

Youth Missing From Care

403.1

Purpose and Scope

Agency Content

This policy establishes procedures for probation staff to respond when a youth in foster care is missing or absent from placement. The goal is to ensure timely notification, coordinated search efforts, youth safety, and successful recovery and stabilization.

403.2

Procedure

Agency Content

In accordance with AB 25-67, Inyo County Probation's protocol for youth missing from placement is as follows:

Definition of Missing from Care

A youth is considered **missing from care** when:

- Their whereabouts are unknown to the probation department, **or**
- They are located in a place not approved by the court that may pose a risk to their safety.

For **nonminor dependents (NMDs)**, this applies when:

- There is reason to believe they did not leave voluntarily, **or**
- They may be at risk of serious harm.

Immediate Response Requirements

Upon learning a youth is missing, the assigned probation officer shall:

- Act immediately to assess safety risks.
- Begin active efforts to locate the youth.
- Make all required notifications **as soon as possible, but no later than 24 hours**.

Required Notifications (Within 24 Hours)

The probation officer must notify the following, unless restricted by court order:

- Parents or Indian custodians
- Legal guardians
- Attorneys for parents/guardians (if applicable)
- The youth's attorney
- Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), if assigned
- The court of jurisdiction
- The youth's Tribe or Tribal representative (if applicable)
- Any dependent sibling age 10 or older (if appropriate and safe)
- Local law enforcement (and tribal law enforcement, if applicable)
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)

All notifications must include contact information for the assigned probation officer and supervisor.

Reporting Requirements

The Probation Officer is required to report a youth missing from care within 24 hours. When reporting a missing youth to law enforcement and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), the probation officer should include, when available:

- A recent photograph
- Physical description
- Relevant health and safety risks
- Information about tribal affiliation (if applicable)

Probation staff shall maintain **ongoing communication** with law enforcement and NCMEC until the youth is located.

Search and Location Efforts

Probation officers must make active and ongoing efforts to locate the youth, including:

- Visiting the youth or making attempts to visit
- Contacting family members, relatives, friends, natural supports and service providers connected to the youth
- Checking locations the youth is known to frequent
- Following up on all leads
- Requesting law enforcement welfare checks when appropriate
- Reviewing social media and available databases (as authorized)
- Consult with NCMEC liaison if appropriate

All efforts must be **documented** in the case management system and in court reports.

Special Considerations for Indian Children

For youth who is or may be an Indian child:

- Notify the Tribe within 24 hours
- Collaborate with Tribal representatives in search efforts
- Provide regular updates to the Tribe
- Document all "active efforts" to involve the Tribe

Youth Recovery and Return to Care

When the youth is located, the probation officer shall:

- Arrange for safe return to placement
- Visit the youth within 3 days of return
- Assess the youth's physical and emotional condition, debriefing interview tool can be utilized
- Determine if harm was experienced while missing, including risk of exploitation
- Provide or refer for appropriate services
- Update all parties notified regarding the absence

Case Planning and Stabilization Following return:

- Identify reasons for the youth's absence
- Update the case plan to address those factors
- Engage the Child and Family Team (CFT), including Tribal representatives if applicable
- Consider placement changes or additional support needed
- Implement strategies to stabilize the youth in placement and to prevent future incidents
- The IPCANS must be updated within 30 calendar days

Harm Reduction Approach

Probation staff should use a **harm reduction approach**, which includes:

- Use open, honest, nonjudgmental communication with youth
- Develop an individualized safety plan that includes safe alternatives, emergency resources and pertinent contact information
- Encouraging safe behaviors if the youth leaves placement
- Maintaining consistent, supportive contact while the youth is missing

Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Probation officers must:

- Identify youth at risk of or experiencing exploitation
- Document concerns and findings
- Report to NCMEC when required
- Provide appropriate specialized services

Documentation Requirements

Probation officers must document:

- All notification efforts
- Search activities and contacts
- Information about the youth's absence and return
- Assessment of exploitation risk
- Case plan updates

Documentation must be entered into the case management system and included in court reports.

Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure compliance with state and federal requirements and to improve outcomes for youth.