Missing Children With Special Needs

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Autism

• We experience many cases of children with special needs who are reported missing to law enforcement
• The highest number of the cases appear to involve children with Autism Spectrum Disorder
• Others cases involve children with Down Syndrome, traumatic brain injury and any other conditions characterized by physical, social or cognitive impairments and communications challenges
**Missing Special Needs Children**

Unique challenges –

- the children have a tendency to “wander or elope”
- the children sometimes have a tendency to seek small enclosed spaces which may be overlooked during initial searches
- some of them may elude or hide from searchers
- some children have a diminished sense of fear
Challenges continued….

• They may be unable to respond to search teams
• The children can be very resilient
• Unique behaviors – “no two children are alike”
• The children may have very specific interests – active roadways, road signs, trains, fire trucks.
• The children often seek bodies of water
Challenges

• Some children may walk long distances – far exceeding search perimeters established by law enforcement and search teams.
• Search teams must consider innovative and creative techniques to find the children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Trail Lighting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Favorite Toy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent voice</td>
<td>Fire Apparatus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helicopter</td>
<td>Train</td>
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Leading Causes of Death

Missing children with autism are especially “at risk” because of unusually high mortality rates:

- Drowning – 91%*
- Struck by vehicles
- Exposure to the elements
- Other accidental causes

*National Autism Association
NCMEC Strategies

• On March 1st, 2012 NCMEC staff met with SME’s to discuss the issues and identify strategies
• Representatives from National Autism Association, nationally recognized search experts, Team Adam Consultants and staff from MCD, National Safety Director, Call Center, Family Advocacy, Outreach and Training
Lost/Missing Children Strategies

- Reports of lost/missing special needs children (regardless of affliction) require elevated response – *must be treated critically!*
- Actions of the first responders are vital to the safe recovery of the child
- Immediate response to bodies of water in the vicinity to “head the child off.”
- Attempt to contain the child in a specific area.
Strategies continued....

LISTEN INTENTLY TO THE PARENTS/CARE GIVERS –

- Get information about the behaviors of the child. Assessment of the “risk factors.”
- Find out what interests the child? – i.e. favorite places they like to go, interests in trains, heavy equipment, water, roadways
- Has the child gone missing before?
Knowing the Child Continued……

- How will the child likely react to searchers?
- Will they hide? Will they run? Are they verbal or nonverbal? Will they respond to their name being called?
- How will they react to K-9’s, ATV’s, etc.
- Who will they most likely respond?
- Do they need life-sustaining medications?
Response/Search Strategies continued…

- Sustained searches –
- Development of search plan
- Incident Command System (ICS)
  Must be aggressive and well coordinated
  All available emergency personnel – law enforcement, fire, medical
  Other jurisdictions for additional help
  Trained searchers/use of volunteers
Lessons Learned

DO NOT GIVE UP UNTIL THE CHILD IS FOUND!

The case of 8 year old R.W. of Hanover, Virginia demonstrates that these children are especially resilient and can survive many days – even in rugged terrain and inclement weather.
Available Resources
Team Adam

Team Adam will deploy on cases of missing special needs children. Specialized Team Adam search personnel will also deploy to assist, when appropriate.

2011 – 8 deployments, 2 recalls – children found
2012 – 12 deployments, 6 recalls – children found
2013 – 6 deployments, 1 recall – child found
**Best Practices Guide – Search Protocols**

- NCMEC Publication of Search Best Practices – Search Protocols –
- “*Law Enforcement Response Guide for Missing and Abducted Children*”
- Awareness and Education – First responders
- Role of Call Takers – 911 Centers – NCMEC
- Focus on prevention – parents, care givers, educators, etc.
- Parents/Caregiver considerations?
Continued….

Use of Electronic Tracking Devices – Project Lifesaver, LoJackSafetyNet.com, Caretrak, Emfinders.com
Awareness and First Responder Training

- NCMEC Staff have developed training package and delivered to first responders via webinars and classroom to over 1,000.
- Law Enforcement Outreach Teams (Team Adam and Project ALERT) provided train-the-trainer instruction and training packages. 48 trainings have already been delivered in 15 States.
- Published articles in professional law enforcement magazines – newsletters.
Awareness and First Responder Training

• All State Missing Child Clearinghouses
• International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) have been engaged re; training and publication
• The “National Search and Rescue Committee” are including the NCMEC protocols in their response manual (participating agencies – DOD, DHS, DOI, DOC, DOT, FCC, NASA)
A Child is Missing – Targeted Notification

- Neighborhood canvassing and rapidly alerting vital
- Automated telephone notification system notifying residents/businesses in a targeted area about a missing child

We Help Find Missing Persons...
Fast... Effective... Outstanding Results!
Geo-Targeted LOCAL Phone Alerts.
achildismissing.org

www.missingkids.com
East Arlington witness alerted by screams

BY ROBERT THARP
Fort Worth Star-Telegram

ARLINGTON — A 9-year-old Arlington girl was kidnapped yesterday afternoon as she and her younger brother rode bicycles in the parking lot of a vacant shopping center in East Arlington, police said.

A witness told police he looked up after hearing Amber Hagerman scream and saw a man grab her from her bicycle and push her inside a black, full-sized pickup. The man then jumped in the truck and sped out of view. (More on ABDUCTION on Page 16)
Time is the enemy

• AMBER Alert was developed after a child was abducted and quickly taken from the area in a vehicle. She was ultimately murdered.

• It is a voluntary partnership based on this case and a study conducted on abducted children who were murdered. 76% were murdered in the first 3 hours
Department of Justice
Recommended Criteria for an Amber ALERT

• There is reasonable belief by law enforcement that a child abduction has occurred.
• The law enforcement agency believes that the child is in imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death.
• There is sufficient descriptive information about the victim and the abductor for law enforcement to issue an AMBER Alert to assist in the recovery of the child.
• The abduction is of a child aged 17 years or younger.
• Amber ALERT is managed at the State and regional level.
Local, Regional and State Plans
AMBER is not useful every time

• AMBER Alert is most effective when vehicle information is known.
• DOT and commercial highway digital signs, airports, hotels, business property
Law Enforcement Tools

• AMBER Alert has taught us that rapidly engaging the public is critical.

• However, oversaturation erodes that assistance and support.

• Matching the proper notification tool with the support needed is critical.
Questions?