



Missing Persons

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines and responsibilities regarding the Ridgely Police Department's response to reports of missing persons. This policy also identifies the proper reporting requirements, as mandated by Maryland law.

II. POLICY

A. The Family Law – Title IX of the Annotated Code of Maryland establishes guidelines and standards for all law enforcement agencies in the State to ensure prompt and thorough police action in response to the report of a missing child. The legislation further creates within the Maryland State Police a clearinghouse for missing children, and mandates the submission of certain reports and information to the clearinghouse by law enforcement agencies. It also authorizes the Maryland State Police to act in certain cases.

B. A waiting period before beginning an investigation to locate a missing person is prohibited by Maryland law and no member of the Ridgely Police Department will discourage the filing of a report or the taking of any action on a report of a missing person [Family Law Article 9-402(e); Public Safety Article 3-601(a)].

C. It shall be the policy of the Ridgely Police Department to thoroughly investigate all reports of missing persons. Additionally every child reported missing to this agency will be considered at risk until significant information to the contrary is confirmed.

III. DEFINITIONS

A. **Missing Adult**- Any person eighteen (18) years of age or older, whose whereabouts are unknown and unexplainable for a period of time that is regarded by knowledgeable parties as highly unusual or suspicious, in consideration of the subject's normal behavior patterns, plans or routines.

B. **Critical Missing Adult**- Any missing person, age eighteen (18) or older in which one or more of the following circumstances may exist:

1. The missing adult suffers from a neurodegenerative disease;
2. The missing adult suffers from mental/physical impairment or serious illness;
3. The missing adult is suicidal; or
4. There is evidence of foul play.

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C. Missing Child- Any missing person under the age of eighteen (18) years, and who is the subject of a Missing Persons Report filed with a law enforcement agency in this State, and whose whereabouts are unknown [MD Family Law 9-401(c)].

D. Critically Missing Child- Any missing person under the age of eighteen (18), in which one or more of the following circumstances may exist:

1. The missing child has not been the subject of a prior missing person report;
2. The missing child suffers from mental/physical impairment or serious injury;
3. The disappearance is of a suspicious or dangerous nature;
4. The complainant believes the missing child may have been abducted;
5. The missing child has previously been the subject of a child abuse report filed with the State or local law enforcement agency; or
6. The missing person is under 14 years of age.

E. Missing Emancipated Person- Any person under the age of eighteen (18) years; and legally declared emancipated (released from parental care) by the laws of his/her state of residence; and, the subject of a missing person report filed with a law enforcement agency in this State; and, whose whereabouts are unknown; and the agency has signed documentation in its possession supporting the stated conditions (emancipation) under which the person is declared missing. If the emancipation documentation is not in our possession, the report is filed under the Missing Child status.

F. Report Death or Disappearance of Minor- Requires a parent, guardian or person who has supervision of minor child to report the disappearance of an individual under the age of 13 within 24 hours and the reporting of a death of an individual under the age of 13 within 5 hours.

IV. STATE OF MARYLAND MISSING PERSON REPORT

A. All missing person reports will be taken in person by an Officer unless the reporting person is at an unreasonably distant location, such as out-of-state. In these circumstances, a report made by phone or other electronic means is acceptable. There is no mandatory waiting period, or a specific age that a person must be prior to the initiation of a report [Family Law Article 9-402(e); Public Safety Article 3-601(a)].

B. The standardized State of Maryland Missing Person Report, along with a criminal investigation report that documents the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of the missing person will be prepared for any person reasonably believed to have been in the Town of Ridgely at the time of their disappearance, even if the subject of the missing person report resides outside of the Town of Ridgely.

1. If the subject of the missing person report was last seen or was reasonably believed to have been in another jurisdiction at the time of their disappearance, the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction where the subject was last seen is responsible for taking the missing person report, even if the subject is a Town of Ridgely resident.

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2. If the facts of the case do not meet the criteria for a missing person, the information will be noted on a contact card.
- C. All written reports regarding missing persons, including follow-up supplement reports must be submitted prior to the end of the Officer's tour of duty.

V. OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Upon receiving a complaint of a missing person, the investigating Officer will:
 1. Immediately make personal contact with the reporting person. Contact by phone or other electronic means is acceptable for reporting persons who are at an unreasonably distant location, such as out-of-state.
 2. Request a recent photograph of the missing person. Note the case number, missing person's name and date of the photograph on the back of the photograph and attach it to the report.
 3. Conduct a preliminary and thorough investigation (The scope of the investigation will depend on the age of the missing person, the circumstances of the person's disappearance, and any evidence that the person's disappearance is or is not due to foul play, mental impairment, or some other life threatening circumstance.).
 4. Contact communications as soon as possible and give a complete description of the missing person for radio broadcast by the dispatcher. This information is also to be broadcasted to local area law enforcement agencies if applicable.
 5. Brief the Chief of Police or a Supervisor and determine if any critical factors exist that would require immediate follow-up.
 6. Complete the State of Maryland Missing Person Report, along with a criminal investigative report (NOTE: The reporting officer must obtain the signature of the reporting person on the SOMMPR. National Crime Information Center (NCIC) regulations mandate that the signature be obtained to aid in the protection of the missing person's right to privacy). If the signature is not available because the reporting person made the report by phone or other electronic means, this should be noted in the narrative and the reporting person must complete the SOMMPR as soon as practical.
 7. Notify communications for entry into the Maryland Interagency Law Enforcement System (MILES) and NCIC.
 8. Instruct the complainant to contact the Ridgely Police Department if the missing person returns.

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9. In the event of an abduction, or suspected abduction, the Chief of Police will be notified.

B. Officers from on-coming shifts will be assigned to conduct follow-up investigations at least once per shift during the first ten days after the initial report. If the initial ten day period ends on a weekend or holiday, the follow-up investigations will continue past the initial ten day period until the next regular non-weekend or non-holiday workday. Each Officer conducting a follow-up investigation will submit a separate supplement report detailing his/her investigative efforts. All supplement reports will be submitted prior to the end of the Officer's tour of duty.

VI. SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

A. The Supervisor will monitor all reports of missing persons, and if necessary will make contact with the Officer at the scene and/or respond to the scene in order to obtain the relevant facts concerning the case.

B. The Supervisor will confirm the classification of all reports of missing persons as "critical" or "non-critical," evaluating the following factors: age, physical and/or mental health, repeated prior instances of absence, and unusual circumstances surrounding the absence of the missing person.

C. The Supervisor will follow the procedures outlined in Section V for all missing children, or Section VII for all critical missing children.

D. The Supervisor of oncoming shifts will assign all open missing person cases to an Officer for follow-up investigation. Each oncoming shift is responsible for conducting at least one follow-up investigation during the initial ten days after the initial report is taken. If the initial ten day period ends on a weekend or holiday, the follow-up investigations will continue past the ten day period until the next regular non-weekend or non-holiday workday. A separate supplement report will be submitted by each Officer assigned to do a follow-up investigation detailing the investigative efforts made.

E. The Supervisor, along with the Chief of Police, will ensure that open missing person cases are being properly investigated, and that the required follow-up investigations are being conducted during the initial ten day period after the report is taken.

VII. MISSING CHILDREN - ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

A. The investigating Officer taking the initial report of a missing child will determine if any of the following critical factors exist:

1. Has the missing child been the subject of a prior missing persons report?
2. Does the missing child suffer from a mental or physical impairment or serious illness?
3. Is the disappearance of the missing child suspicious or dangerous in nature?
4. Does the complainant have reason to believe the missing child has been abducted?

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5. Has the missing child previously been the victim/witness in any criminal investigation?
6. Is the missing child under the age of fourteen (14) years?
7. Has the missing child been missing more than 12 hours?

B. If any of the above critical factor(s) exist, the investigating Officer will follow the procedures outlined in Section VIII [Family Law Article 9- 402(a) & (b)].

C. The Supervisor or Chief of Police will determine if a missing child originally classified as having no critical factors has been located within twelve (12) hours from the time the initial missing person report was made. Under Maryland law, a missing child who is not located within twelve (12) hours from the time the initial missing person report was made is to be reclassified as a critical missing child. If the child has not been located within twelve (12) hours, the Supervisor will ensure that the procedures outlined in Section VIII are implemented [Family Law Article 9-402(c)].

D. The Maryland State Police is required by law to enter into the investigation of a missing child whenever the investigating agency has reason to believe that a child has been missing for twenty four (24) hours or more and is believed to be in a jurisdiction other than from where originally reported missing. The investigating Officer and/or Supervisor reviewing the report will be responsible for contacting the Maryland State Police for their assistance.

VIII. CRITICALLY MISSING PERSONS - ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

A. When a missing person investigation is upgraded to a "Critical Missing Person," the investigating Officer will immediately notify the Chief of Police or Supervisor.

B. Supervisor's Responsibilities:

1. Critical missing person cases require the response of the on duty supervisor.
2. Ensure that the investigating Officer immediately provides the necessary information to communications so that the missing person can be entered into the Maryland Interagency Law Enforcement System (MILES) and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC).
3. Institute an intensive, well-planned search in the area of the place the missing person was last seen (if known), including a thorough check of the missing person's home and outside surroundings, including vehicles on or near the property, keeping in mind these locations could be crime scenes.
4. Ensure that the Communications Section is notified so that an immediate broadcast is made, as well as surrounding jurisdictions.
5. If the critical missing person is a child, contact the Department of Social Services, and to the extent possible, obtain information that may be relevant in locating the missing child.

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6. Determine the necessary support to aid in the investigation, and if necessary, request additional manpower and equipment from other specialized components, and other agencies, including the Maryland State Police.
7. Secure the place where the missing person was last seen, and limit access to the area to prevent contamination that could hinder the effectiveness of canine resources or destroy physical evidence.
8. Institute a neighborhood canvas in the area where the person was last seen.
9. Ensure that friends and relatives are contacted for leads and information, making requests for other law enforcement agencies to check locations in their jurisdiction, if necessary.
10. Consider utilization of the "A Child Is Missing" rapid-response telephone notification system that can be used for critical missing children and adults (see Section IX).
11. If the critical missing person is a child, consider the activation of an AMBER Alert (see Section X).
12. If the missing person is an adult suffering from a cognitive impairment (a problem with thought processes such as Alzheimer's Disease or Dementia) and information exists that the victim is travelling in a vehicle, consider implementing a Silver Alert (Section XI for further information).
13. Notify the Chief of Police in all cases involving suspicious or unusual circumstances; or if foul play is suspected.

C. Additional Items to Consider

1. Ensure that that appropriate investigative and search procedures are being followed.
2. Determine if additional resources are needed, such as:
 - a. Air scent and/or tracking canine resources.
 - b. Ground search and rescue resources.
 - c. Man tracking resources.
 - d. Equestrian search and rescue resources.
 - e. Search managers.
 - f. Aviation support.
 - g. Marine support.
 - h. Support from the Maryland State Police and/or Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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IX. A "CHILD IS MISSING" ALERT

A. For both critically missing adults and children the "A Child is Missing Alert" will be initiated. This is a service based in Florida that obtains pertinent information on the missing person and then produces an automated telephone message that is sent out to the community. It is the hope that this information will help lead to the safe return. The telephone number for this service is (888)875-2246.

B. Since ACIM potentially reaches thousands of residences and businesses in the area, considerable public interest may be generated in the investigation. Therefore, the Supervisor will also ensure that the Communication Section, Allied Agencies, and Chief of Police are notified that there has been ACIM activation.

C. The use of ACIM will be documented in the missing person report narrative.

X. AMBER ALERTS

In 1996, Amber Hagerman, a nine-year-old from Arlington, Texas, was abducted in front of witnesses while innocently riding her bicycle. Her body was found four days later. In response to community concerns following the tragedy, a system called the AMBER Plan (America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response) was developed. The Maryland State Police enacted the Maryland AMBER Plan, which is designed to use technology and the broadcast media to quickly disseminate information about abducted children to the public. Under the plan, radio and television stations immediately interrupt programming to broadcast information and lookouts in reference to child abductions. The State Highway Administration will also put the information on their highway message boards.

A. AMBER Alert Criteria

1. The police agency has received and confirmed a reported child abduction; and
2. The child is 14 years of age or younger (consideration will be given to activation of the plan for a witnessed abduction of a 15 to 17 year old. However, particular consideration must be given when a child between the ages of 15 and 17 is reported missing as to their own behavior or mental capacity that in some way contributed to the criminal activity. A child under 14 cannot legally give consent for any action, and therefore that age group should be considered more at risk. When in doubt concerning this issue, consult with the Maryland Center for Missing Children.); and
3. Evidence exists to further believe the child is missing against their will and not simply missing (eyewitness, physical evidence, etc.); and
4. Evidence suggests a threat to the child's safety; and
5. The child is likely to be within the Maryland broadcasting area; and
6. There is a victim/suspect description, direction of travel, vehicle information, or something that can be described to the public to be on the lookout for.

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B. AMBER Alert Procedures

1. If the investigating Officer believes a critical missing child case meets the criteria for activating the plan, they will immediately notify the Supervisor.
2. The Supervisor will confirm that the Amber Alert Criteria has been met and contact the Maryland Center for Missing Children, or the Maryland State Police Headquarters Duty officer. For verification purposes, the Supervisor will be prepared to follow-up the verbal request with a written request made via fax.
 - a. 1-410-290-0050 (M-F 0830 to 1630 hours)
 - b. 1-800-MDS-KIDS (M-F 0830 to 1630 hours)
 - c. 1-410-290-1831 (Fax M-F 0830 to 1630)
 - d. 1-800-525-5555 (after hours MSP Headquarters Duty Officer)
 - e. 410-486-3101 (after hours MSP Headquarters Duty Officer)
 - f. 410-653-4269 (after hours MSP Headquarters Duty Officer fax)
3. If an AMBER Alert is warranted, the notification must be made as soon as possible to assist in the recovery of the child and apprehension of the suspect.

XI. SILVER ALERTS

On October 1, 2009, Title 3 Section 604 of the Annotated Code of Maryland was established, creating a Silver Alert Program for the state of Maryland. This law applies to anyone who has a cognitive impairment to the extent that he/she requires assistance from a caregiver. Cognitive impairments include, but are not limited to, Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia. Persons of all ages can suffer from a cognitive impairment.

The intent of the program is to promptly alert public safety agencies and the general public when a person with a cognitive impairment is reported missing. The Silver Alert will disseminate information on the missing person quickly and to as many people as possible, in an effort to locate and safely return the individual.

A. Silver Alert Criteria

1. Only law enforcement agencies may request the issuance of a Silver Alert.
2. The missing person must suffer from a cognitive impairment, such as a diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease or of Dementia, AND
3. The missing person's disappearance poses a credible threat to the health and safety of the individual, AND
4. The missing person is traveling in a vehicle and there is enough descriptive information about the missing person and vehicle for law enforcement to issue an Alert, AND
5. The investigating agency has already activated a local or regional alert (press release completed) by contacting media outlets in their jurisdiction, AND

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6. The missing person has been entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC).

B. Procedures for Activating a Silver Alert

1. Upon confirmation that the above criteria exist, the investigating Officer will contact the Maryland State Police Duty Officer at 410-486-3101 or 1-800 525-5555 (in-state only).

2. The investigating Officer will provide the MSP Duty Officer with call back information for the Silver Alert Coordinator to call for verification.

3. The Silver Alert Coordinator will contact the investigating Officer to discuss the specifics of the investigation and determine whether a Silver Alert will be issued.

XII. UNIDENTIFIED PERSONS

A. An Officer assigned to the report of an unidentified person, whether living or deceased, who appears to be a child, shall

1. Obtain a complete description. Officers who are assigned this task should use standardized information-gathering forms such as the NCIC Unidentified Person File Worksheet and data-collection guide.

2. Enter the unidentified child's description into the NCIC Unidentified Person File. This file is compared daily with the contents of the NCIC Missing Person File. Entries with common characteristics are flagged and both agencies are informed. Agencies should expect to receive this information overnight.

3. Use all available resources to aid in identification of the child. NCMEC's Forensic Services Unit, National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, missing children clearing houses, and/or medical examiners may be of assistance in the identification.

XIII. EXTENDED MISSING PERSONS INVESTIGATION

When a person has been missing for 30 days the Chief of Police will ensure that a NCIC missing person packet is completed and forwarded to the Maryland Center for Missing Children no later than ten (10) days after the thirty (30) day period. The Chief of Police will also ensure that all additional information is entered into MILES/NCIC with the exception of dental records. The MCMC will be responsible for entering the dental records into MILES/NCIC. The Chief of Police will ensure that the complainant is contacted weekly and a supplement report is submitted.

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XIV. DEALING WITH AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS

A. Recognizing Persons with Autism

- May be non-verbal (approximately 50% of this population is non-verbal); or may only repeat what is said to them; may communicate with sign language, picture cards or use gestures and pointing.
- May not respond to "Stop" command, may run or move away when approached; may cover ears and look away constantly.
- May have seizure disorder that is not apparent to responder.
- May toe walk, have pigeon-toed gait or running style.
- May appear as high on drugs, drunk or having a psychotic episode.
- May react to sudden changes in routine or sensory input- for example, lights, sirens, canine partners, odors- with escalation of repetitive behavior, such as, pacing, hand flapping, twirling hands, hitting self, screaming (temper tantrums are an expected response to fear, confusion, or frustration as an effort to stop the stimuli).
- May attempt to present an autism information card; may wear medical alert jewelry or have information sewn or imprinted on clothes or on non-permanent tattoo.
- May not recognize danger or hurt; may possess weak help-seeking skills; may not be able to distinguish between minor and serious problems, may not know where/how to get help for problems; may not be able to give important information or be able to answer questions.
- May not recognize police vehicle, badge or uniform or understand what is expected of them if they do.
- May have difficulty recognizing and repairing breakdowns in communication such as asking for clarification or responding to a request for clarification; may not understand or accept officers' statements or answers.
- May appear argumentative, stubborn, or belligerent; may say 'No!' in response to all questions; may ask 'Why?' incessantly.
- May repeat exactly what the officer says.
- Will have difficulty interpreting body language, such as command presence or defensive posture, or facial expressions, such as, raised eyebrows, rolling eyes, smiles and frowns; and have difficulty recognizing jokes, teasing and verbal/non-verbal emotional responses.
- May be poor listeners: may not seem to care what you have to say; their lack of eye contact may give you the feeling they aren't listening or have something to hide.

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- May have passive monotone voices with unusual pronunciations; often sound computer-like; will have difficulty using the correct volume for the situation.
- May have difficulty judging personal space; may stand too close or too far away; may not differentiate different body parts; may stare at you or present atypical fixed gaze.
- May perseverate on favorite topic when uncomfortable in the form of repeated questions-for example, What if? What's your name? -arguments, or apparent ramblings about favorite sports teams, train, bus or plane schedules, city names, etc.
- May have difficulty in seeing things from a different point of view; may have difficulty predicting other persons' reaction to them.
- Are usually very honest, sometimes too honest; have behaviors limiting credibility with others but do not or ably tell lies; often very blunt, not tactful.

B. Suggested Responses

- Talk in direct, short phrases, such as 'Stand up now. Go to the car.'
- Allow for delayed responses to questions or directions/commands.
- Avoid literal expressions and random comments, such as 'give my eye teeth to know', 'what's up your sleeve?', 'are you pulling my leg?', 'spread eagle', 'you think it's cool?'
- Talk calmly and/or repeat. Talking louder will not help understanding. Model calming body language, slow breathing, hands low.
- Person may not understand your defensive posture/body language; may continue to invade your space. Use low gestures for attention; avoid rapid pointing or waving; tell person you are not going to hurt them.
- Avoid behaviors and language that may appear threatening.
- Look and wait for response and/or eye contact; when comfortable, ask to 'look at me'; don't interpret limited eye contact as deceit or disrespect.
- If possible, avoid touching person, especially near shoulders or face; avoid standing too near or behind; avoid stopping repetitive behaviors unless self-injurious or risk of injury to yourself or others.
- Evaluate for injury; person may not ask for help or show any indications of pain, even though injury seems apparent.
- Examine for presence of medical alert jewelry or tags; person may have seizure disorder.
- Be aware of person's self-protective responses to even usual lights, sounds, touch, orders, and animals.

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- If possible, turn off sirens, flashing lights and remove canine partners or other sensory stimulation from scene.
- If person's behavior escalates maintain a safe distance until any inappropriate behaviors lessen, but remain alert to the possibility of outbursts or impulsive acts.
- Consider use of sign language, or picture or phrase books.
- If you take an individual into custody and even remotely suspect the person may have an autism spectrum disorder, to reduce the risk of abuse, and/or injury, ask jail authorities to segregate the individual and not to place them in the general incarcerated population before a mental health professional has evaluated them.

XV. RECOVERY AND RETURN OF MISSING PERSONS

Upon receiving information that a missing person has been located, the Officer or investigator closing the case will:

A. Verify the return and identity of the missing person. (If the missing person is found in another jurisdiction, the Officer can have the police department in the jurisdiction make the verification.) Complete a supplement report before the end of his/her tour of duty and notify Communications.

B. In missing person's cases, Officers will debrief the missing person to ascertain the reason for their disappearance. This contact should be made in person not over the phone; whenever possible. The missing person must be interviewed to ascertain if the missing person left as a result of abuse or family problems related to domestic violence. The information obtained will be part of the narrative in the supplemental report. The follow-up interview should include, but not limited to:

1. Nature of closure, i.e., returned home voluntarily, parents contacted by child, etc.
2. Condition of missing person, i.e., physically abused, deceased, unharmed, etc.
3. Reasons for disappearance, i.e., family argument, abuse, no reason given, etc.
4. Activities while missing, food, shelter, associates, etc.
5. Indication of abuse, exploitation, involvement in criminal activity.

C. Contact Communications by telephone with the following information so that the missing person can be removed from the MILES and NCIC Missing Person File:

1. Nature of closure;
2. Condition of the person;
3. Location where found;
4. Reason for disappearance; and
5. Suspect information, if applicable.

D. Advise the original complainant of the relevant details of the case and the subject's location. If information is developed that the missing person has been the subject of foul play or has been located either deceased or is in severely deteriorated physical or mental condition, personal contact will be made with the complainant. In other cases, telephone contact will suffice.

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E. If requested, return any photograph and/or, dental and fingerprint records in police possession to the owner.

Whenever a juvenile is located in a jurisdiction other than Caroline County, it will be the responsibility of the parent or guardian to retrieve the juvenile.