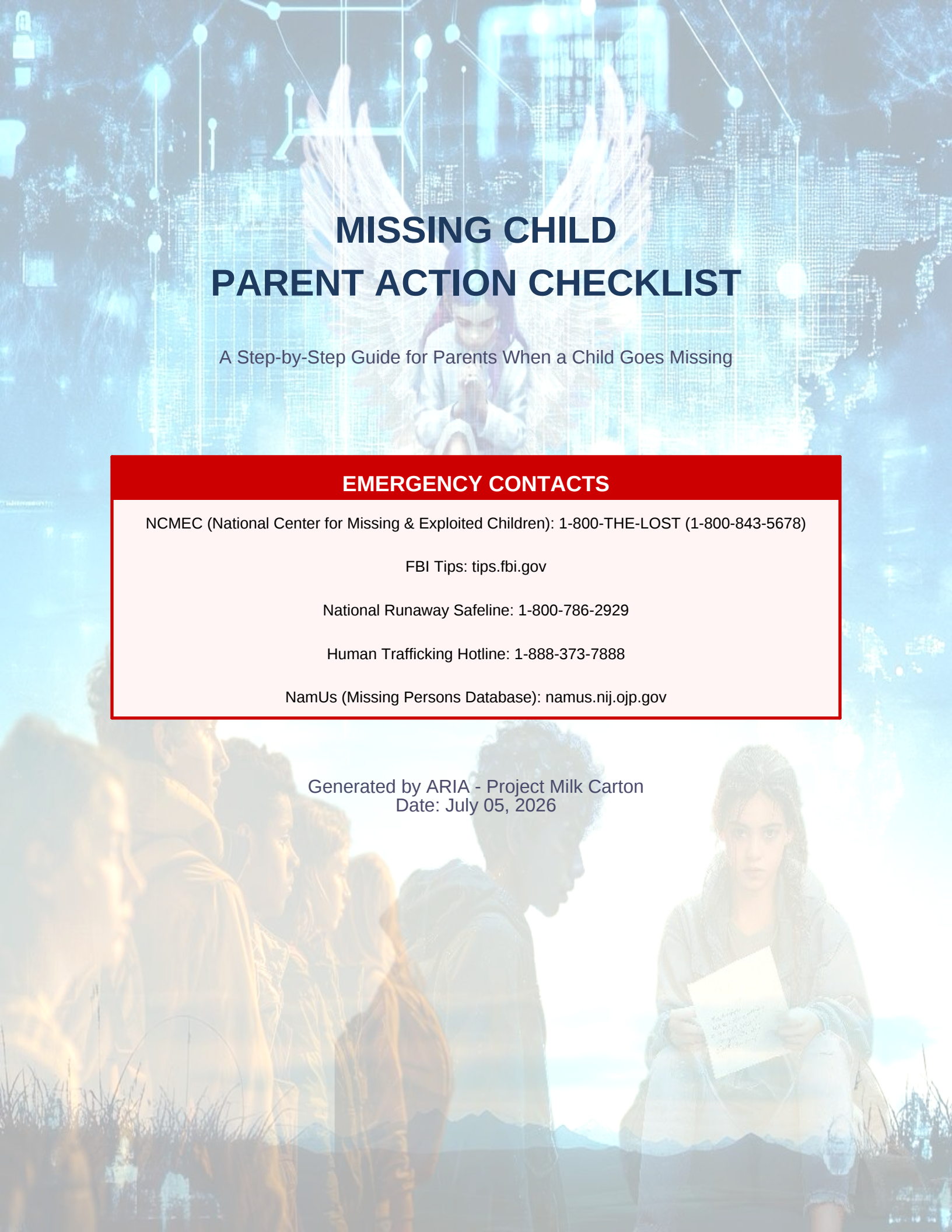




MISSING CHILD PARENT ACTION CHECKLIST

A Step-by-Step Guide for Parents When a Child Goes Missing

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

NCMEC (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children): 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)

FBI Tips: tips.fbi.gov

National Runaway Safeline: 1-800-786-2929

Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888

NamUs (Missing Persons Database): namus.nij.ojp.gov

Generated by ARIA - Project Milk Carton
Date: July 05, 2026



SECTION 1: THE FIRST 24 HOURS

Time is critical. The first hours after a child goes missing are the most important. Every minute counts. Do not wait. Do not assume your child will return on their own.

Immediate Actions (First 2 Hours)

- **Call 911 immediately** - Do NOT wait. There is NO waiting period for missing children.
- **Get a case number** - Write it down. You will need this for everything.
- **Confirm NCIC entry** - Police MUST enter your child into NCIC within 2 HOURS (federal law).
- **Provide a recent photo** - The most recent, clear photo you have.
- **Give physical description** - Height, weight, hair color, eye color, birthmarks, scars, what they were wearing.
- **List known locations** - Friends' houses, hangouts, school, anywhere they might go.
- **List all contacts** - Friends, boyfriends/girlfriends, online contacts, anyone they've mentioned.
- **Preserve their room** - Do not clean or disturb anything. It may be evidence.
- **Check their devices** - Computer, phone, tablet - note any passwords you know.

YOUR FEDERAL RIGHTS: NCIC ENTRY

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Under the National Child Search Assistance Act:

- Police CANNOT make you wait to file a report
- Your child MUST be entered into NCIC within 2 HOURS
- There is NO age requirement - this applies to ALL missing children
- If police refuse, ask for a supervisor IMMEDIATELY

Within 24 Hours

- **Contact NCMEC** - Call 1-800-THE-LOST. They provide free resources and poster distribution.
- **Request investigator assignment** - Get the detective's name and direct phone number.
- **Ask about AMBER Alert** - Request evaluation if you believe your child was abducted.
- **Notify your child's school** - They need to know and may have information.
- **Contact close friends and family** - Someone may have information.
- **Start documenting everything** - Keep a log of all calls, times, and what was said.

SECTION 2: AMBER ALERT CRITERIA

AMBER Alerts are emergency broadcasts that can reach millions of people instantly. Understanding the criteria helps you provide the right information to law enforcement.

Official DOJ AMBER Alert Criteria

1. Law enforcement confirms an abduction has occurred
2. The child is 17 years old or younger
3. Law enforcement believes the child is in imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death
4. There is enough descriptive information to issue an alert
5. The child's name and other data have been entered into NCIC

If AMBER Alert is Denied

If your case meets the criteria but is denied:

- Request the denial in writing with specific reasons
- Provide additional evidence of danger
- Contact your state AMBER Alert coordinator directly
- Escalate to your governor's office if necessary
- Use media and social media to spread awareness independently

SECTION 3: ESCALATION - WHEN AGENCIES AREN'T HELPING

If you feel law enforcement is not taking your case seriously, you have options. Document everything and escalate through proper channels.

Escalation Chain (In Order)

1. **Supervisor of assigned officer/investigator** - First step, same department
2. **Police Chief or Sheriff** - Department head
3. **Mayor's Office or County Commissioner** - Elected oversight
4. **State Attorney General** - State-level intervention
5. **FBI Field Office** - Federal involvement (especially if interstate suspected)
6. **U.S. Attorney's Office** - Federal prosecution authority
7. **Your Congressional Representative** - Can apply pressure and open doors
8. **Media (last resort)** - Public pressure, but coordinate carefully

Documentation Needed for Escalation

- 
- Timeline of all contacts with agencies (dates, times, names)
 - Names and badge numbers of all personnel you've spoken with
 - Copies of all written communications
 - Evidence of delays or refusals
 - Case number and date originally reported



SECTION 4: FBI INVOLVEMENT

The FBI has jurisdiction in missing children cases under specific circumstances. You do not have to wait for local police to involve them.

When FBI Gets Involved

- **Interstate transport suspected** - Any evidence child crossed state lines
- **24-Hour Presumption Rule** - After 24 hours, law presumes interstate transport
- **International abduction** - Child may have been taken out of the country
- **Trafficking indicators** - Signs of human trafficking
- **Federal land/property** - Disappearance occurred on federal property

YOU CAN CONTACT THE FBI DIRECTLY

Find your local FBI Field Office: fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices

FBI Tips: tips.fbi.gov

You do NOT need permission from local police to contact the FBI

SECTION 5: TRAFFICKING AWARENESS

Human trafficking is a real threat, especially for runaways and children in foster care. If you suspect trafficking, demand specialized assessment.

Warning Signs of Trafficking

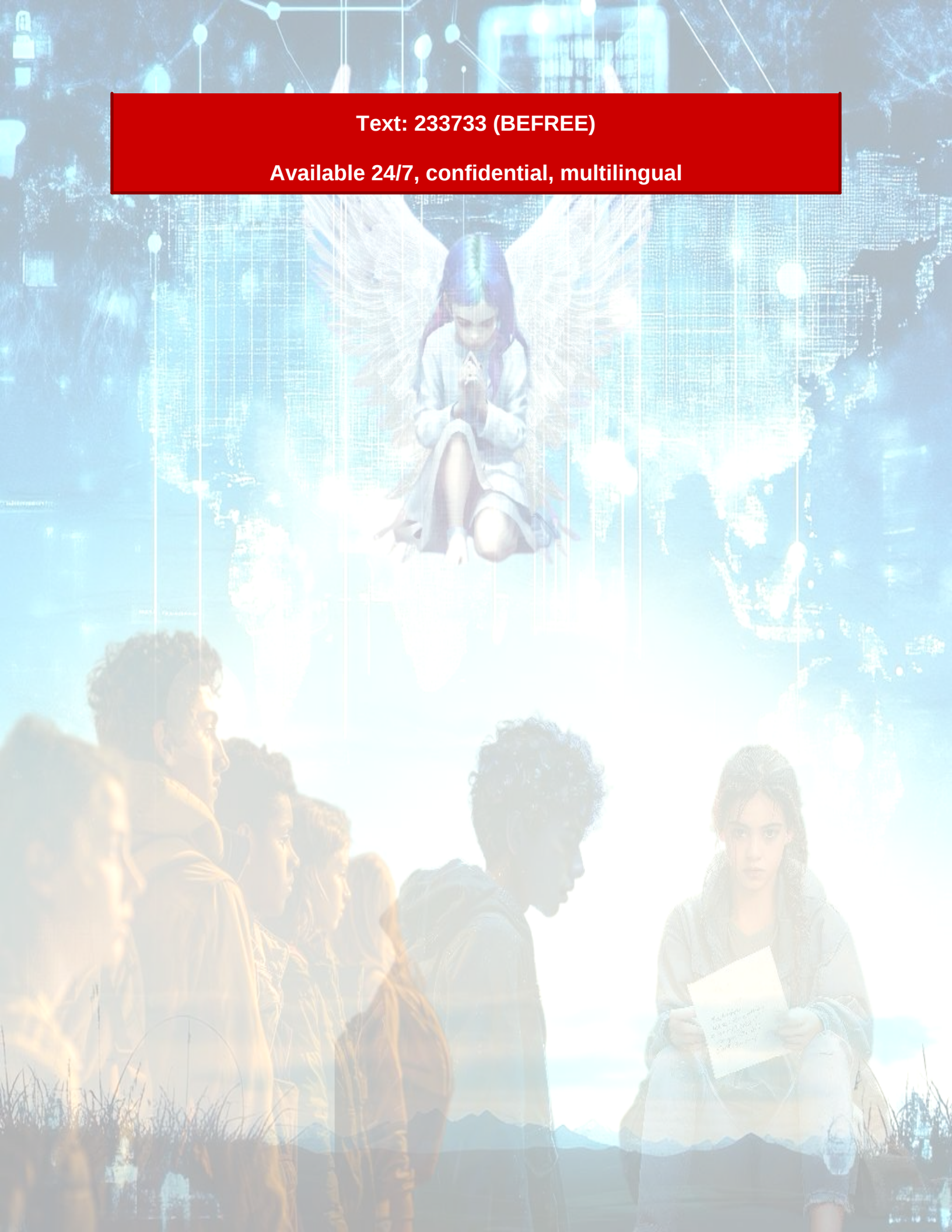
- Multiple runaway episodes in the past
- New, unexplained possessions (phone, jewelry, clothes)
- Signs of physical abuse or branding/tattoos
- Secretive about new friends or online contacts
- Evidence of commercial sexual exploitation
- Missing from foster care or group home
- Association with older individuals or known gang members

NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

1-888-373-7888

Text: 233733 (BEFREE)

Available 24/7, confidential, multilingual



SECTION 6: ONGOING ACTIONS

Weekly Actions

- Contact your assigned investigator for updates
- Review and update social media posts about your child
- Check in with NCMEC on case status
- Document any new information you've received
- Follow up on any tips or leads you've heard about

If Case Goes Cold (90+ Days)

- Request assignment to cold case unit
- Ask for DNA collection from family members for database
- Ensure case is in NamUs (namus.nij.ojp.gov)
- Contact NCMEC for cold case review assistance
- Consider private investigator if resources allow
- Keep story in media with anniversary coverage

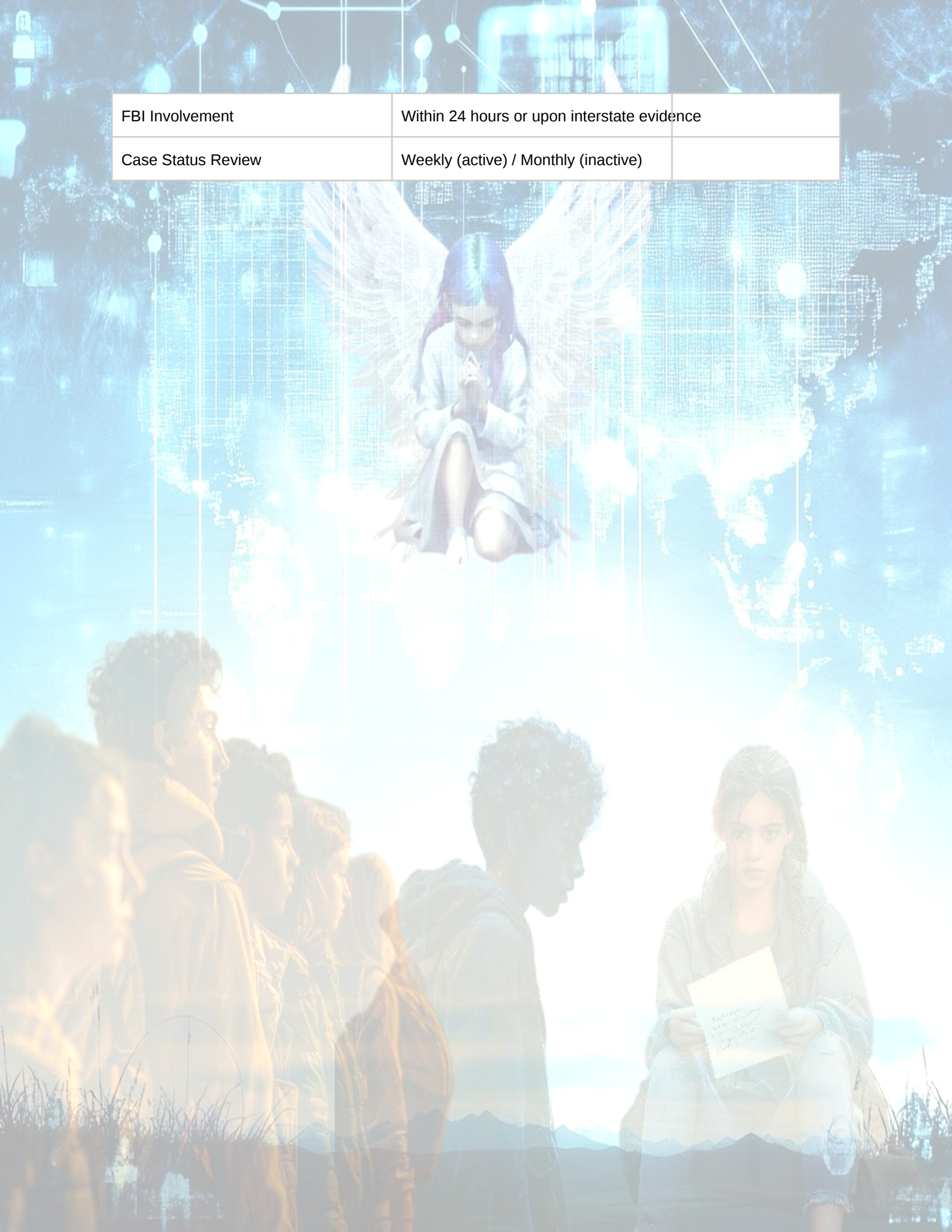
Community Engagement

- Organize volunteer search parties (coordinate with police)
- Distribute flyers in strategic locations
- Create and maintain social media campaign
- Engage local businesses to post flyers
- Reach out to schools and youth organizations
- Connect with faith communities

SECTION 7: CRITICAL TIMELINES (FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS)

Action	Required Timeline	Your Notes
Accept Missing Child Report	IMMEDIATE - No waiting period	
NCIC Database Entry	Within 2 HOURS	
NCMEC Notification	Within 24 hours	
Investigator Assignment	Within 48 hours	
AMBER Alert Decision	Within 4 hours (if criteria met)	

FBI Involvement	Within 24 hours or upon interstate evidence	
Case Status Review	Weekly (active) / Monthly (inactive)	



Use this page to document all contacts with law enforcement and agencies. This information is critical for escalation and accountability.

Child's Name: _____

Police Case Number: _____

NCMEC Case Number: _____

Investigator Phone: _____

[illegible]

This checklist was generated using the Missing Persons Decision Chain (MPDC) developed by Project Milk Carton. For more information, visit projectmilkcarton.org

DISCLAIMER: This is educational information, not legal advice. Consult with an attorney for legal guidance specific to your situation.

