

**Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services  
(CCDCFS)  
Policy Statement**

**Policy Chapter:** Substitute Care  
**Policy Number:** 6.06.03  
**Policy Name:** Missing, Abducted or Runaway Youth in Care

**Original Effective Date:** 03/01/2016  
**Revision Date(s):** 10/01/2018  
**Current Revision Date:** 10/01/2021  
**Approved By:** Cynthia G. Weiskittel

**PURPOSE:** To ensure the safety and well-being of children and youth in care and to provide staff with guidance and expectations on the reporting of children who are missing, abducted or runaway.

**SCOPE:** This policy applies to all CCDCFS Child Protection Specialists (CPS).

### **DEFINITIONS**

***Missing Child or Youth:*** When a child or youth in care is unaccounted for a length of time that cannot be justified based upon the child's age, maturity, or emotional capacity and when efforts to locate the child have been unsuccessful.

***Abducted Child or Youth:*** A child or youth in custody whose whereabouts are unknown and it is known or suspected that the child has been taken from their out-of-home placement or other location by a person(s) either known or unknown to the child, in violation of a court order regarding the child's custody status.

***Runaway/AWOL Child or Youth:*** A child or youth in custody who is voluntarily missing from care for more than three (3) hours. A child may be considered a runaway sooner than three hours if any of the following are true:

- The child has stated that he or she is running away;
- The child or another party contacts the caretakers or worker and indicates the child is not returning to their placement;
- The child misses a clearly stated appointment or curfew and the caretaker or worker has reason to believe the child does not intend to return;
- Some or all of the child's possessions are missing.

### **POLICY**

CPS shall engage in diligent efforts to locate children in the custody of CCDCFS when they are missing, abducted or voluntarily away from their authorized placement, and to ensure efforts are documented in the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). If a child's whereabouts are unknown, consistent and reasonable

efforts are required to locate the child by working with law enforcement, out-of-home placement providers, family/caregivers and others with whom the child has significant relationships. When a missing, abducted or runaway youth is located, the child's health and well-being will be evaluated and efforts will be made to determine the primary factors contributing to their absence and, to the extent possible, respond to those factors in subsequent placements.

## PROCEDURES

The primary Child Protection Specialist (CPS) completes the following tasks, as well as, obtain any copies of reports for the case file:

- I. At any point the child or youth is determined to be missing, abducted or runaway, the primary CPS or Hotline staff shall complete reports to the following entities:
  - A. The law enforcement agency from which the child went missing
    1. If the initial report was made by someone other than the primary CPS - contact the lead detective within 24 hours to provide CPS name, title and contact information, in addition to, child characteristics;
    2. Request law enforcement to complete a report with the National Crime Information Center (NCIC).
  - B. Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Department: Tanisha Knighton 216-348-4232
  - C. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) at 1-800-THE-LOST; <https://cmfc.missingkids.org/reportit>.
    1. Sign and return the Release and Verification Form
    2. Indicate his/her job title on the form as the signer is executing the release on behalf of DCFS, the child's custodian
    3. Obtain copies of the completed forms for the child's case record file
  - D. The following information shall be provided to the law enforcement entities to assist in locating the child or youth:
    1. Correct identifying information including age, race, height, weight, level of functioning, eye glasses and braces;
    2. Any medical conditions or medications which could affect the health or conduct if missed, substance dependence, physical and/or mental disabilities;
    3. History of criminal conduct or physical violence which could affect the responding officer(s) or the public's safety;
    4. Any history of suicidal ideation or action;
    5. Whether the child has run away previously and was found at or known to have been at a particular location;
    6. If the child is known or suspected to be a victim of sex trafficking;
    7. Is believed to be with others who could endanger his/her welfare or in a potentially life-threatening situation;
    8. Child's sexual orientation or transgender status;
    9. Addresses of parents, family, friends, and any significant persons in the child's life;
    10. Any other tips or lead information that could help locate the child, including any social media accounts and/or cell phone;

11. A photo of the child in addition to any physical description of birth marks, tattoos, or other unique physical characteristics.
  - E. Notify the placement department of child's status within 24 hours. The placement provider shall be put on hold for 72 hours and child's status is recorded as "AWOL or Absent from Care."
  - F. Complete the LEAVE section located in the SACWIS placement screen to document the primary factors that possibly contributed to the child running away or being absent from care, including:
    1. Date and time of notifications to law enforcement entities
    2. Last known location of the child
    3. The length of time child has been missing leading up to the report
    4. Anyone the child may have been with prior to the reported leave
  - G. Notify the child's parent(s); out-of-home care provider and, if applicable, inform the child's Indian Tribe of the child's missing status.
  - H. Amend the case plan to reflect the child's status within seven (7) days.
    - I. Notify all legal parties associated with the case including the Guardian ad Litem and Assistant Prosecuting Attorney.
    - J. If it is suspected that the missing youth ran with peers or other youth in DCFS custody, coordination should occur between district offices and CPS workers.
    - K. If the CPS reasonably suspects the youth is at a specific location, the worker must notify the law enforcement agency within jurisdiction and request the youth be picked up.
    - L. If the child is in an unauthorized placement, the CPS shall complete monthly face-to-face contacts and, if appropriate, assess the home by completing the Caregiver Approval process.
- II. The CPS worker shall make ongoing reasonable efforts to locate the missing, abducted or runaway child in conjunction with law enforcement. This may include, but is not limited to, the following:
- A. Maintain bi-weekly contact with law enforcement to share updated information;
  - B. Contact the child's friends and family to request information about the child's whereabouts and person with whom the child may be associating;
  - C. Contact school personnel from the school the child last attended or at other schools the child previously attended, if it is believed the child maintains close relationships with persons at that school;
  - D. Contact the child's probation officer, if applicable;
  - E. Contact any other individuals who are believed to have knowledge of the child's whereabouts;
  - F. Utilize social media to search for the missing child and determine a possible location based on any updates he/she may have posted;
  - G. The CPS and supervisor formally reviews all efforts to locate the child within seven (7) days and every 14 days thereafter.
- III. When a child or youth is located, the CPS completes the following tasks and documents the activities in the SACWIS activity logs:
- A. Ensure the child's basic needs are met immediately upon their return including safety and protection, food, personal hygiene and clothing;

- B. When the CPS knows or suspects the youth is engaged in risky behaviors such as sexual activity or substance use, they will obtain medical treatment and assess the appropriateness of a (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) SANE exam, formal Triage, trauma screening and/or child trafficking screening. CPS may enlist the help of victim specialists or make victim services referrals as appropriate;
- C. If any child abuse and/or neglect occurred while the child was missing or if there are any indicators of human trafficking activities, the CPS submits a completed referral to the hotline;
- D. Interview the child to determine the following information:
  - 1. Understand from the youth's perspective the reasons they went missing
  - 2. Document the primary contributing factors
  - 3. Develop a plan of action to prevent future episodes
- E. Place the child in a setting that addresses or remedies the issues that led to the child's missing status;
- F. Notify law enforcement, Sheriff's department, NCMEC and any other entities of the child's return and assist in completing a missing child clearing;
- G. Obtain a photograph upon child's return and note any observable physical changes;
- H. Notify the parent(s); out-of-home care provider; and, if applicable, the child's Indian Tribe to inform them the child has been located;
- I. Notify all legal parties associated with the case including the Guardian ad Litem and Assistant Prosecuting Attorney informing them the child has been located;
- J. Amend the case plan to reflect child's return within seven (7) days;
- K. A staffing must be held immediately if a child has been missing or absent from care for more than three (3) days with the child present. If the child returns after hours, a staffing must be held the next business day.

#### IV. Special Considerations

- A. If a child age 14 or older has been missing for more than four months, the CPS may discuss the child's status with the family's service team to determine if custody termination is appropriate. The following information must be considered and discussed:
  - 1. The child's age and cognitive/developmental capacity;
  - 2. The child's mental health status;
  - 3. The child's legal status (children in permanent custody cannot be terminated until age 18);
  - 4. Whether the child is pregnant or parenting a child;
  - 5. Risk factors including sex trafficking, gang involvement or other risky behaviors which impact the child's safety and well-being;
  - 6. The level of independent living preparation the child received;
  - 7. The ability of the child and/or family to seek supports/services in the future;
  - 8. The CPS's efforts to locate the child;
  - 9. If appropriate, the Deputy Director within the chain of command must approve the Request to Terminate AWOL Children from Custody Form;
  - 10. Deputy approval must be obtained prior to holding a Termination TDM.

**SEE ALSO:**

**Ohio Administrative Code:**

Section: 5101:2-42-88

Requirements when a child in substitute care disrupts from placement or is absent without leave (AWOL)

**Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services Policies and Procedures Manual**

Policy 5.01.02 – Case Plan/Family Service Plan

Policy 5.02.01 – TDM/Staffings Policy

**FORMS:**

Cuyahoga County Prosecutor for Filing Unruly for AWOL Cases

Missing, Abducted or Runaway Youth Checklist

Request to Terminate AWOL Children from Custody