



Virginia Missing Person Family Resource Guide

NOTE: This guide is intended to be used to assist families of missing persons by providing an overview of actions to take when a loved one goes missing. This is not an exhaustive list, but does provide helpful steps to take, expectations for families, and other resource links.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Call law enforcement immediately** if your child goes missing. Do not delay contacting the police to file a report when *any* family member, regardless of age, goes missing. This is especially important if there are any health issues, disabilities, impairments, medication requirements, etc. There is *no* waiting period to file a missing report for any person in Virginia.
- Be prepared to provide a description of the missing person, what they were wearing, and what vehicle they may have been travelling in and/or who they may be with or last seen with.
- Ask law enforcement if the situation meets Amber Alert, Senior Alert, or the Endangered Missing Child Media Alert criteria.
- Ask law enforcement if the situation requires a search effort and, if so, whether search and rescue resources have been requested or deployed.
- Avoid going into the missing person's room or area(s) they spend the most time. Secure these areas and their personal belongings until law enforcement provides further direction. Below is a list of some items of importance:
 1. Items such as a hairbrush, a toothbrush, or undergarments in the event that investigators may need to undertake DNA analysis. Items such as shoes, socks or undergarments in the event investigators need to have scent articles.
 2. Any electronic equipment such as a cell phone and/or computer. Cell phone provider; Recent activity on social sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.: **Do not try to search devices yourself.** Allow law enforcement to retrieve information on devices and social media.
 3. Any personal documents such as banking statements, credit card statements and life insurance policy.
 4. Any written material such as a journal.
- When you have finished filing the missing person's report, ask that law enforcement get back to you with the missing person's FBI National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing Person file number and the contact information for the investigator in charge of the file.
- Request the name and contact information for the law enforcement liaison who can explain law enforcement efforts and work with the family to uncover any additional information useful to the investigation. This may be a different person than the investigator in charge. Find out the name and contact information for the backup law enforcement person when the primary is not available.
- Law enforcement should request that a family volunteer or a family spokesperson be a liaison to communicate with investigators. This simplifies the relationship as law enforcement will be able to update one person with respect to the investigation and will know who to contact when information is needed from the family. Talk with your family and close friends about who will be your family's contact person with the police. If the members of your family are feeling overwhelmed you may decide that a close friend should be the contact person.
- To make things more manageable, start a log or journal. Include all information about the missing person's case in the journal.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS IF YOUR CHILD IS MISSING

- After contacting law enforcement, call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) 24 hour hotline at 1-800-THE-LOST. NCMEC may offer a case management team to work directly with your family and the law enforcement agency investigating your case. This may include technical assistance, poster creation and dissemination, and family peer support resources and referrals.
- Provide investigator with any information regarding custody or visitation issues and provide a copy of the custody order if a family abduction is suspected.

ACTIONS YOUR FAMILY CAN UNDERTAKE

- Tell all necessary people about the disappearance of the missing person. This may include the missing person's employer, their bank, and their doctor. If the missing person is a child you will need to contact the school they are attending.
- Obtain copies of the missing person's medical and dental records.
- Phone friends or acquaintances that may have information about where the missing person is. Write all of the information down in your journal.
- If you find out any additional information from telephone inquiries pass it on to law enforcement.
- Distribute a flyer with a photograph of the missing person around your community and social media. If the missing person is a child, contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children about the services they provide for distributing pictures and posters.
- If it applies to your situation, arrange for the payment of the missing person's mortgage, rent or bills. You may require legal advice on how to proceed.
- If it applies, arrange for care of any children or other dependents of the missing person.
- If it applies, arrange for care of any animals/pets belonging to the missing person.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

- Discuss with the law enforcement liaison a plan for communicating information to you. Keep the lines of communication open with the law enforcement liaison by asking questions, making suggestions, airing any differences.
- Expect to go through a detailed search and rescue questionnaire with law enforcement. Be prepared to answer questions that may be uncomfortable or may make you feel like you are being interrogated.
- Request that the law enforcement liaison contact a victim advocate, if available, to meet with you to explain your rights and explore services that might be available in your community.
- Expect that law enforcement may ask that you not disclose some information to the media.
- Be prepared for intense media interest. Although such interest can be leveraged to aid in the search for a loved one, at times it could become intrusive and upsetting.
- Expect that there may be times when law enforcement may not be able to share information about the investigation because doing so might jeopardize safety or the investigation.
- Be aware that things may be posted on news and social media sites before law enforcement can reach you. Postings may not be accurate-- speak with law enforcement before assuming it's true.
- In the event of a long-term search, develop a plan to meet regularly with the law enforcement liaison and discuss goals of ongoing search efforts.

ACTIONS TO UNDERTAKE TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

- Ask yourself if you need to take an extended leave from work. If you do, talk to your employer about what options might be available.
- If you feel you need an extension on bill payments, ask about what options are available.
- Try to eat, sleep, and exercise on a regular basis. Although you may not feel that you have time it is important to take care of yourself.
- Try not to blame yourself for the disappearance of your loved one. Treat yourself with as much kindness as you can in these difficult times.
- Be aware that comments made by readers of online media can sometimes be extremely upsetting. You may wish to avoid reading such comments.
- If you have other children, focus on their needs and check in with them about their feelings and how they are coping. Expect that their behavior might change and seek professional counseling for them so they can return to some type of normalcy.
- If hiring private investigators, check their references and make certain they are properly registered by contacting DCJS Division of Licensure and Regulatory Services at 804-786-4700. Let your law enforcement contact know that you are hiring a private investigator and would like them to assist as deemed appropriate by law enforcement.
- Individuals who identify themselves as psychics or those individuals who say they can bring your loved one home for a fee deserve special scrutiny, as they may set unrealistic or false hopes for your family.
- Try to realize your limits. Be easy on yourself if you are unable to provide what is needed in all situations. You may, for instance, be unable to provide emotional support to all of the members of your family. Don't feel guilty about seeking professional counseling services to help yourself and your family deal with the wide range of emotions that are being experienced.
- Don't feel guilty if you have to return to work. This does not mean that you have given up on the search for your loved one.

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

An excellent guide published by the Department of Justice is available that provides an in-depth discussion of many of these points: *When Your Child is Missing: A Family Survival Guide* (http://www.missingkids.com/en_US/publications/PDF6A.pdf)

VIRGINIA RESOURCES

Virginia State Police: Missing Children

(804) 674-2000

<http://www.vsp.state.va.us/MissingChildren.shtm>

Virginia State Police Missing Persons

(804) 674-2000

www.vsp.state.va.us/MissingPersons.shtm

Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM)

Emergency Operations Center, Search and Rescue Office: 1-800-468-8892 (24 hr.) or 804-674-2422

Virginia Amber Alert plan and criteria: www.vaamberalert.com/index.htm

Virginia Senior Alert: www.vasenioralert.com/plan_components.html

Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services

INFO-Line1-888-887-3418

Callers will be informed of their rights as victims under *Virginia's Crime Victim and Witness Rights Act* and will receive additional information, support, and referrals to programs and resources in their communities.

Virginia's Criminal Injury Compensation Fund

(800) 552-4007

www.cicf.state.va.us/index.shtml

NATIONAL AND OTHER RESOURCES

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)

1-800-THE-LOST

www.missingkids.com/MissingChild (If missing person is under 18 years of age).

National Runaway Safeline

1-800-RUNAWAY

www.1800runaway.org/parents-guardians

Child Find Saskatchewan

1-800-513-FIND

childfind.sk.ca/index.php/site

Help Save the Next Girl: missing@helpsavethenextgirl.com

International Association of Chiefs of Police Alzheimer's Initiative

www.theiacp.org/Missing-Alzheimers-Disease-Patient

Alzheimer's Association Wandering

www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-dementia-wandering.asp

Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline: 1-800-272-3900

AARP Caregiving Resource Center

www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/

Alzheimer's Foundation of America

<http://www.alzfdn.org/index.htm>

Project Lifesaver

www.projectlifesaver.org

This resource guide was created by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services in collaboration with the Virginia State Crime Commission's Missing Person Family Resource Guide Workgroup. Published May 2016