

**MORE THAN
6,000**

**Indigenous women have
been reported missing
across the U.S.**

FIRST 72 HOURS

**The first 72 hours
of a missing person
investigation are the
most critical.**

This brochure is designed as a starting point for families, communities and advocacy organizations to respond when a Native woman goes missing and is part of our expanded **MMIW Toolkit for Understanding and Responding to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women for Families and Communities.**

View our expanded
MMIW Toolkit at
niwrc.org/mmiwtoolkit

**WHEN A LOVED ONE
GOES MISSING**

**A Quick Reference Guide for
What to Do in the First 72 Hours**

Time is of the essence when someone you love goes missing. Do not delay – take these four important steps in order to make every second count:

- 1. Contact local law enforcement.**
- 2. Gather and track additional information.**
- 3. Preserve important evidence.**
- 4. Enlist the immediate help of your family, community or victim services program.**

Note: This resource is not designed to address how to respond when someone 17 or younger goes missing, as it involves a unique set of laws, policies and other resources. Please view *When Your Child Is Missing: A Family Survival Guide* online at bit.ly/3kAclst.

Add program logo here

**NATIONAL INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S
RESOURCE CENTER**
P.O. Box 99, Lame Deer, MT 59043
1-406-477-3896 | niwrc.org



Step 1: CONTACT LAW ENFORCEMENT - DO NOT WAIT

Contact 911 emergency services or whatever law enforcement agency you would contact for any other type of life-threatening emergency immediately. Request to file a missing persons' report now. Share with the police as much detail as possible to help identify your loved one, including:

- Full name, any nicknames or aliases they might be using
- Date of birth
- Descriptive physical features (ex. height, weight, hair color, eye color)
- Any identifying marks, such as tattoos, birthmarks, or scars
- What they were wearing
- Any medical conditions requiring regular treatment or medication (ex. if she is pregnant)
- If you suspect she was stalked or lured away via Internet (ex. Facebook, Twitter).
- Request the officer's name, badge number, telephone number, and police report number and note this information so you can follow up.

A missing woman could be transported across tribal, county, state lines or even international borders. Consider contacting the local department of transportation, train and bus stations, port authorities, airports, and border control.

Step 2: GATHER AND TRACK ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Start thinking about any potential leads. Reconnect with law enforcement when you have additional information, such as:

- Where was your loved one last seen?
- Were they with someone at the time? If a stranger, describe them.
- If the missing person was alone, who did they last see or speak with? Note that individual's name, phone number, address, etc.
- Missing person's tribal affiliation/enrollment.
- Is their vehicle also missing? If so, provide

a vehicle description (ex. make, model, color, year, and license plate number).

- Did they leave behind anything important (ex. phone, wallet, or ID)?
- Do they suffer from an illness/condition that might make them a danger to themselves or others?
- Have they been abused or received any threats of harm? Is the missing person afraid of anyone? Did they witness a crime or is involved in a new or ongoing dispute?
- Have they been acting outside of their normal pattern of behavior (ex. missing work, not picking up their children).
- A list of the places they frequent (ex. work, school, grocery stores, restaurants/bars).
- A list of the friends and family members they regularly see or communicate with, including contact information.

Step 3: PRESERVE IMPORTANT EVIDENCE

Preserving evidence can be critical to ensuring that materials and information can be used in the search for your loved one, and, if necessary, in a criminal prosecution. While waiting for law enforcement to arrive:

DO NOT:

- Touch or move anything before law enforcement arrives.
- Tidy or clean up their home, vehicle, or the area where they were last seen – dusting, cleaning, or throwing things away may remove fingerprints or discard important evidence.
- Delete or alter any call history, text messages, social media accounts, cell phone images, or web browser history. Law enforcement may request bank records, social media account information and cell phone records.

DO:

- Limit access to the area where they were last seen.
- Take photos of the area, if possible.
- Jot down notes of everything you can remember from immediately before your loved one went missing.

Step 4: ENLIST HELP

Contact friends, family, and co-workers to see if they know the missing person's whereabouts, and log those conversations in your notebook.

Ask for help with specific tasks such as:

- Calling churches, hospitals, jails, and homeless shelters.
- Designing an easy-to-read, attention-grabbing flyer, including the word "MISSING" in big, bold text (download flyer template at niwrc.org/mmiwtoolkit).
- Include a recent, clear photo of her and add a physical description.
- Include any known circumstances of her disappearance, such as date or location
- Posting the flyer in high-traffic areas.
- Creating a social media page for awareness and information sharing.
- Contacting the local news.
 - Note: There are benefits and drawbacks to using both social and news media, so be sure to weigh the increased visibility with the potential intrusion on your family's privacy. Consider designating a spokesperson for the family as an option.
- Organizing a search
 - Coordinate with law enforcement to avoid duplicating efforts.
 - Identify local search resources available (ex. volunteers, dog searches, boats, etc.).
 - Solicit and register the names and contact information of all volunteers.
 - Communicate with volunteers in advance about suggested items to wear/bring in order to stay safe and healthy, given the weather, terrain, and time of day.
 - Separate the search area into "grids" and assign teams (not individuals) to each grid.
 - Brief the group in advance with helpful tips about preserving evidence, spacing and speed of volunteers, and other expectations for a successful search.