

Resources & Recommendations for Calls Involving Missing Children on the Autism Spectrum FAQs

The following questions were asked during the live webinar and answers were provided by NCMEC and Inspector Hoffman from FDLE.

Q: I'm wondering if NCMEC also does training for school personnel?

A: Yes. Please request training using this link: <https://formstack.io/CB73D>

Q: Are children with other forms of developmental disability also at risk? For example, an intellectual disability? Do any statistics show that as well?

A: NCMEC has outreach specifically related to children on the autism spectrum because of the high statistics related to missing incidents and deceased recovery data. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability, but there can be a co-occurring intellectual disability. While our work is specific to children with ASD, it is worth noting that drowning is a leading cause of death for children. The CDC page is here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/facts/index.html>

Q: A lot of children are in the process of being diagnosed. If they do not have the official diagnoses, but is in assessment, how does that effect the resources provided?

A: From the NCMEC perspective, the resources are the same. All of our resources are free of charge.

Q: My grandson has autism; would it be wrong to ask my local police dept. what they have in place for missing children with autism?

A: We encourage all community stakeholders to inquire with their local law enforcement about trainings that are required for law enforcement, as well as the types of awareness and support programs that might be available. If there are none, NCMEC can help.

Q: When we enter a child into NCIC is NCMEC notified automatically?

A: No. While NCMEC has access to NCIC, we do not receive automatic notifications. We receive them in limited instances such as AMBER Alerts because we are a secondary distributor of AMBER Alerts. Otherwise, we must be contacted by law enforcement or a legal guardian to open a missing child case with our organization.

Q: Is enhanced MCA only for autism or is it for any kind of mental deficit/disorder i.e. special needs kids?

A: As far as how the FDLE AUTHORIZES an ENHANCED MCA, the following criteria must be met: 1. child is under 18. 2. Local law enforcement has a well-founded belief that the child is in IMMEDIATE danger of death or serious bodily injury. 3. There is a detailed description or photograph of the child. 4. Local law enforcement recommends activation.

Q: What is the exact "time frame" that a missing child with autism needs to be reported to send out an MCA?

A: There is no specific time frame for any alert. If a child with Autism is missing or a child without Autism is missing, police should be notified immediately, there should not be any time delay.

Q: As a 9-1-1 dispatcher should I ask the caller if the child is non-verbal or non-vocal?

A: I would stipulate that it could not hurt. But I would definitely make it a secondary question. And then obviously relay that information to patrol headed to the scene. And it is Non-Verbal and Verbal, not non-vocal.

Q: Is the enhanced alert system for Florida only or is this nationwide?

A: I do not know about every state, but there are forms of what the FDLE identifies as an ENHANCED MCA being used in other states. The all important WEA (Wireless Emergency Alert) is housed with FEMA, so any state could get on that system. Peterwarren@fdle.state.fl.us would have more info on this topic.

Q: What if someone is 18 or above but on the spectrum?

A: In Florida, we have what are called PURPLE ALERTS that we will be introducing in the near future.

Q: Regarding alerts that come to cell phones: Can a photo be attached? Is this in the works?

A: All of alerts provide a link. After you click on that link there is a photo of the child along with physical characteristics. As technology progresses the photo of the child may pop up automatically but that is contingent on future technology.

Q: With next generation and people being able to send photos/videos, will dispatchers be able to get the WEA alert out to save time?

A: I can only speak on how the FDLE has determined how the alerts are broadcast. Even if the dispatcher has the pertinent info (that the missing child has Autism), there still has to be a conference call between law enforcement to actually have the alert finally AUTHORIZED. One of the reasons for this is the officer arriving on scene still has to confirm the child is missing, and then the conference call has to be completed so that we are sure that all criteria are met before the ENHANCED MCA or MCA is authorized. The criteria was explained in a question listed above.

Q: What is the normal time frame for an MCA to be activated?

A: Times will vary. Speaking for the FDLE, we have to wait for the police agency conducting the investigation to request the alert. So it varies substantially as to how long or short of a time that the police agency waits to call us. That is one of the main reasons we made the 9-1-1 Telecommunicator Autism Training, to help reduce the time delay and get the alert out as soon as possible.

Q: Where can I find the training specifically for 9-1-1 operators?

A: <http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/Media/BPDTraining/AutismTelecommunicator/story.html>

For additional resources and contact information:

NCMEC Contacts

Fred Miller
Outreach, Training, & Prevention
femiller@ncmec.org

Joy Paluska
Missing Children Division
jepaluska@ncmec.org

1-800-THE-LOST
Missingkids.org/autism

Florida Department of Law Enforcement

Inspector Chad Hoffman
ChadHoffman@fdle.state.fl.us

850.363.4717 (24/7)
850.251.4017

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