

**Missing From Care Practice Guide****21-15PG****Target Population**

Children or young adults up to the age of 23 in the care and custody of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) that are missing from their placement (foster home, in-home cases and any congregate care setting, including placements through the Chafee Grant).

**Missing From Care/  
Runaways**

Runaways:

- children under age 13 are considered to be runaways immediately when they are missing from care, and
- children who are 13 and older are considered to be runaways when they have been missing for one hour.

Exceptions:

Children age 13 and older are considered to be runaways immediately when they are missing if the child:

- has high emotional or psychiatric acuity and is placed in a psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF), a crisis stabilization program (CSP) or a psychiatric hospital
- is diagnosed with a serious medical condition such as insulin-dependent diabetes which requires scheduled medication and timely monitoring, or
- poses a danger to self, others or the community.

**Missing Persons  
Notification**

When a child is missing from care, a report shall be made by telephone, to the DCF area office, during business hours, or to Careline, after hours and on holidays.

Through the Critical Incidents and Significant Events notification process, the agency will ensure that the appropriate local law enforcement agent and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) are notified and maintain regular communication with law enforcement and NCMEC to provide a safe recovery of a missing or abducted child or youth, including sharing information about the child's or youth's recovery and circumstances related to the recovery.

*Continued on next page*

**Missing From Care Practice Guide****21-15PG****Missing  
Persons  
Notification**  
, continued

Where reasonably possible, reports submitted to law enforcement agencies and NCMEC should include the following:

- a photo of the missing or abducted child or youth (reference KIDPIX requirements pursuant to Policy 23-3)
- a description of the child's or youth's physical features, such as height, weight, sex, ethnicity, race hair color, and eye color, and
- endangerment information, such as prescription medications, suicidal tendencies, vulnerability to being sex trafficked and other health or risk factors.

This notification process shall also include written notification to the child's attorney by the social worker assigned to the case.

It is an incorrect assumption that 24 hours, or any other time frame, must pass before a law enforcement unit will accept a missing person report. There is NO waiting period for reporting a missing person. A law enforcement agency should accept, without delay, any report of a missing person. No law enforcement agency should refuse to accept a missing person report.

If a law enforcement agency nevertheless refuses to accept a missing person report, the social worker shall notify the Central Office Legal Affairs immediately.

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**Missing From Care Practice Guide****21-15PG****Responsibilities of Providers and DCF**

Every effort should be made to prevent a child missing from care through the provision of:

- planned, proactive and preventive services
- mental health assessment and treatment
- strategies (e.g., coaching and modeling) that consistently address underlying issues and build skills

Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS) should be accessed as appropriate to assist:

- DCF foster homes
- therapeutic foster homes
- community-based group homes
- in addressing behavioral crises and mitigating against a child missing from care.

**Law Enforcement Notification**

When a child is missing from care from a congregate care setting, DCF foster home or therapeutic foster home, DCF shall report immediately, and in no case later than 24 hours after receiving, information on missing or abducted children or youth to the law enforcement authorities for entry into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Factors to be considered include the child's:

- danger to self, others, the community
- risk of being a victim of trafficking
- medical and physical health
- chronological age
- developmental age
- behavioral and mental health status, including prior trauma history and especially sexual abuse, exploitation or trafficking
- social and emotional functioning
- geographical location

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**Missing From Care Practice Guide****21-15PG****Immediate  
Law  
Enforce-  
ment  
Notification**

The decision to contact law enforcement immediately to file a missing person report for entry into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database shall be governed by the following criteria:

- the facility staff or foster parent(s) belief that the child is a danger to self, others or the community, regardless of age
- the child has a prior history of sexual exploitation, or
- the child is under the age of thirteen years.

In these cases, the facility staff or foster parents shall:

- immediately notify, by telephone, the DCF area office, during business hours, or Careline, after hours and on holidays, and
- DCF shall immediately notify law enforcement.

Therapeutic foster parents must also contact the therapeutic foster care (TFC) agency that provides their support of the incident.

**Non-  
Immediate  
Law  
Enforce-  
ment  
Notification**

The decision not to contact law enforcement immediately to file a missing person report should be based on the following guidelines and incorporate the appropriate steps described below.

1) If the child does not meet the above criteria for immediate police notification intervention, facility staff, foster parent(s) and/or the TFC agency staff should contact the area office during business hours or Careline after hours and on holidays. The area office or Careline, together with the foster parent(s) and provider staff, shall assess the nature of the absence to determine whether police notification and intervention is necessary. Therapeutic foster parents should first contact their TFC agency to notify staff of the incident and determine who will contact the area office or Careline to participate in the joint assessment with DCF.

Factors to be considered during the joint assessment include the child's:

- danger to self, others or the community
- medical and physical health
- chronological age

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**Missing From Care Practice Guide****21-15PG****Non-Immediate Law Enforcement Notification**  
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- developmental age and stage
- behavioral and mental health status, including prior trauma history and especially sexual abuse or exploitation
- risk of trafficking, and
- social and emotional functioning.

If the outcome of the assessment is that law enforcement notification and intervention are necessary, DCF shall contact law enforcement and report the child as missing.

2) If the outcome of the joint assessment does not necessitate immediate law enforcement notification or intervention, the area office or Careline staff will work with the facility staff, foster parents and TFC agency staff to develop a plan to ascertain the child's whereabouts. This plan will include steps mutually agreed upon by DCF, facility staff, foster parents and TFC agency staff.

3) When the child's whereabouts are unknown, DCF, facility staff, foster parents and TFC agency staff will continue searching and a formal reassessment will be made within three hours or prior to the area office closing or the next Careline shift change during the child's absence.

If the reassessment determines that police intervention is still not needed, DCF, facility staff, foster parents and TFC agency staff will update the plan to continue the search for the child including additional action steps mutually agreed upon by DCF, facility staff, foster parents and TFC agency staff with another formal reassessment scheduled within three hours or prior to the area office closing or the next Careline shift change during the child's continued absence.

The search and reassessment process should not exceed six hours before making the determination to contact the law enforcement and report the child as missing.

4) When there is knowledge of the child's whereabouts, area office staff during business hours or Careline staff after hours and during holidays will work with facility staff, foster parents and TFC agency staff to ensure the child's immediate return. A child's refusal to return immediately should not, by itself, be a reason for police intervention.

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**Missing From Care Practice Guide****21-15PG****Non-Immediate Law Enforcement Notification**  
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Area office or Careline staff must work with the child to determine how to maintain the current placement or to determine whether another placement is needed. Regional Resource Group (RRG) staff or on-call physicians should be utilized when necessary. The TFC agency shall also work with the child and DCF to assist with maintaining the current placement or determining and facilitating an appropriate alternative placement.

**Incident Information**

When contacting DCF about a missing from care incident, facility staff, foster parents or TFC agency staff will be asked the following:

- What was the child wearing?
- What is the child's height, weight, hair color and eye color?
- Did you notify the police? If so, and case number?
- Is the child a danger to self or others?
- Why did the child run away?
- What triggered this behavior?
- How did the child run away?
- Did the child leave on foot or did he or she exit via another method (e.g., bike, car)?
- Do you know the child's location? What has been done to locate the child?
- Is there a place the child typically runs to?
- Were the placement setting, grounds and neighborhood searched in an effort to locate the child?
- Have you checked the local settings that the child frequents?
- Have you checked local transportation terminals and bus stops?
- Name, phone number and address of all persons on the child's contact list.
- Name and phone number of mother, father and any other family member involved with the child. Names of any friends the child may have run to. Have they been contacted?
- Does the child have a cell phone?
- Have other children at the same placement setting been spoken to regarding the child's runaway behavior?
- Was it with other children from the facility?
- How many times has the child run away within the last six months? How long has he or she typically stayed away?
- What is the child's trauma history?

*Continued on next page***ct.gov/dcf**

## Missing From Care Practice Guide

**21-15PG**

### Incident Information, continued

- Does the child have a history of prior sexual exploitation? If so, what information from the past (e.g., previous missing from care episodes, individuals involved) may inform locating the child?
- Is it likely that the runaway event may have been triggered by a trauma reminder?
- Does the child have any money or access to money? If yes, how much?
- Is the child taking any prescribed medications?
- Does the child have a social media account to which he or she may have posted information as to his or her whereabouts?

### Action Steps

These are the steps to take to physically locate the child.

**Careline Process:** When the Careline is contacted after hours and notified of a child is missing from care, the Careline social worker shall:

| Step | Action                                                                                     |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Review the child's case in LINK/CT-KIND                                                    |
| 2    | Complete the temporary living condition                                                    |
| 3    | Send an email notification to the area office and enter after hours LINK/CT KIND narrative |
| 4    | Notify to the covering Careline supervisor                                                 |
| 5    | Create and distribute an exceptional circumstance form                                     |
| 6    | Notify NCMEC and law enforcement                                                           |

The Careline supervisor shall:

| Step | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Research LINK/CT-KIND, if the information is not already presented, regarding the frequency of the missing from care incidents and any patterns of behavior and determine the need for assignment to an on-call social worker to respond.                                                                                |
| 2    | Assign an on-call social worker to attempt to locate any child under the age of 15 years, all children who present as a danger to themselves or others, children with a history of poor decision-making that puts them in precarious situations, and children who do not have a history of frequently missing from care. |

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## Missing From Care Practice Guide

**21-15PG**

### Action Steps, continued

The on-call social worker shall:

| Step | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Contact the placement and have a discussion with the foster parent or placement staff to determine how often the child is missing from care, where the child has gone or been found in the past, whether police have been involved in the past, and who the child's contacts are. |
| 2    | Make attempts to locate the child based on the information provided, accompanied by police if appropriate and necessary.                                                                                                                                                          |
| 3    | Contact the legal guardian and other family connections to locate the child.                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

**Area Office Process:** Upon notification from the Careline or direct notification from child's placement. Oftentimes, when notification occurs between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM, the initial call will be received from the school or other program that the child attends during the day. The social worker shall:

| Step | Action                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Ensure that the absence is confirmed, not simply that the child was absent from a class, or marked absent, but is actually not elsewhere in the building or on the grounds. |
| 2    | Contact the foster parent or facility staff to see if they are aware of the child's whereabouts.                                                                            |
| 3    | File a report with NCMEC within 24 hours.                                                                                                                                   |
| 4    | Update the LINK/CT-KIND placement icon with the missing from care status.                                                                                                   |
| 3    | Call the child if the child has a cell phone.                                                                                                                               |
| 4    | Contact any transportation provider to ascertain any information they can provide.                                                                                          |
| 5    | Contact, the Juvenile Justice Social Worker or CSSD Probation Officer if the child is involved with juvenile parole or probation.                                           |
| 6    | Contact biological family, other relatives and friends (contacts must be documented within 24 hours).                                                                       |
| 7    | Contact boyfriends/girlfriends, if known.                                                                                                                                   |
| • 8  | Check the child's social media accounts, if available.                                                                                                                      |

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## Missing From Care Practice Guide

**21-15PG**

### Action Steps, continued

All of the above steps must be repeated regularly and repeatedly throughout the day.

The police should be notified based on the timeframes and assessment given above and on the child's:

- age
- mental health issues
- level of functioning
- reasonable cause to believe the child is a victim or at risk of being a victim of trafficking
- extenuating circumstances (such as recent break ups, family illness or death, change in legal or placement status, etc.), and
- missing from care history.

### Return to Placement Setting

When a child returns to the placement, these guidelines shall be followed.

| Step | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | The facility staff, foster parent(s) or TFC agency staff will immediately notify area office staff during business hours or Careline after hours and holidays to assess the child's needs and discuss planning.    |
| 2    | As appropriate, Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS) should be accessed to assist DCF foster homes, therapeutic foster homes, and community-based group homes with assessing the child's immediate status. |
| 3    | The caregiver or agency shall work with DCF to assess and support the needs of the child.                                                                                                                          |
| 4    | Social worker shall contact law enforcement, NCMEC and individuals or agencies involved with the child within 24 hours when the child returns to care.                                                             |

*Continued on next page*

## Missing From Care Practice Guide

**21-15PG**

### Return to Placement Setting, continued

| Step | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5    | <p>A debriefing interview must be conducted with the child within two calendar days (excluding weekends and holidays) of returning to out-of-home care to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate the child for health and safety concerns and assist with appropriate care and safe placement (if needed) on collaboration with RRG.</li> <li>• Determine the child's experiences while absent from care, including screening the child to determine if the child is a possible sex trafficking victim (<i>see "HART Consult" below</i>).</li> <li>• Determine the primary factors that contributed to the child's running away or otherwise being absent from care, and to the extent possible and appropriate, responding to those factors in current and subsequent placements.</li> <li>• Discuss the child's interest in re-establishing connections with his or her siblings and other relatives for children 16 and above. This includes discussing skills and strategies to safely reconnect with any identified family members, provide guidance and services to assist the child.</li> </ul> |
| 6    | <p>The planning phase shall include developing or updating a safety plan for the child, if appropriate. The purpose of the safety plan is to assure that the child has positive strategies and coping skills that, instead of running away, can be used during times of distress. The facility staff, foster parent(s) or TFC agency staff, the child and the DCF social worker will participate in planning and understand and support the plan.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

### Suspected Abuse When Missing

If it is known or suspected that the child may have experienced physical abuse, sexual abuse or exploitation, community violence or another type of traumatic event while missing from care, either DCF or provider staff shall administer a DCF-approved trauma screening tool to identify any new trauma exposure and the child's traumatic stress symptoms.

*Continued on next page*

**Missing From Care Practice Guide****21-15PG****Suspected Abuse When Missing, continued**

The assessment shall include identification of any trauma-related needs of the child, potential exploitation through trafficking, and whether or not the child feels safe now (upon return), both physically and psychologically, in the current placement.

**Medical Assessments**

A child should be sent to an Emergency Department **only** when facility staff, TFC agency staff or foster parent(s) determines that there is a need for immediate medical attention (e.g., substance abuse, sexual abuse, risk of self-harm, human trafficking). This expectation is regardless of the child's legal status.

Medical assessments, as well as arrangements for routine tests and screenings (e.g., urine tests for pregnancy or substance use), can begin the next business day and can usually be completed by other medical providers such as a primary care physician. The need for general mental health assessment, trauma-specific assessment or general mental health/trauma-specific treatment should be routinely assessed within a reasonable time following the child's return.

A child is not to be sent to the Emergency Department or denied admission to a foster home or congregate care facility due to questions or concerns about medical orders or prescriptions. Any questions that a congregate provider, foster parent or TFC agency might have about the child's return to placement are to be referred to the area office for resolution during business hours whenever possible.

The area office and DCF medical staff will work on any identified prescription or medical order concerns as early in the day as possible. After hours and during holidays, any questions concerning medical orders or expired prescriptions need to be referred to the Careline. The Careline will then contact the DCF on-call physician, who will work with the Careline to ensure that there are appropriate medical orders and prescriptions for the critical medications that need to be administered.

*Continued on next page*

**Missing From Care Practice Guide****21-15PG****HART  
Consult**

A Human Anti-trafficking Response Team (HART) consult must be requested with the assigned RRG clinician when there is any indication the child was sexually abused or the child is missing for more than 72 hours. During the HART consult, the HART Liaison shall use the DCF screening instrument to assess for child trafficking.

**Cross reference:** DCF Policy 21-14, "Human Trafficking"

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**Quality  
Assurance**

Each region, on a weekly basis, shall send a reminder to social work staff who have children missing from care on their caseloads to update the Missing from Care Database and document all efforts to locate the child.

Area office quality improvement (QI) staff will review the Missing from Care report each Monday and cross reference LINK/CT-KIND to see if child remains missing or has returned.

QI staff shall email the social worker to update the system if child has returned and/or to update efforts to locate in LINK/CT-KIND.

NCMEC will be checked monthly to determine if a child who has returned are removed from the database.

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**Documen-  
tation**

Documentation of all activities regarding a child missing from care is essential. DCF, congregate care providers and TFC agencies will be expected to document the following:

- all efforts, discussions and planning in their respective client record narratives within the established time frames for completing narrative entries, and
- the plan developed and updated to search for the child, including the action steps and justification for not contacting the police.

The DCF narrative completed by Careline staff (when Careline responds after hours) will be cut and pasted into an email and sent to the area office chain of command (i.e., social worker, social work supervisor, program supervisor).

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**Missing From Care Practice Guide****21-15PG****Documen-  
tation,**  
continued

All contacts with the on-call physician should be documented in the client record. Careline staff will document such contacts that occur after hours and during holidays.

Significant Event Report forms must be completed and submitted within 12 hours of the incident to DCF Risk Management and in accordance with the Exceptional Circumstance policy.

**Cross reference:** DCF Policy 22-1-2, " Notification of Exceptional Circumstances"