordinates a well-organized and extremely comprehensive system of protecting juveniles. Relying on Florida Statutes as well as effective programs and services delivered through the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) Safe and Healthy Schools Office, the Office of Drug Control (ODC), the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), the Department of Children and Families (DCF), and the Department of Health (DOH), FDLE uses its capacity to integrate these agencies into a network of expert

See "Missing", page 2

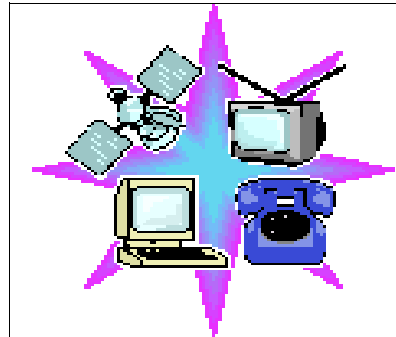
## Missing continued

personnel who work to keep children safe at home, in school, and the community.

This issue of SDDFS NOTES examines the critical topic of missing children in Florida, and across the nation, from a variety of perspectives. For example, you will review Florida State Statutes that protect youth, youth Internet safety recommendations, as well as an overview of the Ch\*I\*P program. You will read about the first steps that should be followed when a child disappears. An overview of the AMBER Alert system, which is now operational nationwide, is also found in this publication. Finally, information on the selection and use of training and educational resources is included.

As professional educators, we are obliged to provide safe and fear-free environments for every child, and to decrease the number of children at risk. This issue has been produced precisely for the purpose of advancing the knowledge of professionals whose work is focused on youth. Do your part by engaging everyone around you in protecting Florida's children from potential harm. **PASS IT ON.**

## AMBER Alert—Florida's Action Plan for Missing Children



Governor Bush expressed it best, "The first few hours of abduction are the most crucial. We want information on a missing child to be released to the public as soon as possible and as widely as possible to further the chances of a successful recovery." The quick return of a child to its parents or guardians depends largely on how successful authorities work together in this effort. Time is of the essence in critical situations such as this. In such case, a nationwide system of coordinating the return of children known as the AMBER Alert Plan was established.

The AMBER Alert Plan was conceived following the tragic death of Amber Hagerman, a 9-year old girl who was abducted and murdered in 1996. The plan is modeled after the often used emergency alert notices that go out during severe weather conditions. The AMBER Alert system delivers radio and television announcements immediately following the report of an abduction.

Of course, to avoid potential of false or premature reports to authorities, the abduction must be verified by law enforcement before the announcement is posted to the public. Florida was one of the first states to put this system of public notification about child abductions into effect.

Today AMBER Alert has been expanded to comprise many ways of bringing attention to a child's disappearance. In 2002, many other Florida agencies joined forces with FDLE to augment effectiveness of this system. Partners now include the Florida Department of Transportation, Florida Highway Patrol, and the Florida Lottery. For instance, the Florida Lottery uses its road signs and lottery machines as a means of putting the public on notice of a child's disappearance. In 2003, Governor Bush launched the Dynamic Message signs that are displayed on Florida roads in conjunction with each Amber Alert. Additionally, the Missing Children Information Clearinghouse (MCIC) created an email system allowing businesses and citizens to automatically receive missing children alerts. The address is:

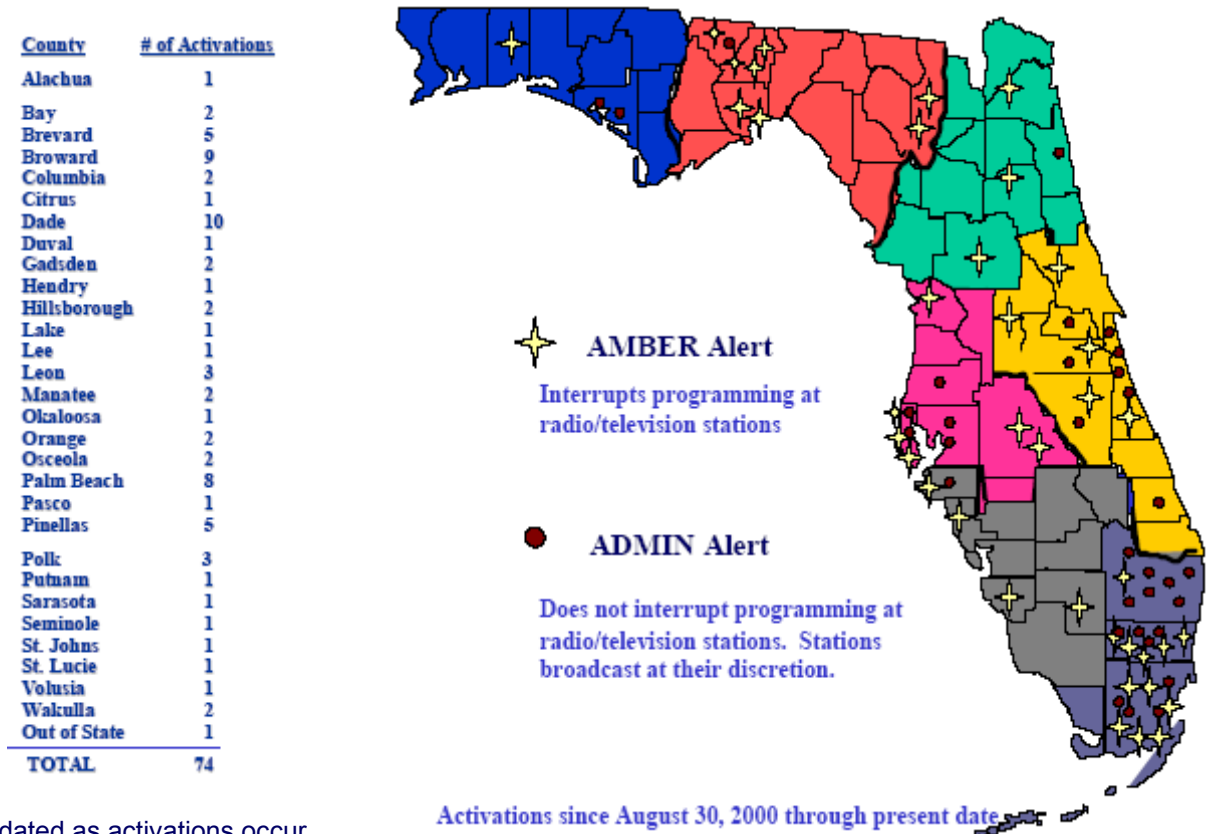
<http://www.missingchildrenalert.com>.

See "Amber Alert" page 3



### Amber Alert continued

The Florida map below details the number of AMBER activations by school district from August 30, 2000 through October 2004.



→Note: Updated as activations occur.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement has a policy on AMBER activation. This strict policy requires anyone seeking to activate an alert to adhere to clearly stated rules. A summary of these criteria is found below. More detailed information can be found on the FDLE website regarding steps for activation.

See "Amber Alert" page 4

## **Amber Alert** continued

### **To activate the alert the following five criteria must be met:**

- 1) The child must be under 18 years of age.
- 2) There must be a clear indication of abduction.
- 3) The law enforcement agency's investigation must conclude that the child's life is in danger.
- 4) There must be a detailed description of child and/or abductor/vehicle to broadcast to the public (photo when available).
- 5) The activation must be recommended by the local law enforcement agency of jurisdiction.

### **Steps for Activation are:**

- 1) The Amber Alert can only be activated by law enforcement.
- 2) The local law enforcement agency will call the FDLE Missing Children Information Clearinghouse (MCIC) at 1-888-356-4774.
- 3) The FDLE will work in conjunction with the local law enforcement agency of jurisdiction to determine if information is to be broadcast on a regional or statewide basis.
- 4) The FDLE working in conjunction with the local law enforcement agency of jurisdiction will prepare information (i.e., child, suspect and/or vehicle contact information) for public distribution.
- 5) The FDLE will ensure that the information is broadcast through the Emergency Alert System, Dynamic Message Signs, lottery machines.  
<http://www.missingchildrenalert.com>

### **Make Use of All Available Resources:**

- 1) Local media outlets
- 2) Local crime stoppers
- 3) National Center for Missing and Exploited Children <http://www.missingkids.com>, 1-800-843-5678/FI. 1-561-848-1900
- 4) Jimmy Ryce Center for Victims of Predatory Abductors 1-800-JIM-RYCE (546-7923)
- 5) Child Watch (Orlando) 1-800-928-2445
- 6) A Child is Missing, Inc. 1-888-875-2246
- 7) FBI National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime 1-800-634-4097



## Immediate Steps To Take When A Child is Missing

The OJJDP Report, entitled “When Your Child is Missing: A Family Survival Guide” (May, 1998) indicated that the first 48 hours following the disappearance of a child are the most critical. Parents are given a list of very important steps they should follow. Here is an inventory of those important steps. Be sure to go to the NCMEC website, <http://www.missingkids.com/> or call 800-843-5678 for further information. Copy, and **PASS IT ON** to parents in your district.

### The First 24 Hours

- o Immediately report your child missing to local law enforcement personnel. Ask investigators to enter the child into the National Crime Information Center NCIC Missing Persons File.
- o Request that law enforcement put out a *Be On the Look Out (BOLO)* bulletin.
- o Limit access to your home until law enforcement arrives and has collected possible evidence.
- o Ask for the name and telephone number of the law enforcement investigator assigned to your case, and keep this information in a safe and convenient place.
- o Give law enforcement investigators all the facts and circumstances related to the disappearance of your child, including what efforts have already been made to search for your child.
- o Write a detailed description of the clothing worn by your child, identifying physical traits/marks, and the personal items he or she had at the time of the disappearance.
- o Make a list of friends, acquaintances, and anyone else that might have information or clues about your child’s whereabouts, particularly those whose interest in, or involvement with the family changed in recent months.
- o Find recent photographs of your child and make copies of these pictures for law enforcement, the media, and other agencies involved in the search.
- o Call NCMEC at 1-800-843-5678 to ask for help with photo distribution.
- o Ask your law enforcement agency to organize a search for your child, and if necessary with tracking or trailing dogs, etc. Also ask them to contact the media on your behalf.
- o Designate one person to answer your telephone. Keep a notebook or pad of paper by the phone to jot down important information as it becomes available.
- o Keep a notebook or pad with you at all times to write down thoughts, leads, or questions.

### The Second 24 Hours

- o Talk with your law enforcement investigator about the steps being taken to find your child.
- o Expand your list of friends, acquaintances, extended family members, etc., who may have seen your child during or following the abduction.
- o Look at personal calendars, community events calendars, and newspapers for clues about who may have been in the area at time of abduction.
- o Anticipate that authorities may want you to take a polygraph test, which is standard procedure.
- o Report any extortion attempts to law enforcement.
- o Consider having a second phone line installed with call forwarding, get caller ID and call waiting. Also work with authorities to install a trap-and-trace feature on your phone.
- o Ask questions until they are answered.
- o Make a list of things volunteers can do to help you.
- o Get dental, x-rays, and other medical records, and give them to law enforcement.

(Source – *When Your Child Is Missing: A Family Survival Guide*, May 1999)



## Internet Safety for Young Children and Teens



One in five children (ages 10-17) receive unwanted sexual solicitations online. These alarming statistics were derived from a U. S. Department of Justice survey which was administered by the Crimes against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire.

In addition to the disturbing ratio of how many children are solicited, one-third of the surveyed youth receiving solicitations were males and two-thirds were females, with the largest number of victims between the ages of 14-17 years. Nearly all of the solicitations were from strangers, of which two-thirds were male. Frighteningly, 70% of the solicitations occurred during the time these youth were using a home-based computer. Almost half the survey respondents did not tell an adult about the solicitation. The study also revealed that most parents or guardians who permitted youth to use the Internet failed to use filtering or blocking software.

Dr. David Finkelhor, Director of the Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC), Dr. Kimberly Mitchell, and Janis Wolak, administered the survey and authored the report. Their study produced several important recommendations (below) that are worth noting.

**PASS IT ON.**



### **Recommendations:**

- 1) Youth and families should be encouraged to report incidents to Internet service providers and, when appropriate, to law enforcement.
- 2) Online reporting sources like the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's (NCMEC's) CyberTipline (<http://www.cybertipline.com>) should be better publicized to reach a broader audience of youth.
- 3) Mental health, school, and family counselors should receive training about the effects of online hazards on youth.
- 4) More Understanding is needed about families' knowledge of, attitudes about, and experiences with filtering and blocking software.
- 5) Concern about internet victimization should not eclipse efforts to combat other forms of youth victimization (e.g., assault, abuse, and neglect).

More information on Internet solicitation is available at: <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/>

## Ch\*I\*P Program for Kids

Young children are often targets of predators who take advantage of their innocence and immaturity. Even places perceived as safe for children may not be anymore. Therefore, parents and teachers must always remain alert to the possibility that a child in their care may be abducted. The Child Identification Program (**Ch\*I\*P**) has been established to decrease opportunities for this unfortunate situation to occur.

The **Ch\*I\*P** program, similar to programs that fingerprint children, gives parents or guardians a means of keeping vital DNA records on their child. DNA stands for deoxyribonucleic acid, the building block of life, and does not change over a lifetime. It is the source of essential genetic information which distinguishes each individual from another. The DNA obtained with a blood sample is recorded shortly after the child is born, or shortly after the child enters school. The sample, which is maintained by the parent, serves many purposes. First the information could be used when a child is kidnapped or abducted by a parent. Or, it could prove useful in an accident or natural disaster. The **Ch\*I\*P** program is an excellent program. Find out which hospitals in your district currently offer it and then, **PASS IT ON**. For more information on Ch\*I\*P, go to <http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/Chip/>



### **REMEMBER.....**

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) suggests that training and educational materials used to reduce child victimization should:

- Be based on accepted educational theories;
- Be appropriate for the age and educational and developmental levels of the child;
- Offer concepts that will help children build self confidence in order to better handle and protect themselves in all types of situations;
- Have multiple program components that are repeated several years in a row; and
- Utilize qualified presenters who use role-playing, behavioral rehearsal, feedback, and active participation. **PASS IT ON.**



## Types of Child Sexual Exploitation under Federal Law

Source: National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (2004)



<b>Child Pornography</b> (possession, manufacture and distribution)	Visual depiction of a minor engaged in sexually explicit conduct (18 USC 2256).
<b>Online Enticement</b>	Use of the internet to entice, invite, or persuade a child to meet for the purpose of sexual acts, or to help arrange such a meeting (18 USC 2425).
<b>Child Prostitution</b>	Performing, offering, or agreeing to perform a sexual act for any money, property, token, object, article, or anything of value (18 USC 2423(a)).
<b>Child Sexual Tourism</b>	A law prohibits any U.S. Citizen from traveling abroad to engage in sexual activity with any child under 18 (18 USC 2423(b)).
<b>Unsolicited Obscene Material</b>	These materials are sometimes attached as an image(s), or hyperlinks sent to a child in an unsolicited e-mail or spam (18 USC 1470).

For more information on how these federal laws are related to Florida laws on Sex-Offenders go to [http://www3.fdle.state.fl.us/Sexual\\_Predators/](http://www3.fdle.state.fl.us/Sexual_Predators/). This website tells more about The Florida Sex-Offender Registration and Notification Requirements process, and how it directly relates to Sex-Offenders living near schools in your district. The site includes information on:

- § Who is required to register
- § What is meant by Sexual Offender
- § Who is a Sexual Predator
- § Requirement of Juvenile Offenders
- § What is required of Offenders living or working near or attending Florida Schools



## Florida Statutes



### 775.21 Florida Sexual Predators Act

Designates an offender as a “sexual predator” and subject to registration and community and public notification if the felony is a capital, life, or first-degree felony violation, or any attempt thereof of specified offenses. See statute.

Expresses legislative intent that the high level of threat that a sexual predator presents to the public safety provides sufficient justification to:

- prohibit sexual predators from working with children, either for compensation or as a volunteer;
- require sexual predators to register with the Department of Corrections; and
- require community and public notification of the presence of sexual predators.

Requires local law enforcement to inform the community and the public of a sexual predator’s presence and to notify each licensed day care center, elementary school, middle school, and high school within a 1-mile radius of the temporary or permanent residence of the sexual predator within 48 hours after receiving notification. Provides a 3<sup>rd</sup> degree felony penalty for violations.

### 810.0975 School Safety Zones

Establishes School Safety Zones from one hour before and one hour after school in, on, or within 500 feet of any real property owned by or leased to any public or private elementary, middle or high school. Requires the school principal or designee to notify law enforcement to prohibit any person from loitering in the school safety zone who does not have legitimate business or other authorization or license to enter or remain in the school safety zone or does not otherwise have invitee status.

Prohibits any person from entering or loitering within the school safety zone without legitimate business in the school or any other authorization or license to enter or trespass in the school safety zone or without otherwise having invitee status. Provides exception for residents and persons operating a licensed, commercial business. Provides a 2<sup>nd</sup> degree misdemeanor penalty.

See “FL Statutes”, p.10



## Florida Statutes continued



### 937.023 List of Missing Children

Requires the Florida Department of Education (DOE) to provide for a program to identify and locate missing Florida school children who are enrolled in public school districts. Defines a “missing Florida school child” as a child 18 years of age or younger whose whereabouts are unknown.

Requires DOE to:

Collect each month a list of missing school children as provided by the Florida Crime Information Center.

Compile a list of missing school children, which shall be distributed monthly to all school districts and requires districts to distribute this information to the schools.

Notify the appropriate local, state, or federal law enforcement authority as soon as any additional information is obtained or contact is made with respect to a missing school child.

Requires every public school district to notify DOE at its earliest known contact with any child whose name appears on the list. *[State Board of Education rule 6A-6.083 implements this requirement]*

### 937.025 Missing children; student records; reporting requirements

Notwithstanding any law that provides for the confidentiality of student records maintained by a public or private school, upon notification by Florida Department of Law Enforcement that a child is listed or reported as missing, the school in which the child is currently enrolled, or was previously enrolled, shall flag the student records in such a manner that whenever a copy of or information concerning the records is requested, the person authorized to provide such copy or information is alerted to the fact that the child has been listed or reported as missing.

Requires the school to report to local law enforcement and Florida Department of Law Enforcement any request concerning flagged student records and to report any information regarding the request that may assist law enforcement agencies in locating the missing child.

Provides immunity from civil liability for reporting such information.

Requires employees of state or local government and public or private schools to promptly report any information received or possessed that could assist in locating a child who has been reported as missing, ascertaining the identity of the person who has actual custody of a missing child, and determining whether a missing child is in danger of physical injury or death.

Provides a first degree misdemeanor penalty for knowingly reporting false information.



## Florida Statutes continued



### **943.043 Toll-Free Number**

Authorizes Department of Corrections to notify the public through the Internet of any information regarding sexual predators and sexual offenders which is not confidential and exempt from public disclosure.

Requires Department of Corrections to provide, through a toll-free telephone number, public access to registration information regarding sexual predators and sexual offenders.

Requires Department of Corrections to provide a photograph of any sexual offender or sexual predator which the department maintains in its files and a printed summary of information available, upon request.

### **943.04351 Search of Records of Persons Prior to Appointment or Employment to Work with Children**

Requires a state agency or governmental subdivision, prior to making any decision to appoint or employ a person to work, whether for compensation or as a volunteer, at any park, playground, day care center, or other place where children regularly congregate, to conduct a search of that person's name or other identifying information against the registration information regarding sexual predators and sexual offenders maintained by Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Exempts from this requirement individuals already subject to a state and federal background check, since the background check they have completed is more thorough than this search. Individuals employed by school districts and others that already undergo background screening pursuant to the School Code are not subject to this additional review.

### **947.1405 Conditional Release Program**

Requires any inmate who was convicted of specified crimes and whose victim was under the age of 18 and who is subject to conditional release supervision shall have, in addition to any other conditions imposed, a prohibition on living within 1,000 feet of a school, day care center, park, playground, designated public school bus stop, or other place where children regularly congregate. DOC is required to notify each affected school district of the location of the residence of a releasee 30 days prior to the release, and thereafter if the releasee changes his or her residence.

By October 1, 2004, district school boards must relocate any existing school bus stops, and may not establish a new school bus stop if the site is within 1,000 feet of the existing residence of a sex offender.

After October 1, 2004, prohibits certain sex offenders from living within 1,000 feet of a school, day care center, park or playground if their victim was less than 16 years old. Provides a penalty.

## Read More about Missing Children

[For more information and additional resources go to the websites below.](#)

Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) <http://www.fdle.state.fl.us>

National Clearinghouse on Abuse and Neglect Information <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm>

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children <http://www.missingkids.com>

U. S. Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org>

Also read:

- Federal Resources on Missing and Exploited Children, Third Ed., May 2001
- *Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Throwaway Children in America: First Report* by Finkelhor, D., et.al. (1990).
- Families of Missing Children, Final Report, Center for The Study of Trauma, University of California, San Francisco (1992).
- *How to Prevent a Family Abduction (a paper produced by the Vanished Children Alliance)*, Hilgeman, George K. (1999).

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The members of the SDDFS staff, as well as the staff of the Office of Safe and Healthy Schools at the Department of Education, stand ready to provide support through training and technical assistance to schools and school districts. Please encourage educators to take advantage of our services. For additional information on these resources or to find out how to access these resources, please contact the librarian at (850) 414-0236 (SunCom 994-0236) or by email at [sdfs\\_librarian@firn.edu](mailto:sdfs_librarian@firn.edu).

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### Florida Safe, Disciplined and Drug-Free Schools Project

Phone: (850) 414-9976

SunCom: 944-9976

FAX: (850) 414-9979

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Website: [www.unf.edu/dept/fie/sdfs](http://www.unf.edu/dept/fie/sdfs)

The Department of Education, through the Bureau of Student Assistance, funds the Florida Institute of Education's (FIE's) Safe, Disciplined and Drug-Free Schools Project. FIE is an institute of the University of North Florida. The Safe, Disciplined and Drug-Free Schools Project offers technical assistance and support in the development and implementation of drug use and violence prevention strategies. For more information, contact the FIE/SDFS Project.

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