

CF OPERATING PROCEDURE
NO. 175-85

STATE OF FLORIDA
DEPARTMENT OF
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
TALLAHASSEE, October 17, 2002

Family Safety

PREVENTION, REPORTING AND SERVICES TO MISSING CHILDREN

1. Purpose. This operating procedure describes uniform policy for ensuring that prompt and comprehensive actions are taken when children are missing for any reason. This operating procedure identifies the steps to be taken in order to prevent runaways, locate missing child(ren), prevent further incidents and provide needed services.
2. Scope. This operating procedure is applicable statewide to the Department and its designees who work with children under court ordered supervision, in both out of home care and in home care.
3. Explanation of Terms. For purposes of this operating procedure, the following definitions apply:
 - a. "Abducted" means that an individual who does not have care and custody of a child under the jurisdiction of a dependency court has taken the child and left the jurisdiction of the court or in some manner is avoiding the supervision ordered by the dependency court.
 - b. "Absconded" means that an individual who has care and custody of a child under the jurisdiction of a dependency court has taken the child and left the jurisdiction of the court or in some manner is avoiding the supervision ordered by the dependency court.
 - c. "Child" means any unmarried person under the age of 18 years who has not been emancipated by order of the court.
 - d. "Department" means the Department of Children and Families unless otherwise specified.
 - e. "Designee" means a person, contractual provider or other agency or entity named by the Department.
 - f. "Exigent Circumstances" means situations that require immediate actions, such as the child is under the age of thirteen, believed to be out of the zone of safety for their age and development, mentally incapacitated, in a life threatening situation, in the company of others who could endanger their welfare or is absent under circumstance inconsistent with established behaviors.
 - g. "Missing Child" means a person who is under the age of 18 years; whose location has not been determined; and who has been or will be reported as missing to a law enforcement agency.
 - h. "Runaway" means a child who has left a relative placement, non-relative placement, shelter home, foster home, residential group home, any other placement alternative or their in home placement without permission of the caregiver and who is determined to be missing. A child who has run away three or more times for the purposes of this operating procedure is considered a "Habitual Runaway".

This operating procedure supersedes CFOP 175-85 dated June 14, 2002.

OPR: PDFS

DISTRIBUTION: X: OSES; OSLS; ASPGO; PDFS; District/Region Family Safety staff.

i. "Family Services Counselor" means a professional position responsible for case management for children placements. The term includes Department of Children and Families staff and staff working for an agency named as a designee.

4. Procedure.

a. General Requirements.

(1) A family services counselor must be alert to changes in the child's behavior, emotional, and physical status, such as school problems, drug usage, depression, withdrawal and agitation. The family services counselor must be prepared to act quickly when a child runs away or whose location is otherwise undetermined and must know the procedures to report a child as missing. The department or designee must ensure that all caregivers are made aware of how to detect behaviors that may precipitate a child running away, as well as the procedure to follow if a child runs away or is otherwise missing.

(2) Each District/Region Family Safety Office must appoint a Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Missing Children Information Clearinghouse (MCIC)/Local Law Enforcement contact person. The responsibilities of the contact person will include:

(a) To act as a liaison between the District/Region or designee's staff and FDLE-MCIC/Local Law Enforcement to ensure that all necessary information on each child is obtained.

(b) To review the electronic Missing Child Reporting Form (MCRF) completed by the family services counselor or to complete the electronic MCRF based on the information submitted by the family service counselor to assure completeness and accuracy prior to its transmission to FDLE. The review should focus on the information outlined in paragraph 4c(1) of this operating procedure.

(3) The district/region administrator or designee will initiate a process to identify homes where run away behavior is frequent, assess those homes to determine why children run away and conduct exit interviews in accordance with CFOP 175-61, "Exit Interviews for Children in Shelter/Foster Care." This includes regular data collection on the number of children who run away, number of children who have had more than two unplanned moves, and the number of licensed homes with more than five children. The number, percentage and conditions disclosed by completed foster child exit interviews to ensure that it is the content of what the children have disclosed in the exit interviews which impacts our placement decisions, not just the percentage of interviews completed. Data analysis will be conducted and needed improvements identified.

(4) The department or its designee will identify and support foster homes and other licensed facilities which have good skills and specific training in providing care for teenagers. The department or its designee will ensure that staff with placement responsibility have all current placement information available to them, including information on licensed homes and facilities that may not be appropriate for runaways.

(5) The department or its designee will ensure that all caregivers are informed of potential warning signs and understand the reporting activities expected when children run away or are determined to be missing.

(6) If age appropriate, immediately upon placement of every child in out of home care, the family services counselor, jointly with the relative or non-relative caregiver, foster parent, or a staff member if placement is in a group home, will inform the child that his/her safety and well-being is a major concern. Children will be informed of their rights and responsibilities as recommended by the statewide teen advisory board (refer to "Know the Facts, Foster Care through the Eyes of the Teen,"

1996 edition, pages 4 and 5). All children will be given the Florida Abuse Hotline number (1-800-962-2873) to call if they have concerns about their safety. In addition, they shall be provided with the name and office number of their family services counselor, their Guardian ad Litem and the District/Region Human Rights Advocacy Committee.

b. Initial Response by a Caregiver to a Child Who Is Believed to be a Missing Child. Staff of the department or its designee must instruct caregivers to immediately do the following, as applicable, and document their attempts upon discovering a child under their care is missing:

(1) **If exigent circumstances exist**, the caregiver will call local law enforcement as soon as the determination is made that the child is missing and ask the officer to:

(a) Take a report of the missing child.

(b) Assign a case number and provide the number back to the caregiver or person reporting the child missing.

(c) Provide a copy of the law enforcement case report, when it is available.

(d) If the responding law enforcement officer refuses to take a missing child report, for any reason, the caregiver will request to speak to the appropriate Watch Commander and document the officer's name and specific local law enforcement agency name. If the Watch Commander refuses to take a missing child report, the caregiver will immediately contact the family services counselor or on-call staff to report this information. The counselor will report this information to the FDLE-MCIC contact person who will contact FDLE to request assistance in obtaining the missing child report.

(e) The caregiver will notify the child's family services counselor or emergency on-call staff and share all pertinent information listed above with emphasis on providing the law enforcement agency name, case number and if available a copy of the law enforcement report. The family services counselor will follow the procedures outlined in paragraph 4c of this operating procedure.

(2) **If exigent circumstances do not exist**, the caregiver will within the first hour check to see what, if any, of the child's personal belongings are missing or if the child left a note; and,

(a) Call the following persons as appropriate to ascertain if the child has been seen, or has given any indications that may explain the child's missing status:

1. School/child's teachers and school resource officer;

2. The child's relatives/parents, both local and non-local, if appropriate and the caregiver has the means for such contact;

3. Any friends or places that the child generally frequents, the local runaway shelter (if there is one in the community); and,

4. The child's employer, if applicable.

(b) Write down any information gathered that might help locate the child.

(c) Provide telephone/beeper numbers and ask for the individuals above to call back and share information if they have further information or see the child.

(d) Write down what the child was wearing the last time the child was seen and obtain a recent photo.

(e) Notify the child's family services counselor or emergency on-call staff and share all pertinent information listed above with emphasis on providing the law enforcement agency name and case number if available. The family services counselor will gather the information outlined in paragraph 4c(1) below in preparation for reporting the child as missing.

(3) If at any time the child returns to the caregiver home, all law enforcement agencies and other agencies notified that the child was missing must be contacted immediately. If at any time **new information** is obtained on the child's location, all law enforcement agencies and other agencies notified that the child was missing must be contacted immediately and appropriate efforts taken to return the child to the caregivers home.

c. Family Services Counselor Response.

(1) The family services counselor will attempt to locate the child by checking with Economic Services, Medicaid, and other information sources and systems available to the department or its designee. The following information will be gathered in preparation for the reporting of a child as a Missing Child:

- Name and contact numbers of the caseworker
- The address from where the child is missing
- The last time the child was visited by the caseworker at that address
- Name(s) and contact information of any sibling and children of the missing child
- If the missing child has a child of their own, whether or not they took the child with them
- Name, Date of Birth and Social Security number of any adult known to be involved
- If the adult's address is different from the child's, the address of the adult
- Information obtained from other department information sources
- Information obtained by the caregiver in their efforts to locate the child
- The most recent court order and or court order indicating custody
- If available, a current photograph and brief description of the child
- If available, a finger print card for the missing child
- A list of any known medical or psychological problems
- If available, the dental records of the child
- Any other information that may assist law enforcement in locating the child

(2) The child's hard copy case file will be maintained in the local office in a centralized location and available at all times for review by local law enforcement and for the provision of updated information.

(3) The child's family services counselor will notify, as applicable, the following persons (if the caregiver has not already done so) once it has been determined that the child is missing and share the information identified in paragraph 4c(1):

(a) Local law enforcement must be notified within four hours in all cases of missing children whose location is not determined. The responding officer must be asked to:

1. Take a report of the missing child; and,
2. Assign a case number/case report to record in the child's case record and provide the number to the caregiver or person reporting the child missing.

3. If the responding law enforcement officer refuses to take a missing child report, for any reason, the family services counselor will request to speak to the appropriate Watch Commander and document the officer's name and specific local law enforcement agency name. If the Watch Commander refuses to take a missing child report, the counselor will report this information to the FDLE-MCIC contact person who will contact FDLE to request assistance in obtaining the missing child report.

- (b) The child's parents, legal custodian, relatives or foster parent.
- (c) His or her immediate supervisor.
- (d) The child's Guardian ad Litem.
- (e) The child's therapist.
- (f) Any other person the family services counselor deems essential.

(4) In addition to notifying local law enforcement, the process for reporting a missing child is:

(a) The family services counselor must immediately complete the electronic version of the Missing Child Reporting Form (MCRF) on the appropriate web site. The district/region may choose to have the family services counselor complete a hard copy of the form and to have the FDLE/Local Law Enforcement contact person input the form on the Webb site. Completion of the electronic MCRF will initiate notification of the child as missing to FDLE /MCIC and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). All contacts with FDLE and other follow up actions must be clearly documented in the child's HomeSafenet chronological notes.

(b) An original or scanned photo of the child, if available, must be mailed or e-mailed to the MCIC immediately. A photocopy of the child's picture is not acceptable.

(c) If exigent circumstances exist, the MCIC can be contacted directly to assist in initiating emergency procedures with law enforcement.

(d) The District/Region FDLE-MCIC contact person must check the MCIC web page at www.fdle.state.fl.us/missing_children/ within seven days of the MCRF being sent to MCIC to ensure that the child has been entered into the missing child database. If the child is not entered, the contact person must call MCIC at 1-888-356-4774 to find out if there is any additional information needed in order to have the child placed in the system.

(e) The family services counselor must document efforts to locate the child in the HomeSafenet chronological notes, explicitly indicating all contacts made and attempted and initiate a Missing Child Alert in HSn. Due to the critical need for timely information, all HomeSafenet information related to a Missing Children must be input immediately and not to exceed 24 hours.

(5) If the child is residing in another state or nation the following actions must be taken:

(a) or children placed pursuant to the conditions of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC), the family services counselor will immediately contact the social service worker providing supervision to request their assistance in the reporting of the child as missing to law enforcement in the jurisdiction where the child was residing. For children not placed pursuant to ICPC,

the counselor will contact the caregiver with whom the child was residing and request their assistance in reporting the child as missing.

(b) The family services counselor will contact any parents and/or relatives who reside locally to see if they have any information on the location of the child. This information and the information outlined in e.(1) should be shared with the social service worker providing supervision or caregiver to assist law enforcement in the jurisdiction where the child was residing.

(c) When the family services counselor is notified by the social service worker providing supervision or the caregiver that the child has been reported as missing, the electronic MCRF will be completed indicating that the child was residing out of the state of Florida and has been reported as missing in the jurisdiction where he was located.

(d) The family services counselor will initiate an Alert in HomeSafenet immediately. All information and actions taken must be clearly documented in the child's HomeSafenet chronological notes.

(e) The family services counselor will notify the ICPC Office as soon as possible that the child has been reported as missing and of the efforts to locate the child.

(6) As soon as possible, the child's family services counselor shall, with the assistance of Child Welfare Legal Services, file notice with the court that the child has been reported as a missing child.

(7) An Incident Report must be completed as outlined in CFOP 215-6, "Incident Reporting and Client Risk Prevention", paragraph 4, Procedures.

(8) The family services counselor will follow HomeSafenet and ICWSIS instructions for updating and entering specific child information for children who are on runaway status or whose location has not been determined into the identified data base(s); e.g., HomeSafenet (HSn), Interim Child Welfare Services Information System (ICWSIS). A complete data records check will be conducted immediately by the child's family services counselor to locate any service providers that may be active with the child. Should there be an active service provider, the family services counselor shall contact the service provider immediately regarding the last time the child was seen and to notify the service provider the child is missing. District/region data will be updated monthly by the family services counselor.

(9) The family services counselor will call the Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-541-9724 and ask to file a Request to Locate. The family services counselor must ask to speak with a supervisor or staff with clearance to perform the entry. Family services counselors must provide their social security number, the district/region, area and unit where they are employed to the Hotline staff taking the information. The family services counselors will also be asked for a description of the child, the clothing the child was last seen wearing, information on any health or safety concerns and whom should be contacted when the child is located. This request or alert is canceled automatically after 180 days; therefore the family services counselor must contact the Hotline every 179 days until the child is located.

(10) The child's family services counselor or caregivers will ensure that every effort is made to encourage a child to return if they are contacted by the child who is affected by this operating procedure.

(11) If at any time the child returns to the caregivers home, all agencies notified that the child was missing must be contacted immediately. If at any time **new information** is obtained on the

child's location, all agencies notified that the child was missing must be contacted immediately and appropriate efforts taken to return the child to the caregivers home.

(12) The child's family services counselor will offer and arrange safe transportation for the child's return if the child makes contacts. If the child is out-of-state or in another district/region, transportation arrangements with adult traveling supervision will be made.

d. Case Management Services While a Child is Missing.

(1) Efforts to locate the child will occur at minimum, weekly for the first three months a child is missing and monthly for every additional month thereafter (for example, contacting the family, legal custodian, relatives, Guardian ad Litem, provider agencies, friends, the Missing Children Information Clearing House, the National Center of Missing and Exploited Children and law enforcement). Contacts must be documented explicitly in the child's HomeSafenet (HSn) record and in all judicial review reports.

(2) Prior to each judicial review of a child in out of home care whose location is not determined, the family services counselor will:

(a) Complete a data systems (HSn, ICWSIS) records check to locate service providers who may be active with the child.

(b) Contact any provider listed as having been an active service provider to the child during the dates that the child's location was not been determined. Should there be an active service provider, notify the service provider the child is missing and document the last time the child was provided a service.

(c) Include in the judicial review reports specific efforts and results related to locating the child.

(3) For the period of time that the child remains missing, the Missing Child Alert initiated in HomeSafenet will be updated and all actions taken to locate the child documented.

(4) The family services counselor must interview the child's caregivers to determine whether or not the child will be placed with them upon return.

(5) The child's family services counselor will explore other placement options in the event the caregivers do not wish for the child to return or the child expressed a strong aversion to returning to the previous placement or return to the placement is otherwise determined not to be in the child's best interest.

(6) Each district/region will establish a procedure ensuring that the HomeSafenet Runaway and Absconded Alert report and the Runaway and Absconded Exceptions report are being tracked and reviewed on a monthly basis.

(7) If a child becomes eighteen years old while reported as missing, all agencies notified that the child was missing will be contacted and notified that the child has become eighteen years old. A copy of the case file will be offered to local law enforcement for their continuing efforts to locate the missing person.

e. Response to Interventions for Children Who Return.

(1) When the child returns, the child must hear and see statements of concern regarding the child's safety and well being from the adults who have significant relations with the child.

(2) Relatives, non-relatives, foster parents and other caregivers shall be instructed to take care of the child's immediate needs upon return, such as food, bathing, medical attention, rest, etc. In cases when children return from runaway status, appropriate discipline or consequences can be delayed until after the immediate needs, including psychotherapeutic and behavioral interventions, of the child are met and the caregiver and the child are ready to calmly discuss the incident and clarification of behavioral expectations.

(3) When the child is located and/or returned, the family services counselor shall immediately notify the child's parents, legal custodian, relatives, caregivers, the Guardian ad Litem, law enforcement, the court, the Missing Children Information Clearing House, and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, as well as any other agency or people who were contacted regarding the missing child. Local law enforcement will be notified through the use of a missing child termination letter (Example attached). FDLE /MCIC and NCMEC will be notified by updating the electronic MCRF web site.

(4) If age appropriate, the child will be interviewed privately by the family services counselor within twenty-four hours of the child's return to determine the child's need for further services and/or change in placement. Additionally, the family services counselor will work with the child to try to determine the circumstances surrounding the episode. In situations where the family services counselor determines the child ran away, a referral for a mental health evaluation must be made. For the child who is considered a Habitual Runaway, a referral will be made to the District/Region Behavior Analysis Services Project for a behavioral review or comprehensive behavioral assessment by a Certified Behavior Analysts or Certified Associate Behavioral Analyst. After the review or assessment the Analyst will provide assistance in the development of an individualized plan for the prevention of continued run away behavior. Services will be contingent on the capacity of the Behavior Analysis Services Project.

(5) The family services counselor will consult with a supervisor and the caregiver to determine the need for a staffing, to discuss service needs, need for a case plan update, placement changes, etc. for the child. The staffing should include caregivers, Child Welfare Legal Staff, clinical staff, the Guardian ad Litem and teachers, if applicable.

(6) The child's family services counselor will ensure that HSn is updated upon the child's return to reflect that the child has returned and that the HSn missing child Alert is end dated.

(7) The family services counselor will contact the Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-541-9724 to have the Request to Locate closed.

(8) Should a child returning from runaway status express a desire to live with a person or family member who wishes to be considered as a placement for the child, a home study and background check shall be conducted to determine if the home is an appropriate option.

(9) The child's family services counselor will review the child's case plan each time a child returns and will update the case plan, if necessary, and submit the update to the court (review the case plan to ensure that it includes appropriate services). The plan will include appropriate services and tasks. The caregiver will be included in the case plan update.

(10) Additional training or consultation to caregivers will be identified and provided, if necessary, to assist them to provide appropriate care to the child who has returned.

(11) All intervention actions taken when a child has returned will be documented in the HomeSafenet chronological notes.

(Signed original copy on file)

JERRY REGIER
Secretary

SUMMARY OF REVISED, DELETED OR ADDED MATERIAL

This operating procedure has been substantially revised to incorporate the most current procedures for reporting and responding to situations in which children are missing for any reason from their out of home care placements.