

1

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Self-Check



2

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## How Have We Changed?

"A lot of people believe that what they read in newspapers is true. I was naïve: I believed it, too. Unfortunately, a lot of it isn't accurate, and if they don't read the corrections or clarifications later, they still believe it."

-Clark Hussey, Grant's Dad

Minnesota News Council, Spring 1994



3

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## How are we the Same?

"Media can be your best friend or your worst enemy. With social media, be prepared for both positive and negative responses."

—Rysa

From "What About Me?" Finding your path forward when your brother or sister is Missing, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2024

<https://family-survival.lamberadvocate.org/download-guides/>



4

## Children...not numbers



Andre Bryant  
Missing from  
Brooklyn, NY  
3/29/89



Morgan Nick, Missing from Alma, AR.  
6/9/95

5

## Series of Cases in 1979-1981 that started public discussion/outcry

- May 1979
  - Etan Patz, 6yrs



1981

- Adam Walsh, 6yrs



- 1979-1981

— Atlanta Child Murders  
1979-1981 Dozens of African American children and young adults went missing in Atlanta, GA. 20 showed up deceased. Wayne Williams was tried for 2 of the 22 murders and found guilty.

"Case Studies," Dittrich, Atlanta Magazine, August 2005



6

## Historical Measures Enacted to Assist

- 1932 Passage of Federal Kidnapping Act
- 1975 FBI Instituted the Missing Person's File
- 1982 Passage of the Missing Children Act - **NO WAITING PERIOD TO ENTER A CHILD AS MISSING**
- 1984 Establishment of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)
- 1994 Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexual Violent Offender Registration Act
- 2000 Passage of the Child Abuse Prevention and Enforcement Act known as "Jennifer's Law"



7

## My own lens

"We teach best what we most need to learn."  
— Richard Bach



Photo Bismark Tribune



8

## Jacob Wetterling

Missing since October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1989.  
Individual arrested October 2015. Named "Person of Interest" in Jacob's case.  
Over 24 media requests in under 12 hours.



9

## The problem:

## Old Formula:

Criminal Act –  
Chase - Capture



10



"When a dog bites a man, that is not news, because it happens so often. But if a man bites a dog, that is news."

-John B. Bogart,  
City Editor, *The Sun*



11

## Public Perception

- Crime Trends
  - Who are the victims?
  - What is the nature of crime –
    - Home Invasion vs. Intimate Partner Violence
- Emphasis of Crime
  - Belief that violence is rampant
  - Belief that they are more likely to be a victim of crime



12

## Current Snapshot on Stranger Abduction

"On average, fewer than 350 people under the age of 21 have been abducted by strangers in the United States per year since 2010, the FBI says. From 2010 through 2017, the most recent data available, the number has ranged from a low of 303 in 2016 to a high of 384 in 2011 with no clear directional trend."

Hundreds of thousands of juveniles are reported missing to the FBI each year. In cases where the circumstances of the case is recorded, 0.1 percent are reported as having been abducted by a stranger.

Jonathan Allen reporting for Reuters. January 2019.



13

## Categories of Missing

### Missing Adults

- JoJo Boswell
- 7/11/05
- Owatonna, MN

### • Catastrophe Missing



14

## Media's Relationship to Crime

- Impact on policy
  - Seeing more crime, should crime prevention get more money than improving schools?
- Inform (or not) the dialogue
- Aid in investigations
- Changing social norms/culture
- Public perception
  - How often? Where? Who?



15

## 4 Sources of social knowledge

- Personal Experience
- Significant Others
- Social Institutions
  - (Schools, Government...)
- Media



"The more remote the subject, the more the public perception of it will be shaped by media imagery." –Surette, 2007



16

## Most outlets must answer to advertisers



17

## Who is the media?

- Different bosses
- Different policies
- Different pressures

Victim families can choose who they want to talk to and who they do not. There is power in choice.



18

## Sandusky Case, Historical Learning

Berkeley Media Studies Group analyzed the first nine days of media coverage for their report, *Breaking news on child sexual abuse: Early coverage of Penn State*, commissioned by the Ms. Foundation for Women.

Released January 2012

- Lori Dorfman, DrPH, Pamela Mejia, MPH, MS, Priscilla Gonzalez, MPH, Andrew Cheyne, CPh



19

## From the "Breaking News" Report

"In that study we found that news coverage of child sexual abuse is infrequent, and when it does occur, it is usually tied to a "moment" in the criminal justice process, which means that there is very little coverage of prevention since most reports focus on an incident after the fact.

We also found that language in news stories about child sexual abuse is often vague and imprecise, likely making it harder for readers to see what really happened."



20

## Obstacles in Getting it Right

- Being First is a value
- Objectivity- Journalists each have their own training, experiences, and opinions
- Multiple Eyes and Opinions on an article
- Reactionary nature
- Lack of Training



21

## "Ideal" Victims for Media?

"Those who are ideal victims include children, some women and the elderly. Young men, the homeless, those with drug problems, sex workers, etc., may find it much more difficult to achieve *legitimate* victim status. In this sense, there is the danger of creating a hierarchy of victimization. Race, social class and status also play a role, and whether or not it is done intentionally, it is perpetuated by the media. Whether we agree or disagree with how the media chooses to report crimes and the impact it has on victims, as victim service providers, we have a role to assist victims dealing with the media and a unique opportunity to educate the media and the public about crime, victims and the impacts of reporting."

<http://crcvc.ca/publications/media-guide/understanding/>

Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime



22

## Legacy Laws

- Laws named after victims are often called namesake laws or legacy laws, and can have complicated ripple effects.
  - Added grief if law isn't passed or doesn't use the person's name
  - Overwhelmingly named after white children and adults (AP Analysis, 2019).
  - Sometimes do not work as intended or are passed from an emotional need without looking at the day-to-day challenges.



23

## Racial Inequity in Media



"When you look at the media, often times it's a white woman, often times younger and college-aged that is getting the attention, and not a middle-aged Native woman who may have a criminal history because I think people can relate more to [the young woman]; whereas maybe they can't relate to a Native person or pretty much any person of color that has gone missing." - Nigel Perrote of PAVSA  
<http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jan/19/minnesota-native-american-women-trafficking-police>



24



## Victim Blaming



"We retain our peace of mind by making victims pay for it"

"Oddly then, in our search for meaning, we often assign victims too much blame for their assaults, and offenders too little. Our inconsistencies do not seem to trouble us, but they are truly puzzling. After all, if the offender is not to blame for his behavior, why would the victim be, no matter what she did or didn't do? Our views make sense, however, if you think that we are trying to reassure ourselves that we are not helpless and, that, in any case, no one is out to get us."

— Dr. Anna Saltier, *Predators: Pedophiles, Rapists, And Other Sex Offenders*



25

## Media – Not One Size Fits All

- Media is made up of individuals, some with good intentions and some with bad intentions. The intentions can change based on the day, the news director, or the story.
- We have the power to create our own media and own our own now in ways we never could control before.
- Prevention Messages can be welcomed or can be seen as off topic



26

## Generational Media

- Young journalists and journalism students concluded that they're driven by ideals:
  - 62% said they entered the field to help people make informed decisions
  - 58% said they did so to expose injustice
  - 49% to learn new things
  - 45% to fight misinformation

Greentarget, NextGen Journalists: Navigating Misinformation, AI and the Future of Journalism, 2023



27

## Power of Media



"I know what it's like to be missing. I know what it's like to see my parents on TV. **pleading for me to come home.**"

- Gina DeJesus, recalling the times when she was allowed to watch television newscasts while being held captive by Ariel Castro.



28

## Media Resource

### Privacy & Dignity

- **A Guide to Interacting with the Media**
- **Resource from the National Center for Victims of Crime**

*Your [victims'] interests and the media's interests are totally different. Therefore, if you decide to cooperate with them, you must be very certain that you know what you personally wish to get out of it. And then you must focus on that alone, making sure you say exactly what you want, regardless of what the media says or does. You must choose your ground."*

— **Lucy Murray Brown**, victim advocate, Somerville, Massachusetts

[www.victimsofcrime.org](http://www.victimsofcrime.org)



29

## Family Advocacy

- Family Comes First
- Easier when a relationship is built between ORI and family, but that is sometimes an uphill battle
- One reason parallel investigations
- Cultural/racial bias
- Man bites dog vs dog bites man



30

## Parallel Investigations

- Sexually motivated cases represented a small percentage of cases where the child was killed, but then reported as missing.
- Murders with a sexual motivation with a false missing report were with victims slightly older than false missing reports without this motivation and were killed by males not biologically related to them.
- Killed because they were:
  - Unwanted
  - Burden
  - Impediment to a goal

Canning, Hitts, Muirhead, 2011.



31

## Parallel Investigations

Obstacle for law enforcement and family to work together is that family is often under the microscope.

Barway Collins, 10 years old,  
March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015



32

## High Profile Cases

- Talking Points
- Specific person helping the family navigate – hopefully NOT the Investigator
- Practice questions
- Statement versus Questions – help family also understand difference
- Realize the power of social media – Especially the challenge of the comment section



33

## Prep Beforehand

NSVRC has Tools for Advocates working with Reporters including a Media Relations Toolkit

"Many reporters end an interview by asking if you have anything else you'd like to say on the topic. Be prepared to draw on your talking points and repeat your key messages"

<https://www.nsvrc.org/additional-resources-for-media>



34

## Some Suggested Solutions

- Reporters
  - Push for Solutions
  - Don't lose sight of survivors
- Advocates
  - Release statements quickly
  - Develop Relationships with Media Beforehand
    - Have data ready along with prevention examples



35

## Relationships. Relationships.

- Learn and meet with your media resource colleagues (Public Information Officer) before there is a problem.
- If you do not have a PIO, who are your resources? Who maintains your social media?
- If you are a law enforcement officer, is there an advocacy group you trust? They have much more freedom in their messaging.
- Advocacy groups and families can decide when to say no to certain people and outlets. "Life is too short."



36

## Boundaries

"I know I don't have control over the media, but as I try to help the victim families I work with set boundaries, I attempt to do the same."



37

## Breaking News

Tips include:

- In the immediate aftermath, news outlets will get it wrong.
- Big news brings out the fakers. And photoshoppers.
- Pay attention to the language the media uses.
  - "We are seeking confirmation"...means they don't have it
  - "We are getting reports"...could mean anything
  - "[News outlet] has learned"...means it has a scoop or is going out on a limb

Consumer's Handbook from On the Media

<http://www.wnyc.org/story/breaking-news-consumers-handbook-pdf/>



38

## Media Ethics: Grant Hussey Case



- Eden Prairie, Minnesota,
- Star Tribune "Alternatives Counseling Center"
- Pioneer Press – Photo of car



39

## Grant Hussey

- Good message (our tips) - People knew Grant was missing. They had a description of the abductor and the car.
- Bad (they found a different thing to report on) - One newspaper reported Grant went to a GLBTQ teen drop in center for counseling. It changed the conversation about his murder.
  - o Later determined that his visit was made up.
- Ugly (they went in the wrong direction without us) One newspaper printed the photo of the car with Grant and his killer's body inside



40

## Who makes the call?

"There was a lot of debate that night, and the way we make most controversial decisions like this in the newsroom is not a single person saying, 'We're gonna do it,' but a lot of people getting involved...and talking about it at some length."

- Pioneer Press Editor Walker Lundy

"It was a gut-wrenching evening." -Star Tribune assistant city editor, Doug Smith

Minnesota News Council, 1994



41

## Grant Hussey

"Grant Hussey was the victim of a pedophile, he was murdered and then, his memory, became a victim of the journalists."

"I still remember the names of the good reporters."

-Jeanne Hussey,  
Grant's Mom

"Families are families, not just news stories."

-Bob Jader,  
Family Spokesperson

(Interview with Alison Feigh, 2011)



42

## Key = Availability and Access

- Even if the information isn't "new" you can change how it is packaged.
- Stick to your message, frame in new ways.
- What do you want to communicate? Say it over and over in different ways.
- Has the media been given our message?
- If we don't provide content, we might not like the content they come up with on their own. "Experts" who have no idea what they are talking about.



43

## Media Relationship for Advocates

- Don't start a relationship DURING a crisis. Stay connected throughout the year.
- Provide content (studies, stats) that they may need to tell the story.
- Make sure that you have provided information about your agency and the services provided.
- Respond quickly.
- Know other resources



44

## Missouri Case



- Michael Devlin abducted Ben (13 yrs old) on Jan 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007
- 15 year old, Mitchell, witnessed abduction and got a solid description of the vehicle
- Two police officers noticed a truck matching the description when serving an unrelated warrant. Devlin's attitude changed when questioned, L.E. notified FBI
- Pizza shop owner also called in Devlin's truck noting it was covered with road dust

Many of the case details come from book "Child Abduction: Prevention, Investigation and Recovery" by Robert L. Snow



45

## Missouri Witness

"...Mitchell was with classmate Ben Ownby just minutes before he disappeared Jan. 8 after getting off their school bus. Mitchell spotted a white pickup fleeing the scene, and his detailed description led police in suburban St. Louis to spot the truck Thursday.

A day later, Ben was freed from an apartment where he was held captive. Astonishingly, so was 15-year-old Shawn Hornbeck of nearby Richwoods, who disappeared in fall 2002. Michael Devlin, 41, was arrested and charged with kidnapping.

Franklin County Sheriff Gary Toelke said Mitchell's description of the white Nissan pickup was remarkably detailed. Friends and family say that's because Mitchell is a truck fanatic.

"He was so accurate in what he told us, we kind of wondered if he made it up," Toelke said. "So we interviewed him until about 2 in the morning. He got to know us pretty well."

<http://www.nbcnews.com/id/16668590/#.UsG7arRCpcU>



46

## Unknowing Witnesses

There were "unknowing witnesses" in 32.9% of the cases. They saw some aspect of the crime occurring, but at the time did not realize they were witnessing an abduction.

Neighborhood and area canvasses are important.

Case Management for Missing Children Homicide Investigation



47

## Case Example

"...there was an element here that this kid liked about his circumstances," and added: "The situation here for this kid looks to me to be a lot more fun than what he had under his old parents. He didn't have to go to school. He could run around and do whatever he wanted." –January 15 *The O'Reilly Factor*

"No question this monster Devlin made threats and intimidated Shawn. But teenagers have brains and Shawn had the freedom to get away if he wanted to." – Jan 16<sup>th</sup> *The O'Reilly Factor*

*How do we change the narrative?*



48



## Learned Helplessness

A condition in which a person suffers from a sense of powerlessness, arising from a traumatic event or persistent failure to succeed. It is thought to be one of the underlying causes of depression.

Still in trauma, not always post.



49

## NOT Stockholm Syndrome

- Survivors adapt to survive
- Not the same as psychological identification or romantic love for abductor
- Suggesting child is an accomplice can cause further barriers for healing

A Survivor-Based Critique and Call for a New Framework, presented by Abigail M. Judge, Ph.D., Jaycee Dugard, and Rebecca Bailey, Ph.D. on March 18, 2015, Harvard Medical School



50

## Who sends the message?



51

## Basic Frame

- What do we want?
- What is our message?

### Main Message

Support Data (History/Stats)  
Stories (Parent story/Law Enforcement  
Story/Past Example)



52

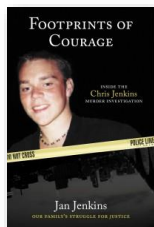
## Psychics

- In 25+ years of looking for missing, JWRC has never had a psychic vision or dream lead to the recovery of a missing person.
- We forward them to law enforcement to investigate if there is specific information (city/state, name, etc.), as it is possible a "vision" could be an actual observation.
- We suggest referring these callers to someone outside of the family as the information can be concerning.
  - Partly based on: When Your Child is Missing: A Family Survival Guide, OJJDP, May 2004

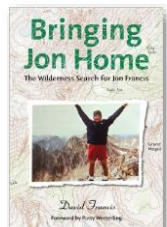


53

## Family Impact Stories



Chris Jenkins missing  
Oct. 2002-Feb. 2003



Jon Francis missing  
July 2006-July 2007



54

## Places To Look for Open Cases

- [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com)
- [www.charleyproject.org](http://www.charleyproject.org)



Roseanna Forcum,  
missing August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1998



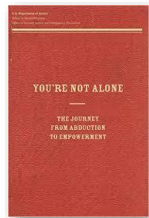
Hang Lee, missing  
January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1993



55

## Guides for Parents, Siblings, Recovered Youth

[www.ojjdp.gov/childabduction.html](http://www.ojjdp.gov/childabduction.html)



56

## Amber Alert Nationally

As of December 31, 2024, 1,268 children were successfully recovered through the AMBER Alert system and 226 children were rescued because of wireless emergency alerts. There are 81 AMBER Alert plans throughout the United States.

[Amberalert.ojp.gov/statistics](http://Amberalert.ojp.gov/statistics)



57

## Resources

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)

[www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com) 800-843-5678

- Family Advocacy
- Missing Children (ERU, NFA, FA, LIM..)
- Case Analysis
- Exploited Child Unit
- Cybertipline



58

## Find Your Voice

"There are moments in which all of us need to have a backbone and feel that we have the right to say no to adults if we believe they are doing the wrong thing. You must find your voice and not be afraid to speak up."

— Jaycee Dugard, *A Stolen Life*

11 year old abducted in 1991. Recovered in 2009



59

### Websites

<http://taoofjournalism.org/> A TAO pledge/seal is a way for journalists to publicly declare that they will live up to being Transparent, Accountable, and Open as a way to earn trust.

[www.newsu.org/courses/reporting-sexual-violence](http://www.newsu.org/courses/reporting-sexual-violence) Reporting on Sexual Violence free, self-directed, online course. This 2-3 hour interactive learning opportunity for journalists was created by Poynter's e-learning project, News University, and the National Sexual Violence Resource Center.

<http://nsvrc.org/publications/nsvrc-publications-information-packets/media-packet> The National Sexual Violence Resource Center has created a packet for journalists reporting on sexual violence.

60

Interviews

Thank you to the impacted families who made time to talk about their experiences.  
Thank you to Teresa Lhotka from Missing Children Minnesota who also shared her thoughts.  
Thank you to Chris Stauffer from Senior Media Consultant at Gundersen for his expertise.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

61



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

62