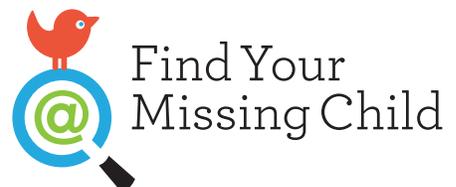


SOCIAL MEDIA Guidebook

FOR FAMILIES OF MISSING AND RUNAWAY CHILDREN



→ www.findyourmissingchild.org



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tony Loftis has more than 15 years of experience in public and community relations. He is a veteran of many public relations and social media campaigns.



When his daughter went missing in November of 2011, he initially struggled to get the New York City media to care. They told him that thousands of children run away to New York City every year, a disturbing number that can be confirmed by the number of pictures of missing and runaway children in the police station at the Port Authority bus terminal.

Based on his professional experience creating social media communities, he set about creating an online community to help him search for his daughter. He found that numerous friends asked how they could help. By providing them with a platform, his friends and the people in his extended social network could aid in the search for his missing daughter and provide suggestions about where she might be. Eventually, this community totaled more than 3,000 people.

One article that featured his daughter in the Huffington Post had 17,000 people take action on it, either by tweeting it, liking it on Facebook or recommending it to their friends.

Eventually, the New York City media took hold of the story and in 12 days he did three radio interviews, five print stories and six television interviews because of the buzz generated by social media. After seeing Loftis's last television interview, someone called in a tip and Loftis's daughter was found less than two hours later.

Loftis later realized that the social media tools he used were commonly available but had yet to be put together and packaged to aid in the search for a missing child. While there is seemingly no end to the number of social media tools available, he thought it was best to focus on the tools most people use: Facebook, YouTube, email and Twitter. By creating a do-it-yourself social media campaign guide, Loftis felt that most searching parents could create an online presence, which an email address and a Facebook account, to aid in the search for their missing child.

His goal was to help parents aid the search for their missing child, which would not only help the police and generate leads, but also would bring peace of mind to the parents as they did something productive to help bring the child home instead of waiting by the phone.

This guide represents an attempt to repay thousands of people who helped him in his search for his daughter.

Good luck and God bless.

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→ INTRODUCTION

When your child runs away or goes missing, the worst feeling in the world is sitting at home waiting for the phone to ring and not knowing how to help in the search for your missing child. This guide will provide you with detailed instructions on how to build a social media community that will help you, your family and friends actively participate in the search for your missing child.

The social media tools (such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and email) discussed in this guide were chosen because they are the most commonly used social media tools and relatively simple to use.

Most people already have some familiarity with social media options, but we recognized that not everyone is comfortable with social media use. In many cases families that are not familiar have been able to turn to relatives or friends who can help apply the techniques described in this book.

By creating a social media community, you will expand the number of people looking for your missing child.

This resource is written with the assumption that the reader has some familiarity with social media tools but is not an expert. Even social media experts will benefit from specific recommendations for using these tools in the search for missing children. If you are not comfortable using social media, reach out to a neighbor, friend or relative who can help you. In fact, it may be beneficial to set up your Facebook, YouTube and Twitter accounts with someone you trust so they can maintain them while you are busy with other tasks.

By creating a social media community, you will expand the number of people looking for your missing child. An interactive social media community enables your family, friends, coworkers and people you don't know yet to aid in the search for your missing child.

Creating a social media community identifies hidden and unknown resources within your extended social network. For example, unknown to you, your extended social network might include a public relations person, a detective, a social media expert, a community organizer, someone who can make cheap photocopies for flyers or someone who can provide a couch to sleep on if the parents need to travel to another town.



WE CAN'T PROMISE THAT YOU WILL FIND YOUR CHILD BY USING THESE TOOLS, BUT WE CAN SAY FOUR THINGS:

- 1** If you use these tools you'll feel like you are actively participating in the search for your child—you do not have to sit around and wait for the phone to ring.
- 2** You will be able to draw upon your network of friends and their friends to actively help you in the search for your missing child. They will be able to provide you with tips and resources that you didn't know they could deliver. In a time of crisis, many people stand tall. By using a social media networking campaign to create a community, you give these people a way to help you search for your child, which they sincerely want to do.
- 3** You will know that you are not alone. You will find out that a large number of people care for you and your family. Their support will carry you through tough times.
- 4** The police will know you care. The more you can help them in their search, the more they will want to help you.



Again, we cannot promise that your child will come home safely if you use the tools in this book. But we believe the tools will give you comfort in knowing that you are actively aiding in the search and not just sitting by the phone.

Before proceeding, let us offer a few words of hope:

- Over 50% of missing children return home within the first week*
- Over 99% of all missing children are eventually found*

This guide is designed to help you increase those odds.



THE IMPORTANCE OF MONITORING WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT YOU

One of the advantages to using social media in the search for your child is that all of the people who are visibly helping you on the social media sites provide third-party validation that you are a good parent. This is why it's especially important to monitor the social media sites and whenever anybody hints that you might be a bad parent, have a friend respond with a positive message.

Because it's so critical, we need to repeat that: you need to respond positively to every negative attack. You have to make sure that you are perceived as good parents.

Kids make mistakes and no child is perfect, but every child deserves the chance to come home. If you find that you are defending your child's actions, you may need to repeat some version of the following phrase:

—> “ We love our child and want her back. We love her and forgive her.
I hope you can too and will help us find her as we would help you.”

* According to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.

→ RISKS

USING THE MEDIA CARRIES RISKS

The media can certainly aid in your search, and many reporters genuinely want to help you, but once the child is found you can't control the nature of the stories that are going to come out. Most parents would trade the safe return of their child for any sensationalistic coverage that may come out after the child is found. Whether or not this is an acceptable risk to you and your family is a decision you need to make.

We strongly suggest that you do not read media stories after your child is found. There's nothing to be gained.

GOING PUBLIC WILL ALSO TURN THE SPOTLIGHT ON YOUR LIFE

If the circumstances about your child's disappearance are suspicious, you may be a suspect in the disappearance. Using the media in this case is a two-edged sword because they will likely try to sensationalize the story by painting you as the chief suspect. While this certainly publicizes the story of your child's disappearance, it will also forever mark you as a suspected criminal, especially if the child is never found, or found deceased under mysterious circumstances.

Even if you are thought to be model parents, there are people who will always believe that children never run away or go missing from good homes. You need to have friends constantly monitor the comments sections of any newspaper stories or television links to refute all negative comments.

INFORMATION GENERATED USING SOCIAL MEDIA WILL BE PUBLIC AND REMAIN SO

If you are effective in generating interest in the search for your missing child, you will create information about your family that you cannot take back. While you can take down the social media accounts you set up in the search for your missing child, information about you, your child and your search will remain on the Internet forever. Many companies perform Google and Facebook searches on potential new hires.

If you use social media in the search for your missing child, your privacy will be forever altered. Many families will accept this as the price they have to pay to find their missing child. Some will not. It's a choice you have to make, but realize if you commit to using social media, there is no going back.

Anything you post to Facebook, email that you write or YouTube video that you create has the potential to go viral, that is be seen by tens of thousands or even millions of people. Be careful and understand that your potential audience is much more vast than the people in your social network. Also, be aware that anything you say or post may be taken out of context. Again monitor social media sites and news coverage for inaccuracies and address them.

[2

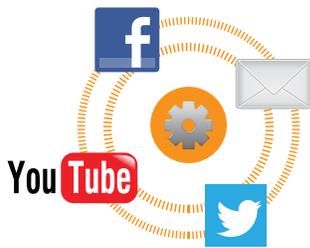
→ THE BASIC TOOLS

The goal of this section is to teach you how to build an interactive community using Facebook, email, YouTube and Twitter to find a missing child.

It is not necessary to use all of these social media tools; for example, an excellent community can be created just by using Facebook and email. But the more ways you appeal to the public to interact with your search, the more ways you have of striking a cord in a large number of people and enlisting them in your search.

Clearly, the more tools you use, the more time you will need to keep them updated. Social media works best when it is monitored and updated on a regular basis. Fresh content gives your community a reason to interact with you and take an active part in your search.

You want a community of people who are eager to help you. The more often you post information, the more people will engage with you.



To create an effective interactive community, you'll need to unify all the tools. Actions taken on Facebook can be discussed in email and on Twitter. Videos posted to YouTube can be mentioned on Twitter and Facebook. To highlight the synergy between all these tools, we suggest that you name all accounts using the "FindJaneDoe" format. This will give you consistency across social media platforms and remind everyone of the search.

You want to build a community of people who sympathize with your plight. Anyone with children will instantly understand how devastating the loss of a child is.

In all of your communication, you need to emphasize this point:

→ **"We need our child back in our lives or else everything is going to fall apart."**

Across all social media platforms, you must emphasize that you want the chance to make your family whole again.

FACEBOOK

The explosion of social media, with nearly 800,000,000 people on Facebook in 2012, is allowing us to maintain relationships and stay in touch with new and old friends regardless of geography, helping us to maintain communities that weren't possible five years ago. Quite simply, we have expanded our circle of friends.

Before Facebook, setting up websites to post information about missing children was limited to people who had strong technical backgrounds. Those websites were difficult to update with new content and served only as a one-way communication tool. Facebook has enabled anyone with minimal knowledge of technology to create and update community

pages that foster two-way communication. Parents can post information about their child and readers can show their support and love.

For people who don't know you personally or haven't seen you in a long time, setting up a Facebook Community page to use in the search for your missing child creates the opportunity to make an emotional connection with people you don't know well.

We suggest creating a public community, separate from your personal Facebook, to use in the search for your missing child. You will want to do this for three reasons:

1. **Setting up a separate community page will create a single central location for information about your missing child.**
2. **By setting up a community page, you can get help to maintain the page.**
3. **Protect your privacy and your friends' privacy. Your personal page has information that you probably would not like to share with the world. The community page will allow you to separate your private life from the search for your missing child.**

The process of creating a Facebook community page is straightforward and can have a tremendous impact by involving your extended network in the search for your missing child. Setting up a community page is fairly simple, but if you are nervous about it, ask a relative or friend to help.

To create a Facebook community page, follow this link www.facebook.com/pages/create.php and click on the box marked cause or community. From there, the process is very straightforward.

Because you will want to create a unified approach to using social media, name your Facebook community page along the lines of FindJaneDoe. It's a naming format that you can and should use every time you set up a social media account. This will make it easier for people to find you across social media sites and conveys that you want their help.

Think of your Facebook community page as a global bulletin board where everyone can post information about your child, including links to news stories, photos, comments, and video. Like a bulletin board, you need to keep information fresh and updated so people have a reason to come back often. The more often people return to your Facebook page, the more likely they are to work on finding your missing child.

The more often people return to your Facebook page, the more likely they are to work on finding your missing child.

→ **THE INFORMATION SECTION OF YOUR FACEBOOK PAGE SHOULD CONTAIN THE FOLLOWING:**

- A recent photo of your missing child
- A phone number for the police department aiding in your search. You may also want to include the phone number of a valid missing children's organization involved in your child's case. The Association of Missing & Exploited Children's Organizations (www.amecoinc.org) has an excellent list of reputable organizations.
- The location where your child was last seen and where they ran away from
- If possible, a link to an article about your child's disappearance

→ **CREATE, MAINTAIN AND UPDATE THE CONTENT ON YOUR PAGE:**

- Encourage others to interact with the community page
- Monitor comments posted on the community page
 - › Respond to every question (you need to encourage supporters)
 - › Answer the same question more than once if you have to—not everyone reads all comments
- Post family photos of yourself and your child, especially at family gatherings
 - › Be sure to get permission from everyone in the photo before you post a picture to Facebook. Not everyone wants to have their picture on the Web, regardless of the purpose
- Post pictures of your child with adult friends, would to help show that your child is part of a greater community
 - › Be sure to get permission of everyone in the photo before you post a picture to Facebook. As we said, not everyone wants to have their picture on the Web, regardless of the reason
- Provide links to traditional media coverage
- Assume your child has access to the Internet and speak directly to your child on some posts
- Ask friends to like and tag the page
- Highlight special events like birthdays and holidays and briefly share the positive memories your family had during those occasions

Traditional media reporters, both print and television, pay attention to Facebook pages. They look at the number of people who visit community pages and the comments posted. If you are lucky enough to get traditional media interested in your story, you will find that reporters often refer to Facebook pages in cases of missing persons.

When a television station interviews you, they may mention and show video of your Facebook community page.

Mention the Facebook community page every time you speak with the media. It the easiest way to help people understand your plight and get them involved.

By posting links to television appearances and newspaper articles, you can turn your Facebook page into an information resource about your child and the progress of the search. Posting links makes it easy for anyone who's not part of your immediate network to quickly understand the story of your child's disappearance.

By the way, the media measures how many people click on stories they write or interviews they air that have links. The more people you can drive to a media website, the more likely they are to give you continued coverage, especially the smaller, hyper-local online publications.

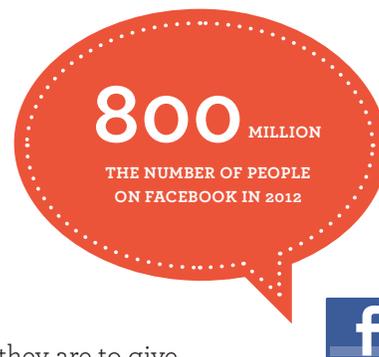
Finally, if your child has a Facebook page (and this is not the place to get into a debate about whether or not tweens and young teens should have Facebook pages), ask your friends and their children to post to your child's Facebook page. You want them to be supportive and ask your child to come home. Some runaways still have access to the Internet while they are away and will monitor their Facebook pages. Posting positive messages from their peers on your child's Facebook page is a way to remind your child that he or she is loved and wanted back home.

EMAIL

Conversations about social media start with email. Email is the oldest and most effective social media tool. Email chains are still the most effective way to create viral messages; that is a message that people willingly forward to their friends. One well written email can radiate out, forwarded from person to person like ripples on a pond.

Create a separate FindJaneDoe@gmail.com to be used for all communication regarding your missing child. You can refer them to the FindJaneDoe@gmail.com.

Because your personal email account is likely to become overwhelmed by well-wishers and people asking how they can help, we strongly suggest that you create a separate email account to use in the search for your missing child. You don't want your personal or professional email account to be cluttered by information pertaining to the search nor do you want your personal account in the public domain after your child returns home.



Although there are a number of free email providers, we think Google's Gmail has the best combination of simplicity and flexibility.

Regardless of which email provider you choose, you will want to use the following format:

—> **FindJaneDoe@emailprovider.com**

As we noted in the Facebook section, using the FindJaneDoe format will maintain a consistency across your social media accounts. Also, using the FindJaneDoe format makes easier for people to remember the email address.

By creating a generic email account, others, either friends or family, can access the account and communicate with people who have questions about the search for your missing child. Make sure someone monitors this email account and responds to all questions and comments in a timely manner.

To get the word out about your child's disappearance, you need to create a viral message that you can send to everyone in your contact list. Everyone. You never know who can help you within your network or who knows someone who can help you.

You must open yourself up to receive help from everyone you know. Creating an email account from which correspondence can be forwarded from your friends to your friends' friends to your friends' friends' friends is the best way of getting out the word about your child's disappearance. One well-written email can ripple exponentially across the country.

More than likely, some of the biggest help in the search for your missing child will come from places where you least expect it. You will find out that people who barely know you will step up and provide support that you would not even expect from close family members. People in your extended network will have resources and talents that you need and you will only be able to find them by sending your email to everyone you know.

You never know who can help you within your network or who knows someone who can help you.

The first email about your child's disappearance should be sent from your personal email account. People need to know the message is authentic and will trust a personal email from you. But you also want people to start using the FindJaneDoe@emailprovider.com account, so your first email should be brief and contain the following elements:

- Briefly inform people that your child is missing
- Let them know that you need their help
- Ask them to look for an email with more details on how they can help from the FindJaneDoe@emailprovider.com account"

Before sending out your first email, make sure your Facebook community page is set up with the basic information about your child's disappearance and at least a few family photos.

→ **YOUR EMAIL TO ALL YOUR FRIENDS NOTIFYING THEM OF YOUR CHILD'S DISAPPEARANCE SHOULD HAVE THE FOLLOWING COMPONENTS:**

- The email address for the account that you need to set up to collect email about your child's disappearance
- A basic overview of when your child left home and where your child was last seen
- Links to the Facebook, YouTube and Twitter accounts you are using for the search
- Links to any content created by print magazines and newspapers, online publications and television interviews
- The link to a website where they can download the flyer you are using to canvas places your child frequents
 - > By giving others the link you defray some of the costs of printing color flyers yourself
 - > You also impart a sense of shared purpose when they go to the site and see a way to help
- A phone number where friends can reach you
- The phone number for the lead law enforcement agency working on your child's case (police may have set up a separate number)
- A 140-character Tweet that recipients of the email can send out on their Twitter accounts
- A reminder to check the Facebook community page for the latest information about the search

Because misspellings and typos will limit the impact of your message, have a professional writer or someone who possesses excellent writing skills proof the document for typos and grammar as well as general wordsmithing. Even better, see if you can find someone in public relations or marketing who understands how to create a message with emotional impact and ask them to review your email and other messages.

Finally, every email that someone receives from to the FindJaneDoe@gmail.com email account reminds them of the urgency in finding the missing child. Just sending and receiving email from an account with your child's name creates awareness of the plight of the missing child.

YOUTUBE

Any video that captures your child's image and speech offers an emotional argument to any viewer to help in the search. This is unlike any other social media tool.

Almost everyone in your social network has access to devices that shoot video, such as a smart phone, digital camera, tablet or webcam. Encourage your friends to shoot video messages of them recalling memories of times spent with your missing child and other videos that will engage viewers. Post those videos to the YouTube channel. When done right, this can create a great deal of valuable and emotional content.

YouTube has a great link on how to set up your YouTube channel and tips for engaging your audience: www.youtube.com/t/ngo_tips

As with the Facebook page and your email accounts, you should name the YouTube channel in the FindJaneDoe format.

Every time you upload a video to YouTube, post that link on Facebook and Twitter with a brief message about who created the video. You can also create daily summaries of new videos and post the summary to Facebook and Twitter.

By creating videos and summaries you create content that keeps your Facebook community page lively and fresh.

Before you announce that you have a YouTube channel—using Facebook, email or Twitter—you need to have videos already uploaded on your YouTube channel. While you can certainly shoot professional videos, amateur videos shot with a steady camera and a good background will provide just as much emotional content.

TWITTER

Twitter is an effective way to disseminate information to a really large audience that includes readers you don't know very well. It's difficult to tell a story in 140 characters (the maximum allowed per posting by Twitter), but that doesn't mean that your tweets can't have a strong impact.

A good tweet with a link to content about your missing child is very effective at enlisting strangers in your cause and getting them to join your community.

If you have a Twitter account with a large number of followers, you may want to use that account to initially spread the word, but you should create a separate account using the “FindJaneDoe” format. Using your personal account continuously for the search will create mixed messages between your followers who are looking to help you in the search and the ones who want to follow your normal activities.



After your first few tweets, include the @FindJaneDoe account in your tweets, which will help you start building a community with that account.

If you do not have a Twitter account, you may not want to create one just to search for your missing child. Be aware that gaining a critical mass of followers may take far too long and your valuable time may be better spent elsewhere. Also, if you are not familiar with how to use the tool, you will not likely be able to use it as effectively as you can use email, Facebook and YouTube.

If you do not have a Twitter account and you still want to use the medium, consider asking friends who have a Twitter presence to tweet about your missing child. Their tweets can provide useful links to your social media accounts and important traditional media stories.

The first few tweets that you send out are the most important ones.

You need to make sure that each of your first few tweets has a link to content about your child and an emotional hook. You also must ask the reader to re-tweet because you need a call to action: you want to enlist others in your cause.

An emotional hook is critical as it will make the reader want to get involved and respond to the call to action. The reader’s involvement could be something as easy to do as re-tweeting your post to their network or something more time intensive, such as helping you organize a ground search.

You need a content link because there is no way that you can convey the whole story of what happened to your child and why the reader should care within 140 characters.

Because you have to tell the story in only 140 characters, it really helps to provide links to longer form content. Post links of all media coverage and major Facebook updates to your Twitter account and ask others to re-post. Because not everyone is on Twitter at the same time, you will need to re-post the same content a few times. Finding a balance between spamming and updating may be difficult. Success depends in large part on you having enough of the right type of content, which is why creating content should be an overriding mission.

Assume people will re-tweet your message. In constructing your initial message, take into consideration that if you use the maximum 140 characters, people will be unable to easily re-tweet that message, because when re-tweeting (which is similar to forwarding an email address), five characters plus the number of characters of the twitter handle are added. Making a 120-character tweet allows others to re-tweet easily, without needed to edit, and thus more likely.

A common mistake is that people think of Twitter as a broadcast medium. It's not. Twitter works best to facilitate conversation. To that end, it's your responsibility to make sure that the conversation is two-way. Once you get started, you have to continue the dialogue.

A Twitter audience will lose interest if you do not provide ever-changing content.

As with all mediums, respond to every question and every statement in a timely manner.

While it may be frustrating at times, you'll likely answer the same question more than once. Because not everyone is on Twitter at all times, readers miss things that have been said earlier in the day. It is important to remember that the person asking the question is doing so because they care. They are they looking for information, and a question asked more than once is a clue that there are others out there who have the same question. Accept it, answer the question, answer the question again and move on. Remember, people are trying to help you.

In the beginning, you may not want use the hashtag #FindJaneDoe as the characters used for the hashtag will take up valuable real estate in your initial message. And even more real estate is taken on by people re-tweeting your message. Later on, though, you should make sure that every tweet and every response contains a hashtag #FindJaneDoe. (A hash tag is simply a way for people to search for tweets that have a common topic.)

Finally, if you have used your Twitter account to post off-color humor or said anything that would make you seem like less than a stellar person, you should not use Twitter in your search for your missing child. As the axiom goes, make sure that if your grandmother, boss or someone from the school PTO read your tweet stream they would not be horrified. Be sure your history is clean because someone will check.

If your Twitter profile is not sparkling clean, you may want to create a new account with the specific purpose of finding your missing loved one.

→ WORKING TRADITIONAL MEDIA REPORTERS

The goal of this section is to teach you how to work with traditional media.

By no means is this a substitute for working with an experienced public relations person, but if you follow the steps we've outlined, you should be reasonably equipped to be an effective spokesperson for your cause and able to communicate effectively with reporters.

We will cover three topics:

- **The importance of setting a clear objective**
- **Using talking points to achieve that objective**
- **Reviewing 11 tips for working with traditional media**

Before we discuss how to work with the media by yourself, you should find out if anyone in your extended network has experience in public relations or knows someone who does. Getting the media's attention is difficult, and understanding what motivates reporters to cover a story isn't as easy as it may seem. Just because you think you have news doesn't mean that the media agrees.

Most people who are not in public relations think working with the media is relatively easy, especially if members of the media want to talk to you. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Public relations professionals will know what media opportunities you should pursue and which ones you should turn down. A good PR person will also help you hone your message and talking points. They can let you know what will and will not resonate with your audience.

If you cannot find a PR professional to help you or cannot afford their services, do your due diligence on the news outlets in your area. Understanding the tenor and tone of their coverage will help you when you speak to reporters.

HAVE A CLEAR OBJECTIVE

Your main objective is to generate leads that the police can use to find your child. It does not matter how much media coverage you generate if it's not directly related to finding your child. Your goal is to use the media to increase the number of people helping you look for your child and to convince people who don't know you to help you search for your missing child.

One of the key strategies in achieving this objective is to make people feel like this could happen to their child. You need to evoke their sympathy in order to make them feel like they want to help you.



Every word out of your mouth in television or print interviews should support the following key talking points:

- This could happen any family
- Our child is in danger and every minute matters
- We need your help

These are the key message that will make you appear sympathetic.

Whether you like it or not, the first thought that goes through anyone's mind is: if you're such a good parent, why did you not keep your child safe?

You absolutely have to give a plausible explanation that doesn't involve problems that you created for your child. You don't want viewers to think the reason your kid is missing is because of terrible parents. That would absolutely crush your credibility and break the bond that you are trying to form with the people who you want to help you.

Whether you like it or not, the first thought that goes through anyone's mind is: if you're such a good parent, why did you not keep your child safe?

STICK TO YOUR TALKING POINTS

Can you say three positive things about your child? How is your child special?

It is easy to get flustered during interviews. We suggest developing a cheat sheet with information that you want to get across in every interview. Study it before you talk to the reporter.

Try to limit your key points to three main items. Your audience will not remember more than three things and it's unlikely you will get a chance to push across more than three thoughts in a television interview. Print, of course, is different. You will cover more ground, but it is still critical to make sure that your three main points get covered.

You want to get across that what happened to you could have happened to anybody. Again, you need to form an emotional bond with the readers or viewers because you want their help.

→ **11 THINGS TO DO WHEN WORKING WITH THE MEDIA**

1. Smile, pretend the reporter is on your side because she or he probably is.
2. Until they prove otherwise, treat the reporter as your friend, but realize anything you say to them can be used against you. Don't say anything that you don't expect the whole world to hear.
3. Stick to your prepared talking points.
4. Appear sympathetic. You want the viewer or reader to imagine what life would be like if they were in your shoes. Present a story that makes it seem as if this could happen to anyone. You need to drive that emotional connection.
5. Dress in business casual or what you would wear to a job interview.
6. Don't get into a fight. The media control the microphones, have the last word and control the editing process. You don't want to come across as angry.
7. Show up early.
8. Before the real interview starts, figure out a way to let the reporter know what you want to talk about. Give them the whole back story and tell them how you feel emotionally. Be brief.
9. Have pictures available. In both print and on television, visual images carry a great impact. You can also use the pictures to portray your child and yourself in a positive light. It is one of the easiest ways to influence the story.
10. Don't lie. The truth will ultimately come out and hurt your cause. If a question catches you off guard, stall for time and try to find out why the reporter asked that question.
11. Use good grammar. Pretend you're on a job interview. You want to put your best foot forward, appear sympathetic and appeal to the broadest segment of your community.

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT TYPES OF MEDIA

Not all media is created equal. The larger the media outlet's audience, the larger the stakes are and the better you need to be prepared for the interview.

Finding the right reporter can be a bit of a challenge. Not every reporter covers missing persons' cases. Often you can get the name of the correct reporter by asking someone from law enforcement who is working on your case where they send press releases about missing children. You can also ask the police for their media list, which they may or may not be able to share.



When pitching reporters, remember they are pressed for time.

If a reporter picks up the phone, be courteous and ask if they have a minute and be prepared to tell your entire story quickly.

You should practice your pitch on a friend or at least in front of a mirror before you get the reporter on the phone. You may only get one chance to talk to the reporter and you want to make the most of the opportunity. This means having your script written out or at least bulleted talking points listed so you don't forget any essential details.

Because you are pursuing a social media strategy in combination with your traditional media outreach, links are very important. This means that a publication with a small online presence can be almost as powerful as an appearance on a local TV station. The local TV is a fleeting three to five minute event that requires viewers to watch at a certain time. Links, on the other hand, can live forever and be used with a variety of social media tools. For example, if a small local publication does an excellent job writing about your child's disappearance and your local community's efforts to find your child, posting that link on Facebook or tweeting about it can have a far greater impact than appearing on national television - because people can interact with the content anytime they like.

What follows is a list of the different types of traditional media outlets and some tips for working with them.

INTERNET-ONLY PUBLICATIONS

Often, the easiest way to create content is to reach out to hyper-local online publications. These hyper-local publications have taken the place of the print weeklies many towns once had.

Hyper-local online publications can often be the best resource for continuous coverage. The reporters at these hyper-local papers need local content and are looking for stories. As long as you can feed them new information, they will likely post new stories for you. You can use links to the stories in email, Facebook and Twitter updates.

* According to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.

These articles will provide fresh content to keep your Facebook community page alive. The more alive the story seems, the more it is likely to garner attention from the traditional major media, which has a bigger reach than the hyper-local publications.

To help increase the reach of these hyper-local publications, ask your friends to click the recommend button on the publication's website, like the links to the stories on Facebook and re-tweet them on Twitter.

LOCAL WEEKLIES

Although these types of publications are fading away in many places, they are still a great resource for coverage about your missing child, both in the town where you live and in the area where your child was last seen. Like the hyper-local online publications, these reporters need to cover local interest stories.

One of the benefits to working with small local publications is that they tend to be on your side and to be very gentle. While it may be tempting to start by reaching out to the larger dailies because they reach more people in your area, it may be helpful to start with a small local publication so you can practice doing interviews.

If these publications have an online presence, you can post the links across your social media community.

DAILY PRINT MEDIA

Although they don't like to admit it, local television stations take their cue from the news in daily newspapers, even if it's just the online stories. Therefore, it's imperative that you figure out a way to get into the local newspapers if they are not calling you. Sometimes, finding the right reporter involves searching through the publication's website to see who has covered runaways or missing persons stories in the past. Even more important is finding the reporter who covers the geographic area in which the missing child lives or where the child disappeared.

If you contact a reporter and you hear that they're not interested, ask what might make them take notice of a missing person's story. It might give you a chance to highlight elements of your child's story that you may or may not have effectively conveyed. It might inform your pitch to the next reporter or it might give you another shot at getting the attention of the reporter you are talking to.

TELEVISION

A three-minute television interview can have a greater impact than a very long print story. While fewer people than ever watch the local news, it still has a very broad reach. And more importantly these days clips from television shows or interviews appear online with links. This means that any television appearance that you make can be linked and sent virally either through Twitter, Facebook and email.

Because television is a visual medium, you must dress for it. Dress as if you were going to a business interview or at least put on business casual clothing. For both genders, you are better off with long sleeves and dark colors so you are taken seriously.

More than likely, the reporter will talk to you before the story starts. This pre-interview interview is your chance to give the reporter some background on your child. During this time, the reporter is trying to determine what types of questions to ask you. This is your chance to talk up your kid's great qualities and describe how devastated you are.

If you are emotional, it plays well on television. Just don't fall apart because that will undermine your ability to get your message across. Cover your talking points. In particular you want to give information about how people can follow or help the search, such as visiting your Facebook community page.

Typically, national media coverage of a missing person isn't as effective as the previous outlets mentioned. Your child is more likely to be in your neighborhood or some place that you know.

Additionally, because some national media segments tend to run longer than the local media bits, they generally cover territory that you wish to keep out of the public eye. It should take you about three to five minutes to tell the story about your child's disappearance and what the police are doing to search for your child. Anything longer than that may explore parts of your child's history or your personal history that you want to avoid or that are not helpful in the search for your child.

BASIC THINGS TO AVOID

It's pointless to do media in cities where your child is unlikely to be, unless you have no other options and you need to generate content.

For example, doing an hour of national television seems like a good idea but far exceeds the three to five minutes you need to tell the story of your child's life and what you are doing to find him. For the most part, everything after that is superfluous. After you have repeated yourself two or three times, the reporter is going to get bored and may try to make the story more sensationalistic, which will not be a good thing for you.

If there is anything in the cupboard that is going to cast your child in anything but a positive light, you need to pick media opportunities very, very carefully.

In those situations, only do media opportunities in which you can completely control the message. In some cases this may mean sticking to social media or possibly working with hyper-local online publications, like Patch or the AOL network, which are more likely to be non-confrontational.

For the most part, reporters covering a missing persons story want to help you. And yet, it's their job to make news. You always have to be on your guard. Practice sticking to your talking points.

If you don't know something, don't lie.

There are two things to think about when a media person asks you about what the police are doing. If you're not a suspect, say the police are doing a wonderful job and you want to do everything you can to support them. To that end, what the police really need is leads and they need the reporter's audience to help find your child. You will notice that this is a restatement of our original objective, which is to help the police by generating leads for them to follow.

For the most part, reporters covering a missing persons story want to help you.

If you are a suspect in your child's disappearance, think twice before going on television. More often than not a large chunk of the story will focus on you as a suspect rather than on trying to bring the child home. It's unlikely the media will portray you as a sympathetic character, someone in need of help. Again, if we look at our initial strategies, one of the key goals is for you to appear sympathetic. If you appear complicit in your child's disappearance, you will reduce the number of people who are likely to look for your child.

On the off chance that you're a suspect in the investigation and still want to do media, you must lean on a well-chosen phrase such as "We're doing everything we can to help the police in their investigation. I'm not the story here and I'd like to put the focus where it belongs, on helping to find my child. I answered your questions and those from the police as best as I can. Can we focus on trying to find my child?"

You need to be able to repeat some version of that phrase over and over and over. Always answer the reporter politely, although at the end of the day you may have to say, "I think that I have answered that question as well as I can. I can't add anything more to my answer."

If you are a suspect in the investigation, one effective strategy could be to appoint a family member who is not a suspect as the family spokesperson.



RESOURCES

Find Your Missing Child

6 York Road, Wayland, Massachusetts 01778
617-625-5980

www.findyourmissingchild.org

Association of Missing & Exploited Children's Organizations

www.amecoinc.org

They help families find reputable missing persons organizations that can help in the search.

Black and Missing

www.blackandmissinginc.com/cdad/safety.htm

They provide checklists of what to do after your child goes missing.

Team Hope

www.teamhope.org

They provide support by offering peer support including empowerment, emotional support and coping skills from a trained volunteer.