



CHILD ABDUCTION T.I.P.S. NEWSLETTER

Training, Information, Practices & Strategy

Volume 27

April 4, 2024



CA Senate Bill 39 (Child Welfare Investigating Child Fatalities With No Surviving Siblings) Identifies Missing and Abducted Children

by Emilio Mendoza

Assistant Regional Administrator, Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services

Nothing devastates and paralyzes a community more than the fatality of a child. At the time of these tragic events, there are many questions that surface and systemic gaps that get identified to what could have been done to prevent the unwarranted death. There are three principal agencies that are responsible for investigating whether the cause of death is related to abuse or neglect: law enforcement, child welfare, and the coroner's office. But even with multi-agency and subject matter expert involvement in making this determination, some children get missed or remain unknown, including missing and abducted children.

On October of 2021, CDSS sent the All-County Letter (ACL) No. 21-98 notification to all of the state's county child welfare agencies with the expanded language of SB 39. CDSS gave official guidance, instructions and updates on the investigating requirements of child maltreatment related to fatalities where there is no known surviving sibling. These steps included:

- Verify there are no other children remaining in the household.
- Clearly document the circumstances and outcomes of the fatality and confirm if the incident was a result of abuse and/or neglect.
- Ensure that perpetrators are entered into the Child Abuse Central Index (CACI) given that child welfare agencies are the only ones that can submit into CACI.
- Provide and link surviving families with community resources and grief counseling.

How child welfare agencies implement SB 39 and the CDSS associated ACL's can vary. Some of the factors to consider include: resource availability and allocation, county policy development, delineation of duties and responsibilities, and the creation or updating of collaborative agreements with key stakeholders. Regardless of the challenges that impact a respective county, each of the principle agencies has a fiduciary duty to investigate the reasons that led to the fatality of a child. The evolving findings made throughout the years of implementing SB 39 has revealed that other children needing protection are being discovered and/or were not readily known at the time of the initial investigation. It stands that child welfare agencies have the principle role to verify that there are no other children in the home at-risk and/or accessible to the perpetrator through direct and/or indirect relationships, to include those outside the home or those with varying custodial visitation rights to other children

To download the full article, visit: https://cirinc.org/file_download/819f6a98-a093-4f20-a884-c631abfa3568

The Importance of Reporting to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)

by Alejandro Baron

Student Assistant, California Department of Justice Missing & Unidentified Persons Section (MUPS)

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) is a private and non-profit corporation that focuses on helping to find missing children, reduce child sexual exploitation, and prevent child victimization. In order to prevent child abductions, recover missing children, and provide services to prevent and fight child sexual exploitation, NCMEC works with families, victims, private industries, law enforcement, and the public. NCMEC was founded by John and Revé Walsh and other child advocates in 1984 after several tragedies involving abducted children. This was created to serve as the national clearinghouse and provide a coordinated, national response to problems relating to missing and exploited children.

One of the services that NCMEC offers in order to reunite children with their families is a 24-hour toll-free hotline (1-800-843-5678) where the public may report information in relation to the location of a missing child, as well as request information for procedures necessary to reunite a child with their family, among many other services. NCMEC is a partner of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Together they provide resources, technical assistance, and prevention services to victims, families, and public along with supporting law enforcement agencies at the federal, state, and local level that involve missing and exploited children. NCMEC continues to help search for children no matter how long they've been gone, like Etan Patz who went missing on May 25, 1979 from a New York street on his way to his school bus. On that date, the United States observes Missing Children's Day and for over 30 years NCMEC has not given up on cases like Etan's that others may consider "cold". Every year on May 25th, NCMEC hopes to remind parents, guardians, families, and communities that every child deserves a safe childhood.

There are two types of abductions: family abductions and non-family abductions. A family abduction is when a child is taken, wrongfully retained, or concealed by a parent or other family member, keeping another individual from their custody or visitation rights. According to NCMEC, some of the risk factors that could increase the risk of a family abduction are when a child has been previously abducted, a history of marital instability, lack of cooperation with other parent, domestic violence, child abuse, and someone with strong ties to other geographical area that then one they currently reside. NCMEC reports that of the 27,644 cases of missing children in 2022, 4.5% were family abductions and 58% of the Amber Alerts issued that same year were due to family abduction cases.

When a family abduction is reported to NCMEC they provide services like emotional support, professional referrals, and informative resources. For parents or guardians, legal technical assistance is provided when a family abduction occurs that includes information regarding legal assistance programs in the community, referrals to assist with the prevention of and response to family abduction, resources for attorneys representing parents/guardians and children.

Non-family abductions are rare and makeup 1% of the missing children cases reported to NCMEC. Risk factors for non-family abductions include when a child is going to or coming from a school-related activity, and when a child is playing, walking, or riding a bike. Some of the ways that children have been able to combat an abduction include ignoring the abductor, using a cellphone to threaten or intervene, fighting back, screaming, or another adult or child intervening. There were over 600 abduction attempts documented by NCMEC in 2020. The most common ways the abductors tried to lure children include offering the child a ride, candy, or money, asking the child questions, and using an animal to interest the child.

NCMEC has partnered with Honeywell to create the KidSmartz Personal Safety Program. This program empowers K-5 children to practice safe behaviors. They use fun videos and activities to teach "The 4 Rules of Personal Safety". The four rules are check first, take a friend, tell people 'No', and tell a trusted adult. NCMEC also has the Code Adam Program, which was created after the abduction of 6 year old Adam Walsh. Code Adam is now one of the largest child safety protocols that is being implemented in tens of thousands of establishments in the nation. This program is a search tool for lost and potentially abducted children that is designed to help businesses, parks, government buildings, and others to make sure they keep safety protocols in place in order to respond effectively to situations that involve a child. In these cases, NCMEC also uses Team Adam and the Adam program to help recover non-family abducted children. Of the 1,239 family abduction cases reported to NCMEC in 2022, 923 were resolved which is about a 74% recovery rate. Of the total cases in 2022, 27,644 missing children were reported and 24,229 were resolved. This high resolve rate is just one reason why you or anyone you know that is faced with a family abduction or missing child should reach out to and report to NCMEC. The California Department of Justice is mandated by the California Penal Code to work in cooperation with NCMEC and assists with distributing lead information from NCMEC to California's local law enforcement agencies. NCMEC's mission aligns with the California Child Abduction Task Force's focus of impacting an effective response and investigation into children's abduction cases, and educating professionals and volunteers in order to prevent and recover an abducted child

To download the full article, visit: https://cirinc.org/file_download/711c2b22-67ef-46bb-9cf2-a040c046fa4a



The California
Professional Society
on the Abuse of Children™
an independent affiliate of APSAC
Strengthening Practice Through Knowledge



JOIN US FOR THE

2024 CAPSAC AWARDS CEREMONY

FEATURING THE 2024 RECIPIENT OF
THE KAREN SAYWITZ LEGACY AWARD:
DR. BETTE L. BOTTOMS

ALSO PRESENTING THE 2024 RECIPIENTS FOR
THE PAUL CRISSEY GRADUATE STUDENT OUTSTANDING RESEARCH AWARD
& THE NEAL SNYDER OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10, 2024 | 1 PM - 2 PM (PT) | ONLINE VIA ZOOM



Click the button or visit:

<https://cirinc.org/events/event-pages/capsac-awards-ceremony.html>

Two of our Child Abduction Task Force members are receiving the *Neal Snyder Outstanding Community Service Award*. **Congratulations to Erin Runnion, Founder of the [Joyful Child Foundation](#), and Cari Teran, CEO of [Healing to You](#).** Thank you for all the work you have dedicated to the field!

California Child Abduction Task Force Members

- **Megan Eschleman**, *Chair, Clearing House Manager*, Department of Justice, Missing & Unidentified Persons Section
- **Erin Runnion**, *Vice-Chair, Founder*, The Joyful Child Foundation
- **Bridget Billeter**, *Supervising Deputy Attorney General and Statewide Child Abduction Coordinator*, California Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General
- **Deanne Castorena**, *Deputy-in Charge*, Los Angeles Co. District Attorney's Office
- **Jeffrey R. Cugno**, *Retired Special Agent*, Federal Bureau of Investigation
- **Marlene Glusing**, *Legal Assistant*, Merced Co. District Attorney's Office
- **Stephen Lagorio**, *Deputy Chief*, San Jose Police Department
- **Emilio Mendoza**, *Assistant Regional Administrator*, Los Angeles Co. Department of Children and Family Services
- **Leslie A. Olson**, *Program Manager*, Sacramento Co. Child Protective Services
- **Cari Teran**, *Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist, CEO*, Healing To You
- **Jannell Violi**, *Program Manager*, Orange Co. Department of Education