

From the Office of the Sheriff:

Have you ever asked yourself if a person really needs to be missing for three days before the police will take a report? That's crazy! We deal with missing adults/juveniles very often and no, you do not need to wait 72-hours. As a matter of fact, the sooner we know the better. With that being said let's talk about some of the criteria.

There is no requirement for adults to stay at home or tell someone else they are leaving for a few days for months should they want to just "get away." It is nice if they do but no requirement to do so. Should you feel an adult friend or family member is missing we ask that you come to the department and complete the missing adult paperwork. You will need as much information as possible such as physical description, characteristics etc. We will then categorize the person in one of four areas, disability, endangered, involuntary or disaster victim.

If the person does not fall within these four areas, not much can be done. Alzheimer's patients, past suicidal attempts, evidence of a struggle, or the missing person being way out of their ordinary routine stimulates a rapid response and an investigation. Bottom line is , as an adult, you can leave and not tell anyone where you are going or when you will return.

Juveniles present a host of other issues. Years ago we became weekend day care providers. The same parents reported their juveniles missing, we found them and took them home. This routine repeated itself with the same juveniles each weekend. We have since changed our policy and now require parents to come to the office and complete the paperwork. This drastically reduced the reports from our counties "frequent flyers". In 2006 we had 183 reports of missing/runaway juveniles, 169 in 2007 and thus far this year 187. These are just the Sheriff's Dept. statistics. Similar to the adult missing person paperwork, we require a lot of information, clothing, last seen, list of friends etc. Juveniles are not categorized like the adults, each juvenile is immediately entered into the state system as soon as the parent or guardian completes the paperwork. We then send this info out to all the local departments.

The final step as a parent is you must sign the affidavit stating they are the legal guardian or legal custodian of the juvenile and you authorize law enforcement to temporarily detain the juvenile. You are also responsible for picking the juvenile up from where they are located. We do not deliver! We have found this to be a very valuable tool as many parents want their juvenile home but not enough to come and pick them up. Finally, after they are entered into the system, should they return voluntarily the parent or guardian must call us as they remain in the system until we locate them or are notified they have returned.

Should they voluntarily return they will still be interviewed by an investigator. Repeat runaway's also face the possibility of being placed in secure detention. Just this last weekend we have two juveniles steal four cars. They both ended up in secure detention because they could not be trusted to remain at home.

Missing infants and small children are another issue. Parents report these more than you would think. We quickly deploy law enforcement, fire departments and volunteers to aid in the search. Parents, do not wait to report these cases! The faster we get involved the sooner we can ensure a safe resolution. More often than not the child is located in the home, in a closet or under a bed.

We ask parents to thoroughly search the home first. Often, the anxiety and stress of a missing child forces you to overlook the obvious. In any case, infant through adult, we are here to serve your needs with a few restrictions. Thanks for listening [tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us](mailto:tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us)

