

# MAYFIELD HEIGHTS POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Section:** IV Patrol  
**Policy Name:** Missing Persons

**PolicyNumber:** 4.31

## **PURPOSE:**

To establish responsibilities and guidelines for the investigation of missing persons.

## **POLICY:**

The roles of the Communications Officer (CO) and initial responding Officer are critical in identifying the circumstances surrounding missing persons and in identifying those persons at risk. Therefore, it is the policy of this Department that (1) all reports of missing persons be given full consideration and attention by members of this Department to include careful recording and investigation of factual circumstances surrounding the disappearance in accordance with this policy, and (2) particular care be exercised in instances involving missing children, those who may be mentally or physical impaired, or those who are insufficiently able to take care of themselves.

### Procedure

#### **A.** Reporting/Classification of Missing Persons

- 1.** There is no waiting period for reporting a missing person. Missing person reports shall be taken in conformance with the criteria of this policy and the criticality of the incident.
- 2.** A person may be declared "missing" when his/her 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 behavior patterns, plans, or routines.
- 3.** An individual may be considered "missing-critical" who meets the above criteria and who (among other possible circumstances):
  - a.** May be the subject of foul play;
  - b.** Because of age (young or old), may be unable to properly safeguard or care for him/herself,
  - c.** Suffers from diminished mental capacity or medical conditions that are potentially life threatening if left untreated/unattended;
  - d.** Is a patient of a mental institution and is considered potentially dangerous to him/herself or others;
  - e.** Has demonstrated the potential for suicide; or
  - f.** May have been involved in a boating, swimming, or other sporting accident or natural disaster.

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4. Reports of juveniles who have voluntarily left home (i.e., "runaways") should be classified as such only after thorough investigation.
5. Based on the outcome of initial inquiries, a decision may be made concerning the potential danger posed to the missing person and the urgency of police response.

**B. Initial Report Taking**

1. The initial responding Officer must gather as much pertinent information as possible in order to properly classify a missing person report and initiate a proper response. Such pertinent information includes:
  - a. Name, age, and physical description of the subject;
  - b. Relationship of the reporting party to the missing person;
  - c. Time and place of last known location and the identity of anyone accompanying the subject;
  - d. The extent of any search for the subject;
  - e. Whether the subject has been missing on prior occasions and the degree to which the absence departs from established behavior patterns, habits, or plans;
  - f. Whether the subject has been involved recently in domestic incidents, suffered emotional trauma or life crises, demonstrated unusual, uncharacteristic, or bizarre behavior, is dependent on drugs or alcohol, or has a history of mental illness; and
  - g. The current physical condition of the subject and whether the person is currently on prescription medication.
2. If the missing person is a child, inquiry should also determine if the child:
  - a. Is or may be with any adult who could cause him/her harm;
  - b. May have been the subject of a parental abduction; or
  - c. Has previously run away from home, has threatened to do so, or has a history of explainable or unexplainable absences for extended periods.
3. The Officer in Charge (OIC) shall be notified immediately upon classification of a report as "missing-critical."

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**C. Preliminary Investigation**

The preliminary investigation is intended to gather additional information and to take those steps that will aid in the search for and location of a missing person. This preliminary investigation includes gathering the following types of information and materials:

1. Complete description of the subject and a recent photograph;
2. Details of any physical or emotional problems identified in items B1 of this policy;
3. Identity of the last person(s) to have seen the subject as well as friends, relatives, coworkers, or associates who were or may have been in contact with the subject prior to disappearance;
4. Plans, habits, routines, and personal interests of the subject, including places frequented or locations of particular personal significance;
5. Indications of missing personal belongings, particularly money and other valuables;
6. Any suggestions of foul play or accident;
7. In the case of missing children, Officers shall be particularly cognizant of information that may suggest the potential for parental abduction or the possibility of stranger abduction, as well as:
  - a. The presence of behavioral problems;
  - b. Past instances of running away;
  - c. Signs of an abusive home environment or dysfunctional family situation;
  - d. Whether the child is believed to be with adults who may pose a danger; and
  - e. The name and location of the child's school and any persons who may be responsible for private transportation to and from the location.
8. When possible, Officers should gain permission to search a missing child's home and school locker and relevant belongings, as appropriate.

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9. Upon verification of a missing person, a missing person report shall be completed and appropriate entries made in state and national information databases in accordance with established procedures (e.g., Cuyahoga County Sheriffs Dept. website, NCIC and The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children).
  10. The CCSD Missing Person Unit (MPU) shall accept submissions for the Missing Person website from the law enforcement agency with jurisdiction. In order to place the missing person's photos (up to 3) on the Missing Persons website, a completed photograph release form and photographs from the case submissions must be given to the MPU for placement onto the website via email, fax and/or hard copy. This form will be located in the forms boxes located in the bunker.
  11. In the case of persons designated as "missing-critical," the OIC may:
    - a. Direct the CO to broadcast to all persons on duty all information necessary to identify the missing person;
    - b. Authorize mobilization of resources necessary for an area search.
    - c. Send out regional teletype;
    - d. Contact the missing person's or suspected abductor's cell phone provider and request an emergency locate on their phone, if believed to be taken with them.
    - e. Initiate an AMBER Alert, or other relevant alert if the criteria are met.
- D. Ongoing Investigation**
- Ongoing investigations of missing persons should include, but should not be limited to, the following actions and activities:
1. Request release of dental records and any fingerprints available;
  2. Contact hospitals and the coroner's office as appropriate for injured or deceased persons fitting the description of the missing person;
  3. Thoroughly check the location at which the missing person was last seen and conduct interviews as appropriate with persons who were with the individual or who may work in or frequent the area;

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4. Conduct interviews with any additional family, friends, work associates, schoolmates, teachers, school counselors, and social case workers, as appropriate, to explore the potential for foul play, voluntary flight, or, in the case of juveniles, parental kidnapping or running away
5. Provide identification and related information to all members of this Department, the state police missing persons' authority, neighboring police agencies, and, if parental or stranger-to-stranger abduction is suspected, the FBI;
6. Use local media to help locate missing persons only with the approval of the Chief of Police and the missing person's family;
7. Maintain routine on-going contact with the missing person's closest relative concerning progress of the investigation. Inform these and other relevant individuals that they must notify the lead investigator as soon as any contact is made with the missing person.

**E. DNA Collection for Identification Purposes**

After 30 days, a first-degree relative (i.e., mother, father, daughter, or son) may submit a DNA sample to be forwarded to BCI&I and deposited into a database to be used for comparisons with unidentified bodies. It shall be the responsibility of the Detective Bureau to make contact with a family member 30 days from the report date to offer this option. If this option is exercised, the following will apply:

1. Once a request has been received from a missing person's family for a DNA submission, this Department will contact BCI&I for the "Linking Individuals Not Known" (LINK) kit. The kit will provide detailed instructions.
  - a. DNA collection consists of the first-degree relative swabbing the inside of his/her cheek and placing the swab in an envelope in an Officer's presence.
  - b. The first-degree relative will then sign an Authorization to Release Form.
2. Family members will need to submit dental records of the missing person at this time.
3. The required information must be forwarded to BCI&I within 15 days of the relative's request.
4. A search will be made by the LINK Unit for any comparisons with the missing-persons database and maintained for any future linking purposes.

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5. If any identification is made, BCI&I will contact this Department.

**F. Recovery of Missing Person and Case Closure**

1. Competent adults, having left home for personal reasons, cannot be forced to return home. Officers locating such individuals shall:

- a. Advise them that they are the subject of a missing person investigation;
- b. Ask if they desire the reporting party or next-of-kin to be notified of their whereabouts; and
- c. Make provisions to transmit this information to the reporting party or next-of-kin if permitted by the missing person.

2. In all cases, reporting parties shall be informed of the well-being of located missing persons. Unless criminal matters necessitate other action, desires of missing persons not to reveal their whereabouts shall be honored.

3. Missing persons shall be questioned to establish the circumstances surrounding their disappearance and whether criminal activity was involved.

4. In cases involving juveniles, Officers shall ensure that:

- a. The juvenile receives medical attention, if necessary, in a timely manner,
- b. Initial questioning of the youth identifies the circumstances surrounding the child's disappearance, any individuals who may be criminally responsible, and/or whether an abusive or negligent home environment was a contributory factor; and
- c. Parents, guardians, and/or the person reporting the missing youth are notified in a timely manner.

5. Upon location of a missing person, all agencies and information systems previously contacted for assistance will be notified or updated.

6. Where indicated, follow-up action shall include filing of an abuse and neglect report with the state youth-service agency.

7. The case report shall include a complete report on the whereabouts, actions, and activities of children while missing.

8. Where indicated, criminal charges shall be filed with the prosecutor's office.

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