



# Child Abduction T.I.P.S. (Training, Information, Practices & Strategy)

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## Victimology

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### **Special Agent, FBI Child Abduction Response Plan**

One of the tools the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”) provides for preparation and response to child abduction is the Child Abduction Response Plan (“CARP”). Victimology is one of the sections covered in the CARP. Here is an excerpt from the CARP concerning Victimology.

Victimology, a comprehensive collection of personal information regarding the missing child and his/ her immediate family, is a crucial aspect of a missing child investigation. The background and family dynamics of the child will often play an important role in determining the level and nature of the child’s risk of victimization. The majority of abducted children are victimized by individuals known to them – family, friends and other acquaintances. It is possible that the identity of the offender may be furnished by family or friends of the victim; discovered in the victim’s journals, emails, or social media contacts; or developed through some other detail of the victim’s life.

When strangers abduct children, they generally target potential victims who are alone and vulnerable. Identifying the victim’s typical route to school, after-school activities, usual hangouts, and other places the victim frequents, will provide investigators with opportunities to locate the potential abduction site. It is strongly recommended that a detailed account of the victim’s physical, mental and emotional condition, as well as his/her personality, lifestyle, habits, friends/associates and normal activities, be developed as soon as possible. The goal is to develop a comprehensive picture of all aspects of the child’s life, including his/her normal behavioral patterns, and any recent changes or deviations from those patterns.

The Child Victim Background Questionnaire (CVBQ) is useful in obtaining this critical information. As noted on the form, multiple sources, each familiar with the missing child, should be asked to fill out the questionnaire; this may include family members, neighbors, teachers and coaches, friends/schoolmates,

The following are specific recommendations regarding the background investigation into the victim:

**2.01** Identify and separately interview all immediate and extended family members (to include their spouses, boyfriends/girlfriends, or other close associates) who reside in or frequent the victim's residence. These individuals should be questioned regarding their knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the victim's disappearance, and background information about the victim; including his/her physical, mental and emotional condition, personality, lifestyle, habits, friends/associates and typical activities. The CVBQ should be utilized as a template, but investigators should feel free to expand the

**2.02** Identify friends, schoolmates, neighbors and other associates of the victim and conduct interviews as detailed above.

**2.03** Determine who has normal "parental control" over the victim. This would include biological parents, step-parents, foster parents, divorced/estranged parents, or any others who exercised guardianship of the child. Identify known or suspected conflicts between any of these individuals.

**2.04** Obtain information regarding cellular telephones, tablets, chargers, and/or any other portable electronic devices belonging to the victim, particularly those believed to be in his/her possession. Immediately forward any telephone numbers, service providers, and any other identifying data for these devices to the investigators charged with tracking and/or exploiting the data from portable communication devices. The FBI's Cellular Analysis and Survey Team (CAST) can assist with the analysis of cellular telephone data.

**2.05** Identify any desktop or laptop computers, tablets, cellular telephones, gaming systems, flash drives, and other computing/storage devices that the victim and other family members had access to, as well as passwords, email addresses, social media sites, and any online identities. Determine what types of websites or communication software are utilized by the victim and his/her friends to communicate. Review all emails, chats, searches, and other online communications and writings of the victim, and other family members as appropriate, noting the topics of the communications and the identity of the individuals with whom they have been communicating. The FBI's Computer Analysis Response Team (CART) can assist with the retrieval and analysis of computer data.

**2.06** All individuals interviewed about the victim should be asked if they communicate with the victim via cellular telephone, email, social media, or other communications devices/software. For those who do, request consent to view/copy communications on their cellular telephones or other devices regarding any recent communications with or about the victim. Ask them about the social media sites, communication software, and/or email addresses known to be utilized by the victim.

**2.07** Obtain consent to search the victim's room and seize any personal writings, diaries, drawings, or other items that may provide clues into his/her disappearance, as well as insight into the victim's friends, personality or interests. Review any photographs found, identifying all individuals. Look for any references to relationships or communications with any individuals. The nature of the room's décor and the items within, such as pictures, posters, music, etc., can provide additional insight into the victim's personality and interests.

**2.08** Search trash cans in the victim's room/bathroom for any items of evidentiary or lead value.

**2.09** Determine whether Child Protective Services (CPS) or similar agencies have ever had contact with the family, and if so, the nature of the incident. Follow up on any previous incidents, and interview the CPS case workers and/or responding officers to obtain details regarding the incident(s) and their interaction(s) with the family.

**2.10** Determine if any family members have experienced recent stressful events such as relationship issues, employment difficulties, and/or financial problems.

**2.11** Identify any criminal history/activity involving the victim, family member(s), or any other individuals associated with the victim's family or residence. Follow up on any previous law enforcement calls for service to the residence, and interview the responding/investigating officers to obtain details regarding the incident(s).

- 2.12** Determine any history of illicit drug and/or alcohol abuse by the victim or any family member.
- 2.13** Determine any physical disabilities, illnesses or mental health concerns associated with the victim, including the details of any regular medications or treatments.
- 2.14** Obtain proper parental releases for medical/dental/mental health records. Contact health care providers to obtain copies of the victim's records.
- 2.15** Document any recent appearance changes in the victim (e.g., weight loss/gain, hair style change, clothing, etc.).
- 2.16** Document any recent personality or emotional changes in the victim.
- 2.17** Identify hobbies and/or involvement in clubs, sports teams, or any other organizations. Determine the most recent participation by the victim. Identify/interview all members, including adults.”
- 2.18** Interview the victim's teachers, review the contents of the victim's locker, and seize the victim's current schoolwork and any other personal writings, diaries, or drawings they may have done at school. Additionally, interview guidance counselors, school resource officer, and any other staff members identified as having interactions with the victim. Obtain copies of the victim's school records, report cards, yearbooks, etc.
- 2.19** If the victim was employed, identify and interview co-workers and supervisors. Obtain the victim's work records including his/her personnel file, time sheets, etc.
- 2.20** Determine the current financial status of the child's family, including any large or recent debts, any life insurance policies involving the child, etc.
- 2.21** Identify and interview any babysitters or routine caregivers of the missing child.
- 2.22** Consider the culture of the family and any bearing it may have on the incident. This includes religious beliefs and customs, racial or ethnic prejudices, language barriers, etc.

**If you would like a copy of the FBI's CARP please contact your local FBI Field Office.** The Child Victim Background Questionnaire and other standardized forms used during a child abduction investigation that are available in the CARP can also be obtained by emailing the California Child Abduction Task Force at [childabductionproject@cirinc.org](mailto:childabductionproject@cirinc.org) and the task force will send you a link to access them.

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