

Missing Child in the Garden

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OVERVIEW

Most public gardens are hosts to children every day. Whether they are visiting with family or with a school group, gardens are magical places for children to learn, explore, and enjoy. In some cases, that exploration can lead to a child being separated from their family or group. The unnerving panic that ensues upon discovery of a missing child requires garden staff to step up and assist with an effective response plan to reunite the parties. Or, in a worst case scenario, prevent abduction or injury to the child.

PREVENTION

One of the first steps in keeping children safe is knowing that all staff, volunteers, and subcontracted workers regularly working on site have passed a national criminal background check.

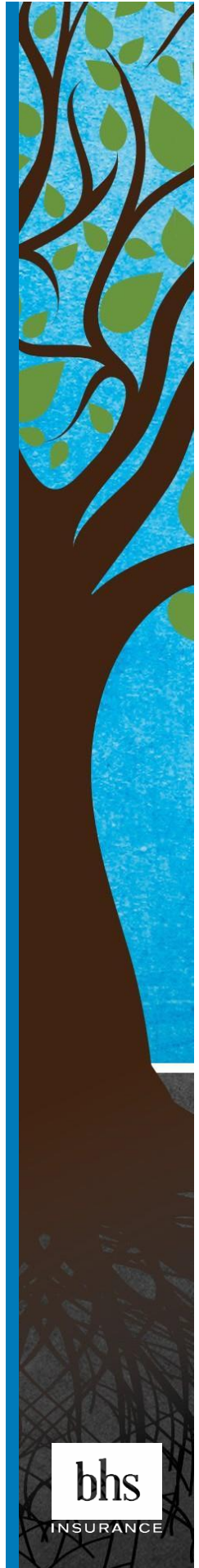
Thoughtful and strategic design and planning of spaces specifically created for children is also of critical importance. For example, children's gardens should have a single entrance/exit that is staffed during open hours.

Children's programming also requires strategic planning in terms of space for hosting events, managing children while they are on site, and parents or designated individuals dropping off and picking up participants.

RESOURCES

There is frightening research that illustrates the importance and necessity of having a well-planned response when a child is missing. The Department of Justice data collected between 1997 and 2006 indicated that 76% of children that were missing and abducted during this time period were murdered within first three hours of their abduction. Additionally, the research indicates that 60% of children were missing for two hours before law enforcement was notified. The results of the research led to the DOJ founding the Amber Alert program which has been used in training local law enforcement and first responders across the U.S. The FBI also has Child Abduction Response Plan to assist local law enforcement in response planning as well.

The National Center for Missing or Exploited Children (NCMEC) is a widely recognized nonprofit leader in protecting children with offices in FL, TX, NY, and CA. NCMEC was founded by John and Reve Walsh in response to the abduction of their six-year-old son Adam Walsh. In 1981 Adam was abducted from a FL department store and later found murdered. Working with a variety of resources Code Adam was developed specifically for businesses, parks and private establishments to provide child safety programs and response planning and training. The program is available



free of charge at: <http://codeadam.missingkids.org/> and includes a training video, poster, checklist for your training and a quiz to ensure your staff and volunteers have understood the information completely. As with most training templates, it is advisable to tailor the plan to your institution working in conjunction with first responders and local law enforcement in your community. It is recommended to train key staff and volunteers annually and to document the training was complete.

While we believe most lost children are only briefly separated from their family or chaperones, the numbers of missing children is astounding. Response training and empowering staff to act promptly with purpose and confidence is of critical importance when a child is missing.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information, please call a member of the BHS Insurance Public Garden team at (800) 350-7676.

