

# Gastonia Police Department

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## **Missing boy search efforts and how people can help**

Law enforcement and emergency officials spoke about efforts in the search for missing 6-year-old Maddox Ritch and how people can help during a press conference Sunday.

Maddox was last seen Saturday at Rankin Lake Park where he got separated from his father and another adult at the park. Maddox is 4 feet tall, and 45 pounds. He has blue eyes and blonde hair. He was last seen wearing an orange T-shirt with the words "I am the man" on the front and black shorts. Maddox is autistic and does not talk.

"The Gastonia Police Department is using a multitude of resources to find Maddox," Chief Helton said. "More than two dozen agencies are helping with the search and the investigation. We are getting assistance from our local, state, and federal law enforcement partners, many fire departments including some local volunteer units and search and rescue teams from our area and South Carolina."

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children is also assisting in the search.

"We have been searching the park non-stop since the 9-1-1 call came in yesterday to report Maddox missing," Chief Helton said. "We have trained searchers walking through the entire park, checking every area, every trail, every corner. Search dogs are also helping with those ground efforts."

Search boats from the Charlotte Fire Department searched the lake all day, checking the water with sonar devices and divers. Agents and detectives with more than a dozen local, state, and federal agencies have also conducted interviews, and followed many leads.

"Maddox's family has been interviewed and is working closely with us," Chief Helton said. "At this time, they ask for privacy and prayers. Every second counts when a child is missing. Our focus is find Maddox as quickly as possible and to bring him home.

"We are working around the clock with one goal in mind to find Maddox and bring him home safely," Helton said. "We have gotten calls from many people in the community eager to help

and we appreciate that. At this time, we have trained search and rescue personnel blanketing the area.”

Helton added that the public can help by calling police if they were at Rankin Lake Park yesterday and saw Maddox or took video or photos of their outing at the park. “We know a lot of people were in the park yesterday and we have spoken to many of them, but we have not spoken to everyone. No piece of information is too small. Something you may think is insignificant could be helpful to our case.”

Also, anyone who lives near the park is asked to search the areas around their own homes where a child might hide for any clues to find Maddox. “If you have a shed, barn, wooded area, go take a look and call us immediately if you find anything out of the ordinary,” Helton said. “We have established a special tip line for information. That number is 704-869-1075.”

FBI Supervisor Jason Kaplan said: “The FBI came in to help our partners with Gastonia last night. We have special training in missing children cases and additional resources to help in the search. One of those resources is the FBI’s Child Abduction Rapid Deployment Team or CARD team.”

The CARD team consists of a group of highly trained and experienced subject-matter experts in mysterious disappearances of children. They deploy all over the country when a child is reported missing, and will be a very helpful resource for this case.

“Every second counts when a child is missing,” Kaplan said. “Our focus is to find Maddox as quickly as possible and to bring him home.”