



# HOW TO CONDUCT A MISSING CHILD DRILL

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A guide to plan, conduct, and evaluate a missing child drill at your church



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# BEFORE THE DRILL

## HOW COULD A CHILD GO MISSING AT CHURCH?

Church can provide a fantastic family environment. Because of this, parents may take a more laid-back approach to supervision while at church, or rely on others to supervise their children. An environment with relaxed supervision creates opportunities for children to explore new hiding places or for someone to walk off with a child and no one notices until hours later that the child is missing.

A missing child drill will prepare those in your congregation to be alert to poor supervision situations and to eliminate them from your church. Other benefits include:

- Your church will have an up-to-date, realistic response plan prepared for future incidents of missing children.
- Children who become lost will know what to do when they are separated and be assured that someone is looking for them.
- You can easily see what changes should be made so your church is prepared to properly supervise and protect the children at your church.

If you have never conducted an emergency drill, don't expect everything to go perfectly the first time. The more you plan ahead of time, the better things will go.

### HERE IS YOUR PLANNING CHECKLIST:

- Discuss your plans for the drill with your pastor, church board and safety committee. Have the drill approved by the church board, and receive input on ways to improve your missing child drill.
- Create a crisis response team. This might include people with police, military, or medical training. It might be helpful to have a communications person who can become the liaison between the local church and its members and local media.
- Designate duties for your crisis team members to perform during the drill.
- Perform a risk assessment of your facility using the church inspection form to be sure your church building is prepared for the drill.
- Create or update your written plan of what to do if a child is reported missing. Your plan should include:
  - Talking to the last person who saw the child to determine where the child was, what the child was doing and whom the child was talking to.
  - Talking to the parent or guardian of the child to get a description of the child and what they were wearing.
  - If it is believed the child is in danger or has been abducted, notify local authorities immediately.
  - Informing the congregation of the child's disappearance and instruct them who to contact if they find the child or saw anything relating to where the child was last seen.
  - Instructing key church personnel to search the church and church grounds, including any exterior buildings, for the child. Start where the child was seen last and fan out from there.
  - If you do not find the child on church grounds, notify local authorities with a complete description of the child, along with contact information for the child's guardian and the church's crisis communication team member.
- Create a scenario where a child goes missing with your crisis response team to simulate during the missing child drill. Scenarios could be:
  - A child leaves Sabbath School to use the restroom and does not return.
  - A parent chatting with friends during Sabbath lunch realizes they have not seen their child for a while and after investigating realizes no one else has seen them either.
  - Children playing hide-and-go-seek at a church social event cannot find one of their friends. The game ends but their friend has still not come out of hiding.
- Assign individuals to observe the drill and report back any problems they noted.

# CONDUCTING THE DRILL

*Announce to your congregation a week or two before the drill of your intent to conduct a missing child drill. Tell them when the drill will take place and what is expected of them. This is especially important if this will be the first missing child drill at your church.*

## EDUCATE YOUR CONGREGATION

- 1** Select a child from your congregation to play the “missing” child. Coordinate with their parents to select a good place for the child to hide and tell the child to stay hidden until someone from the church finds them. Have someone from your crisis response team stationed near where the child is hiding to be sure the child is safe during the drill.
- 2** At the designated time during the service, have a member of the crisis response team announce to the congregation that a missing child drill is now in progress.
- 3** Tell the congregation you do not believe the child was abducted or in danger, but you need to find the child as quickly as possible.
- 4** Describe to the congregation what the missing child is wearing and instruct them who to contact should they have any information regarding the missing child.
- 5** Have your crisis response team members and church personnel on duty conduct a strategic sweep of the church building. If church members are willing to assist, provide specific instructions how they can participate in the search.
- 6** Start your timer to see how long it takes to find the missing child.
- 7** After the child is found, share with the congregation how long it took to find the missing child and what lessons were learned.

# AFTER THE DRILL



- Ask for feedback from the congregation and those who assisted with the drill.
- Identify problems and weaknesses.
- Make notes of what went well and what didn't. You can attach your notes to the drill record. Maintaining records and other notes will provide you with the benefit of information gleaned from past events.
- After reviewing all notes, revise your missing child response plan as needed. Don't forget to set the date of your next drill!

When you begin to have missing child drills, it is best to schedule three or four drills the first year. After the congregation is comfortable with the procedure, yearly drills are sufficient. Remember to vary the time of the drills. Schedule them before, during and after Sabbath School, the announcement period, and the worship service. You may plan one for a church social event or during a weekly Pathfinder meeting. Emergency situations can happen at anytime so be prepared.

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