

MEMO FROM THE MAYOR

SUBJECT: The Heart-Break of a Missing Child, Part 1

At a Glance:

- **Police can expect a kidnapper who intends to murder an abducted child to do so within 24 hours in 91% of the cases based upon a State of Washington Study.**
- **When parents or guardians determine their child is missing, they need to report it to law enforcement right away—no waiting.**
- **Parents and guardians of young children in Emmett need to acquire and complete a Keep My Child Safe Kit from the Emmett Police Department if they have not already done so.**

Some Horrific Statistics

School is now in session. Accordingly, the City of Emmett takes a pro-active stance with regard to our children's safety, particularly their going to and from school. For example, Public Works will redo the cross-walk striping so they can be clearly seen—at least when road white paint is available. We are currently experiencing shortages due to, you guessed it, Covid. For the first week or so, we increase our police patrols around the schools to make sure the school speed zones are obeyed. We sometimes install certain electronic signs, such as rapid flashers at school crosswalks or speed detection signs that inform drivers closest to the sign the speed at which their vehicle travels.

Later, once the students are settled into their routines, School Resource Officers (SROs) will have talks in individual class rooms about safety issues. But what happens when children go missing? What do we do then? Indeed, what does our community as a whole do then? We have been heavily touched in recent months in this area where missing children are concerned. To be sure, there exist different episodic types when children go missing. The Department of Justice recognizes at least six: (1) Nonfamily Abduction, (2) Stereotypical Kidnapping, (3) Family Abduction, (4) Runaway/Throwaway, (5) Missing Involuntary, Lost or Injured, (6) Missing Benign Explanation.

The one aspect about “runaway” that Chief Kunka and I agree upon, focuses upon what

the response should be when a child is reported as having runaway. For our purposes, the Emmett Police Department and our newly established protocol addressing the Mandatory Alert for Missing Children (MAMC) requires that when a child is reported as having runaway, we don't wait for that child to "stay overnight" somewhere. We take immediate action.

Accordingly, we expect parents and our school officials to utilize the same standard. To do otherwise is fool hardy—indeed, to do otherwise is criminally negligent.

A 1992 study conducted by our neighboring state of Washington entitled *Investigative Case Management for Missing Children Homicides* found that while 19% of missing children were reported as missing immediately upon their discovery of being so, and 25% were reported after one hour, and the vast majority, 86%, were reported within twenty-four hours, regrettably, that same report found that 44% of children abducted and murdered, experienced their fate of homicide within one hour of their abduction. 91% of the abduction and murders in Washington studied happened within twenty-four hours.

Parents Should be Proactive Before Being Reactive

Allstate—that's right, the good hands people—have produced a handy document called the "SafeWise Kids Child ID File". The Emmett Police Department has several of them, and it would make this mayor ever so thrilled if we had to place several orders for more. Why? Because it would mean Emmett's parents are being proactive before they have to be reactive in reporting a child as missing. The Child ID File is cleverly conceived. It gives cues to the parents in writing as they complete it. For example, it cues parents to update the file regularly as the child grows (at least yearly) and to keep it in a safe, accessible place. Guns safes come to mind. It also cues parents to review safety procedures with their children regularly. For example, they are instructed to listen to their concerns and worries.

The single most important tool is a current photo ID of the child. Inexplicably, when one goes to the Idaho State Police website for missing persons, their photos cannot be readily found. Emmett's response will be different. Having at least one parent's permission, we will post the photo of a missing child on the official City of Emmett website and, through other social media platforms, direct local residents to the city website photo.

Chief Kunka and the Emmett City Police Department are making child safety in the City of Emmett a major emphasis. It has been observed that one can determine the value of a society

by how that society treats its young and its aged. For example, parents and guardians (typically, grandparents) can come to the Emmett Police Department and obtain “Keep My Child Safe” kits, that include having children fingerprinted, the Child ID File and an eight by three-and-one-half inch pre-printed card, laminated, that provides a “cheat sheet” on (1) how parents can be proactive by utilizing “safe talk” early and regularly, (2) how to be prepared in case a child goes missing (essentially, prepare a Keep My Child Safe Kit, now available at the Emmett Police Department) and (3) what to do if a child turns up missing. The first four items on the list are crucial to Emmett’s system.

- SEARCH your home (immediately) and check with relatives, neighbors, and friends to try and locate your child; and
- If you cannot find your child, immediately REPORT your child as MISSING to local law enforcement (911); and
- LIMIT access to your home until law-enforcement officers arrive and able to collect evidence; and
- GIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT officers ALL of the information they request about your child, especially any information that would assist them in the search (i.e., the Keep My Child Safe kit).

In the next installment, we will cover more preparation hacks, such as keeping an old toothbrush in an envelope licked to close BY your child at room temperature in a dry, easily accessible place far away from heat—and more on MAMC.