

Tracking and Reunification of Children in Disasters A Reference for Health Professionals

As a healthcare provider, during disasters you may encounter a child separated from a parent or legal guardian. It is important to know your role in tracking and reunification for that child. This card is supplementary to the clinical care you would provide within scope of practice, based on ongoing medical risk assessment.

“Reunification is defined as the process of assisting displaced disaster survivors, including children, in voluntarily reestablishing contact with family and friends after a period of separation.”^{1, p. 2}

This general process can vary based on state/local area and disaster circumstances.¹

IDENTIFY the unaccompanied minor.

See other side for key information to gather.

INITIATE your institution or location’s tracking procedure.

(e.g., wristband, web-based system, digital photograph)

CONTACT the appropriate responsible agency in your location.

PROVIDE secure shelter, care, and tracking until reunification.

KEY RESOURCES are law enforcement, child welfare/child protective services, and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reunification system (24-Hour Hotline 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678) TTY: 800-826-7653; missingkids.com).

EFFORTS WILL ENSUE to find the parent or legal guardian, and verify identity and custody before releasing the child. If needed, longer term housing, reunifying transportation, and secure care in the advent of the parent or legal guardian being deceased or incapacitated will be addressed.¹

For additional detail on these steps consult, “Post-Disaster Reunification of Children: A Nationwide Approach” (2013) at <http://nationalmasscarestrategy.org/>.



National Center for Disaster Medicine & Public Health www.usuhs.edu/ncdmp

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How to find information to complete this card:

Consult your organizational emergency preparedness plan, organizational emergency preparedness officer, local or state emergency management office, local or state child welfare agency, state or territorial missing-child clearinghouse (see listing at missingkids.com), or the “Post-Disaster Reunification of Children: A Nationwide Approach” (see document at <http://nationalmasscarestrategy.org/>.)

Contacts:

Local Agency Responsible for Unaccompanied Minors:

Law Enforcement:

Child Welfare/Child Protective Services:

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

24-Hour Hotline: 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678) TTY: 800-826-7653; missingkids.com

Other Contacts or Community Partners:

Your responsibilities and procedures for tracking and reunification of children in a disaster depend on your role, your state and local area, and your institution’s emergency preparedness plan.¹ Consider health care, communication, and/or mobility needs of children.¹

When you encounter an unaccompanied minor in a disaster:

- Ask for key information (“e.g., name, age, pre-disaster address, names of parents/legal guardians, last known whereabouts of parents/legal guardians, relatives’ contact information, and, when possible, any disabilities, access and functional needs, or medical needs”^{1, p. 34}) recognizing that some may not be able or willing to provide it.¹ Also note physical description (height, weight, hair color, and eye color), gender, other identifying characteristics (such as scars, birthmarks, etc.) and description of clothing/jewelry.
- Follow your institution or location’s tracking procedure (e.g., wristband¹, web-based system, digital photograph).
- Alert appropriate contacts.¹

Other notes (my key tasks for tracking and reunification or providing medical care for unaccompanied minors in a disaster, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) considerations in my organization for children in disasters¹):

Reference: ¹Post-Disaster Reunification of Children: A Nationwide Approach. 2013. This document can be found at the following link: <http://nationalmasscarestrategy.org/>.