

Tool #5: Family-Support Services Provided by Nonprofit Organizations Addressing the Problem of Missing and Sexually Exploited Children

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Family-Support Services for Families With Active Cases Involving Missing and/or Sexually Exploited Children

Overview

Cases involving missing and/or sexually exploited children may cause extreme stress and anxiety for family members. Nonprofit organizations (NPO) may help alleviate some of the pressures family members face by providing direct services, information about community resources, and referrals for additional assistance. Not all of the needs of the families with missing and/or sexually exploited children may be met by a single NPO. NPOs should compile lists of agencies and organizations that have previously agreed to provide help to families in the community

during a missing- or sexually exploited-child case. These lists can include fully vetted agencies and organizations providing

- Assistance with the day-to-day needs of a family in the midst of a crisis
- Expertise in finding professionals including physicians, therapists, counselors, and attorneys
- Assistance with media relations

If an NPO covers an area too large to pinpoint resources in particular regions for a family in need, the NPO should still be aware of the general types of resources available to families in that region. Those thinking of offering support to families involved in these cases should complete the necessary steps to organize an NPO. Those deciding whether to start an NPO should complete a community-needs assessment prior to doing anything else (see [“Tool #1: Assessing the Need to Start a Nonprofit Organization”](#)). The next step is to create a mission statement and decide upon governance and finance matters (see [“Tool #2: How to Start a Non-profit Organization”](#)). If those considering the creation of an NPO are family members of a missing and/or sexually exploited child, they should weigh the pros and cons of creating a family-based NPO (see [“Tool #3: Family-Based Nonprofit Organizations”](#)). NPOs evaluating whether to offer family-support services may also want to explore the option of providing search-support services for missing-child cases (see [“Tool #4: Search-Support Services Provided by Nonprofit Organizations Addressing the Problem of Missing Children”](#)).

Supporting the Family Members of Missing and/or Sexually Exploited Children

Because the trauma of having a missing and/or sexually exploited child may disrupt normal family activities and functions, it is important the needs of all family members continue to be met. In an effort to help family members of missing and/or sexually exploited children during this difficult time NPOs may make them aware of existing services and programs in their local communities. If possible an NPO should create an extensive and fully vetted list of resources in the community that may provide these family-support services **prior** to working with family members. If prior planning is not possible NPOs should still extensively research resources when a case arises. The list of resources should include a description of the services offered by the agency or organization along with contact information.

The Association of Missing Children’s Organizations, Inc. (AMECO) — an association of nonprofit organizations located across the United States and Canada that assist in the prevention, recovery, and reintegration of missing and/or sexually exploited children — suggests NPOs not attempt to provide family-support services directly. Family members may be better assisted and sustained in the long-term if an NPO helps family members identify their daily needs and then connects them with others who may be able to fulfill those needs. Many NPOs have found this model to be more sustainable for their organization as well.

An NPO's resource list should include fully vetted agencies, organizations, and individuals¹ who may be able to assist families with day-to-day needs including

- **Meal organization/delivery.** NPOs may obtain contact information for agencies, organizations, or individuals willing to assist family members with this task to better allow family members to focus their attention on the missing and/or sexually exploited child. This may include faith-based groups, local restaurants, local grocery stores, or even a member of the community willing to coordinate volunteers to cook and deliver meals if the need arises.
- **Childcare coordination.** NPOs may obtain contact information for agencies, organizations, or individuals willing to provide childcare services for the siblings of a missing and/or sexually exploited child if the adults in the family are occupied or otherwise unable to care for the siblings. The list may include childcare centers, local community centers with childcare services, schools, and faith-based groups.
- **Transportation coordination.** NPOs may obtain contact information for agencies, organizations, or individuals willing to provide transportation for family members of a missing and/or sexually exploited child if they do not have access to transportation or are unable to provide transportation to the other children in the family. This list may include local taxi companies, community centers, and service organizations such as the Knights of Columbus or Women's League.
- **Pet care.** NPOs may obtain contact information for agencies, organizations, or individuals willing to provide the family's pet with care, exercise, or shelter while family members are focusing on the missing and/or sexually exploited child. This list may include local animal shelters, dog-walking companies, and community centers.
- **Chores in the home.** NPOs may obtain contact information for agencies, organizations, or individuals willing to provide assistance in completing basic chores such as laundry, dry cleaning, yard care, or cleaning. These agencies may include local cleaning businesses, faith-based groups, landscaping businesses, or community centers.
- **Financial assistance.** NPOs may obtain contact information for agencies, organizations, or individuals willing to provide assistance with financial aid to help cover expenses families incur when searching for a missing child or finding professional help. NPOs may refer families to appropriately vetted social-service agencies and programs. These agencies may include faith-based groups, local businesses, or local philanthropic organizations.
- **Case navigation.** NPOs may obtain contact information for agencies, organizations, or individuals willing to provide assistance with navigating through the multiple levels of law-enforcement and other agencies involved in a child's case. NPOs can play a vital role in helping family members understand the roles and responsibilities of each agency involved. They may also assist family members develop a system to manage contacts and track communications with those involved. The NPO may empower the family to advocate on their own behalf and better understand the nuances of a missing- or sexually exploited-child case.

¹In some cases, especially when locally vetted agencies or organizations are not available to provide the services needed by families, individuals within local communities may be the only resource to provide these services. Ideally family members or other individuals close to the family would already know and trust these individuals. Because families in crisis are often vulnerable, NPOs should offer resources to help families assess the services provided by an agency, organization, and/or individual.

For additional information about family-support services, download the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children®s (NCMEC) publication *A Child Is Missing: Providing Support for Families of Missing Children* by visiting www.missingkids.com. From the home page respectively click on the “More Publications” and “A Child Is Missing” links.

Providing Professional-Help References to Family Members of Missing and/or Sexually Exploited Children

Medical, Mental-Health, and Legal Professionals

Families with missing and/or sexually exploited children may need to seek the help of a counselor, therapist, physician, or attorney. NPOs may be able to identify a network of professionals or other national, state/territorial, or community-based resources. NPOs should create an extensive and fully vetted list of resources in the community that may provide professional help prior to working with family members. If prior planning is not possible NPOs should extensively research resources when a case arises. Some families may need to obtain services at a reduced cost or no cost to the family. As part of researching professional-help resources, NPOs should locate local social-service organizations and professionals who would offer financial assistance to families.

Medical and mental-health professionals should have

- Educational specialization in their subject. Physicians should have board certification in a relevant medical specialty. Attorneys should hold a law degree from an accredited law school and be licensed to practice law in the jurisdiction in which the family is located. Therapists should hold an advanced degree in a recognized mental-health specialty and be licensed to practice in the jurisdiction in which the family is located. Advanced degrees are master’s degrees (MSW, MS, MA) and doctorates (MD, PhD, PsyD).
- Specific knowledge about the challenges a missing and/or sexually exploited child and his or her family will face. Considerations may include experience with missing- or sexually exploited-child cases, the legal system, child recovery, and family reunification.

For more information about finding professional help for families of missing and/or sexually exploited children view and download *Just in Case...Guidelines in finding professional help in case your child is missing or the victim of sexual exploitation* by visiting www.missingkids.com. From the home page respectively click on the “More Publications” and “Just in Case...Finding Professional Help” links.

Peer-Support Groups

Peer-support groups offer a place where individuals facing similar circumstances may share their experiences in a nonthreatening, empathetic environment and provide each other with practical information and resources. Support groups often are led by peer facilitators, but should have access to professional help when the needs of any participant exceed the capability of the facilitator. Family members feeling isolated from others may find online or telephone support helpful as they work through their family crisis with others experiencing similar situations.

NPOs may create a list of peer-support groups available in the community or online prior to working with family members. If prior planning is not possible NPOs should extensively research resources when a case arises. NPOs may want to contact local social-service agencies to discuss peer-support groups in the area that would be appropriate for families of missing and/or sexually exploited children. The missing-child clearinghouse in that state or territory may have more information about agencies in specific communities providing support groups. To find your clearinghouse visit www.missingkids.com, and respectively click on the “If Your Child Is Missing” and “Missing-Child Clearinghouse Program” links.

Additional resources for NPOs referring family members to peer-support groups are Team HOPE and Parents Anonymous®, Inc. Team HOPE (Help Offering Parents Empowerment), a program sponsored by NCMEC, is a peer-support network connecting parents/guardians, siblings, and other family members with a volunteer who has a similar case to offer empathetic support over the telephone. To contact Team HOPE call 1-866-305-HOPE (4673).

Parents Anonymous provides drop-in, peer-support group sessions for parents/guardians. The sessions provide parents/guardians an anonymous, free, and supportive environment where they can discuss parenting challenges and learn about positive parenting strategies. These anonymous sessions are provided in communities across the United States. For more information about finding a Parents Anonymous group in your community visit www.parentsanonymous.org, and from the home page click on the link to “Programs & Network.” In the left-hand column click on the links to “Parents Anonymous® Programs,” and then click on the “Network Map” link.

Providing Assistance for Working With Media to Families of Missing and/or Sexually Exploited Children

Some families may be unprepared for the media attention directed toward their case when a child becomes missing and/or is sexually exploited while other families may struggle to obtain or increase media visibility for their child. Media attention is often beneficial to missing-child cases. It is important for family members to be prepared to work with media outlets. NPOs may support families by creating a list of media contacts prior to working with family members. If prior planning is not possible, NPOs may extensively research resources when a case arises. NPOs can assist families in organizing their own media-contacts list. NPOs should not, however, act as a spokesperson for the family or channel media releases and messages on behalf of the family. A family member or close friend designated by the family may be a better candidate to represent the family.

NPOs may provide education to families regarding how specific media outlets operate. If an NPO has experience working with law enforcement they can provide information to families about maintaining contact with law-enforcement officials. Family members should confirm with law enforcement the information they provide to the media. It is important family members make sure any publicly released information is accurate, is up-to-date, and will not compromise the investigation. Most families with a missing and/or sexually exploited child are not familiar with making media appearances. NPOs may help prepare families to work with the media through role playing and rehearsing likely scenarios.

For cases of long-term missing children, the contact lists NPOs create can provide families with resources to coordinate and increase media attention on a case. Anniversary announcements, media interviews with family members, and other news stories can help create new leads by keeping the face and name of a missing child in the media focus.

For more information about keeping a community focused on a missing-child case, view and download *When Your Child is Missing: Bringing community attention to your missing child*, a compilation of activities and resources developed by the Laura Recovery Center in consultation with other AMECO partners and searching families. To download a copy of this publication visit www.lrcf.org and from the home page respectively click on the “Resources” and “When Your Child is Missing” links.

Specific Challenges for NPOs Supporting the Families of Missing and/or Sexually Exploited Children

Mission-Driven Services

When a child is missing and/or sexually exploited a natural response is to want to support the family in all of their needs. This goal, however, is unrealistic, difficult to sustain, and not necessarily in the best interest of the family. As previously discussed the family may need support with a variety of matters. NPOs should provide only the services they are equipped to offer and that support their mission. NPOs must be clear throughout their involvement with a family as to what specific services their organization provides. Developing partnerships with other NPOs and agencies may help address the needs of families beyond the scope of any one NPO.

Maintaining Professional Relationships

NPOs supporting families of missing and/or sexually exploited children may develop close bonds with the families they serve. NPOs should encourage their staff members to have empathy but maintain a professional relationship and avoid personalizing the family’s experience. NPOs may want to provide training for staff members and volunteers regarding best practices in supporting families during trauma.

Need for Staff and Volunteer Support

Paid and volunteer staff members working to support family members of missing and/or sexually exploited children may need emotional support as well. Often staff members and volunteers of NPOs form close relationships with the families of missing children and become emotionally invested in these cases. The emotional highs and lows of this work may take a toll on the staff members and volunteers, and NPOs need to include opportunities to address the stresses of this work.

The mental and emotional health of staff members and volunteers helping families in crisis is critical to the effectiveness of an NPO. Examine training opportunities facilitating discussion about secondary trauma, burnout, and coping mechanisms for compassion fatigue. Some organizations require debriefings with staff members and volunteers after a case to address these tough topics. Some organizations also assign supervisors for staff members and volunteers to help address these issues before they adversely impact job functions. A critical first step is to be aware this type of work may cause secondary trauma to staff members. A healthy staff is better equipped to handle the on-going work of the organization.

Useful Resources

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)

1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678) and
NCMEC's **Team HOPE**, 1-866-305-HOPE (4673)
www.missingkids.com

Association of Missing and Exploited Children's Organizations, Inc. (AMECO)

1-877-263-2620
www.amecoinc.org

Parents Anonymous®

909-621-6184
www.parentsanonymous.org

Laura Recovery Center

1-866-898-5723
www.lrcf.org

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