

Tips To Keep Kids Safe - Prevention Checklist

There are steps that you can take now to be prepared in case your child might someday be missing. Collecting the data described below will help law enforcement search for and identify your child when he or she is recovered:

Keep a complete description of your child

This description must include color of hair, color of eyes, height, weight, and date of birth. In addition the descriptions should include identifiers such as eyeglasses or contact lenses, braces on teeth, pierced ears, and other unique physical attributes. The complete description must be written down.

Take color photographs of your child every six months

Photographs should be of high quality and in sharp focus so that your child is easily recognizable. Head and shoulder portraits from different angles, such as those taken by school photographers, are preferable, but make certain you have a photograph that most resembles your child. Candid photographs may be more representative of how your child looks than a posed shot.

Have your dentist prepare dental charts and prints for your child

Be sure the dental chart is updated each time an examination or dental work is performed and dental prints are taken once every two years until your child is 18 years old. Make sure your dentist maintains accurate up-to-date dental charts and X-rays for your child as a routine part of his or her normal office procedure. If you move, you should get a copy from your former dentist to keep yourself until a new dentist is found. Make certain that the information is easily accessible should you need it quickly. Also consider taking a bite impression of your child's teeth. Take a two-inch square of flat material like Styrofoam and have your child bite partially through it. The bite should be strong enough to leave an impression of the upper and lower teeth. A new bite sample should be made each time your child loses or grows a tooth.

Know where your child's medical records are located

Medical records, particularly X-rays, can be invaluable in helping to identify a recovered child. It is important to have all permanent scars, birthmarks, blemishes, and broken bones recorded. You should find out from your child's doctor where such records are located and how you can obtain them if the need arises.

Arrange with your local law enforcement agency to have your child fingerprinted

In order for fingerprints to be useful in identifying a person, they must be properly taken. Your law-enforcement agency has trained personnel to help ensure that the fingerprints taken are useful. They will give you the fingerprint card and not keep a record of the prints.

Consider having a DNA sample taken from your child

Oral Swab Collection Instructions - Rubber gloves, 2 cotton swabs, and envelope:

- Take the first swab and swab the area between where lower right gumline and cheek meet by twirling cotton-tipped swab and rubbing back and forth. Do this for 30 seconds.

- Allow swab to air dry at least 45 minutes.
- Repeat process with second swab.
- Seal both swabs in envelope; date, initial the seal.
- Store envelope in a secure, cool, dark, and dry location, such as a safety deposit box.

DNA, or deoxyribonucleic acid, is rapidly becoming the "gold standard" for identifications. There are many DNA collection kits available, but it is simple for you to collect a sample. For example, an old toothbrush that has been used exclusively by your child is rich with his or her DNA. Allow the toothbrush to air dry and place it in a brown envelope, have your child lick the envelope shut, and label it.

If using a buccal-swab sample from the inside of your child's mouth it is important to follow the instructions to allow for the swab to dry prior to storage.

Family Reference Sample Collection Kits are available to law enforcement agencies upon request. The University of North Texas processes the samples free of charge to law enforcement. DNA samples must be collected by a law enforcement officer.

Family Project

Make an identification box for each family member. Each family member should use a separate shoebox. In each shoebox place one family member's fingerprints, extra dental X-rays and prints as obtained from the dentist, a recent picture, and the DNA sample in separate brown envelopes. Store the box at room temperature in a dry place away from heat. The DNA sample should be good for up to six or seven years.