

## **HUG-A-TREE, and SURVIVE!**

The **HUG-A-TREE and SURVIVE Program** was started in San Diego, California after a search for a nine-year old boy who died in the local mountains. A group of those searchers put together an assembly program for children on how not to get lost, how to stay comfortable if they do get lost, and how to be spotted and found. We hope your children never need this knowledge, but if you discuss this handout and the workshop with your children, it may help them to remember one or more facts that will make the search short and successful.

### **1. Hug a Tree once you know you are lost.**

*One of the greatest fears anyone can have is of being alone. Hugging a tree or other stationary object and even talking to it calms the child down, and prevents panic. By staying in one place, the child is found by searchers far more quickly, and can't be injured in a fall or other accident.*

### **2. Always carry a trash bag and whistle on a picnic, hike, or camping trip.**

*By making a hole in the side of the bag for the face (always teach the child to make this hole as without it, there is a danger of suffocation), and putting it over the head so the face is showing out of the bag, it will keep the child warm and dry which will help prevent hypothermia. The whistle can be heard further away than the child's voice, and takes less energy to use.*

### **3. My parents won't be angry at me.**

*Time and again, children have avoided searchers because they were ashamed of getting lost, and afraid of punishment. Anyone can get lost, adult or child. If they know a happy reunion, filled with love, is waiting, they will be less frightened, less prone to panic, and will work hard to be found by hugging a tree as they have learned.*

### **4. Make Yourself Big.**

*From helicopters, people are hard to see when they are standing up, when they are in a group of trees, or wearing dark and drab clothing. Find your tree to hug near a small clearing if possible. Wear a red or orange jacket or vest when you go near the woods or desert. Lie down when the helicopter flies over. If it is cold and you are rested, make crosses or "SOS" using broken shrubbery, rocks or by dragging your foot in the dirt.*

### **5. There are no animals out there that can hurt you in this country.**

*If you hear a noise at night, yell at it. If it is an animal it will run away to protect itself. If it is a searcher, you will be found. Fears of the dark and of "lions and tigers and bears" are a big factor in panicking children into running. They need strong reassurance to stay put and be safe.*

## **6. You have hundreds of friends looking for you.**

*We have had children in the local area of a search tell us, "My parents would never spend the money to search for me with all these people." Search personnel are mainly volunteers who work with other professionals and charge nothing and do it because they care. Many children who are lost don't realize that if they sit down and stay put, one of the many searchers will find them. Some are afraid of strangers and may not respond to yells, and have actually hidden from searchers they knew were looking for them.*

## **7. Foot printing your child is a five minute exercise that cuts down the time of a search by several hours.**

*Have the child walk across a piece of aluminum foil on a soft surface, such as carpeting or a folded towel. Mark the foil with the child's name. With this print, trackers can separate your child's track from the hundreds of others in the area, and quickly determine the direction of travel.*

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### **Additional information that might be helpful:**

#### **1. Try to keep them from getting lost in the first place, which is probably impossible.**

*Children are easily distracted off the trail, so teach them to stay on the trail. Never let your child walk trails alone. Pick out a high landmark such as a prominent hill, or note the direction of the sun; this prevents disorientation.*

#### **2. Admit to yourself when you become lost.**

*It can and does happen to anyone, yet is a source of shame when it happens. When you become lost, admit it, accept it, and take actions to be comfortable and in the area when the searchers arrive. Use your head since it is your best survival tool; you can't lose it.*

#### **3. Call the police or sheriff quickly, if your child is lost.**

*Ask them for a search and rescue team. The search area expands so quickly due to the victim's possible movements that rapid response is critically important. A call to the police or sheriff which is cancelled gives the searchers practice and helps keep them alert. Remember, too, that the searchers do not mind turning back if the child is found prior to their arrival. A slow response is dangerous, especially if bad weather wipes out the track, and exposure to the elements is a consideration.*

#### **4. Be available for interviewing.**

*Clues which lead to finding the child in good shape usually come from family and friends who remain on the scene and talk openly and accurately with the search leader or his representative. Any personal information will be kept confidential.*

*This program is dedicated to the memory of Jimmy Beveridge*

*The Hug-a-Tree and Survive program was developed and is made available to the public by  
the National Association for Search and Rescue (NASAR)*

*[www.nasar.org](http://www.nasar.org)*