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FBI launches app to help find missing children

Information from the app can be emailed to authorities in an emergency

By Joy Lukachick
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CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. — Authorities compare the launch of the first FBI app to help parents locate missing children to that of the modern fingerprinting kit.

"We're trying to improve efficiency," FBI spokeswoman Stacie Bohanan said from Knoxville. "Typically, when a child goes missing, the first few minutes are crucial."

The FBI Child ID app -- currently available only on the iPhone -- allows parents to upload photos and descriptions of their children. The information can be emailed to authorities in an emergency.

Often when children go missing, it takes time to get photos to authorities who then alert the public, Bohanan said. The app is intended to streamline the process.

Parents already are used to police offering to fingerprint children at community events. The idea is to help identify a child found miles away from home, said Calhoun, Ga., police spokesman Lt. Tony Pyle.

But Bohanan said convincing parents to think about preparing for the possibility of a missing child always is a challenge.

"We always say, 'We hope you never need it,'" she said.

The app's information is accessible only to the mobile phone user, Bohanan said. The FBI and Apple, which makes the iPhone, don't store the photos and personal information.

Eventually the app -- built and funded through the FBI's Office of Public Affairs -- will be expanded to other mobile devices, officials said, but they didn't have a date.

Other features on the app offer tips to parents on how to respond if a child goes missing and a button to call 911.

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