

Runaway Youth

PURPOSE

To establish a uniform, legally compliant, and trauma-informed response protocol for identifying, location, reporting, and supporting children and nonminor dependents (NMDs) who are missing from foster care, including those at risk of or experiencing Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE), with specific provisions for Indian children under the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

DEFINITIONS

- (a) Missing from Foster Care (WIC 16501.35(c)(1)): A child is considered missing when:
 - 1. Their whereabouts are unknown to the Probation Department; or
 - 2. They are located in a court-unapproved setting that may pose a risk, considering the child's age, mental/physical condition, and intelligence.
- (b) Missing Nonminor Dependent (NMD) (WIC 16501.35(c)(2)): An NMD is considered missing only if:
 - 1. They did not voluntarily leave care, or
 - 2. They are at risk of substantial harm based on the totality of circumstances.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS AND TIMELINE

- (a) Determination of Missing Status. Upon learning that a youth is missing:
 - 1. Assess whether the child meets the definition of "missing" per WIC 16501.35.
 - 2. For NMDs, assess voluntariness and risk of harm
 - 3. Timeline: within one hour of receipt of information
- (b) Mandatory Notifications (within 24 hours). Notify the following individuals/agencies immediately, and no later than 24 hours:
 - 1. Parents/Indian custodians, unless rights terminated or limited
 - 2. Legal Guardian, unless rights terminated or limited
 - 3. Attorneys for Parents/Guardians, if court notification not limited
 - 4. Youth's Attorney (WIC 317(c)/634, always
 - 5. CASA, if appointed
 - 6. Court of Jurisdiction, always
 - 7. Tribe/Tribal Representative, if the youth is, or may be, an Indian child
 - 8. Siblings (10+), if not contrary to their safety/well-being
 - 9. Local law enforcement, always
 - 10. Tribal law enforcement, if Indian child is missing
 - 11. INCLUDE CONTACT INFORMATION FOR THE PROBATION OFFICER AND SUPERVISOR IN ALL NOTICES

- (c) Reporting to NCMEC and Law Enforcement. If the youth meets CSE criteria or is considered high risk:
 - 1. Report NCMEC
 - (a) Phone: 1-800-THE-LOST
 - (b) Online: <https://cmfc.missingkids.org/reportit/Account/LogOn>
 - 2. Include the following in reports:
 - (a) Recent photo
 - (b) Description: height, weight, sex, race/ethnicity, hair, eye color
 - (c) Endangerment factors (e.g., CSE risk, medications, suicidal tendencies)
 - (d) Tribal name and status under ICWA, if applicable
 - (e) Note: CDSS recommends all youth missing from care be reported to NCMEC, regardless of CSE status.

ACTIVE EFFORTS TO LOCATE MISSING YOUTH

- (a) Initial and ongoing search efforts. All search attempts must be documented in CWS/CMS contact notes and include:
 - 1. Contact with parents, relatives, teachers, attorneys, tribal reps, and peers
 - 2. Home visits to potential locations
 - 3. Police welfare checks (if necessary)
 - 4. Social media checks (if authorized)
 - 5. Consultation with internal staff who work with youth and families
 - 6. Searches of public databases
 - 7. Engagement of Tribe (for Indian children)
- (b) Update search efforts at each status review hearing and case plan update.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR INDIAN CHILDREN

- (a) Per ACL 24-18 and WIC 224.1(f)(3):
 - 1. Notify Tribe within 24 hours of learning the child is missing
 - 2. Collaborate with the Tribe to:
 - (a) Assist with locating the child
 - (b) Plan return and future placement
 - (c) Engage in Child and Family Team (CFT) discussions
 - 3. Document active efforts in case record and coordinate culturally appropriate supports.

RESPONSE UPON LOCATING THE YOUTH

Return and Stabilization Plan

When a youth is located:

- (a) Arrange return to placement or alternative safe setting.
 - 1. Placement will remain open for at least 14 days after youth went missing (ACL 19-26 and ACL 22-100)
- (b) Debrief the youth using the Missing/Runaway Youth Debriefing Tool (ACIN 1-13-17).
 - 1. Must occur within 3 business days
 - 2. Allow youth time to decompress before debrief
 - 3. Ideally conducted by a trusted adult of the youth's choosing
- (c) Engage the CFT to assess:
 - 1. Placement suitability (including preservation of the current placement)
 - 2. Apply conflict resolution practices to address conflict and concerns, and discuss solutions
 - 3. Collaboratively develop and implement an individual plan designed to meet the youth and family's needs
 - 4. Trauma supports needed
 - 5. Any new services required
- (d) Update Integrated Practice CANS within 30 days if trauma or conditions have changed
- (e) Assess for CSE involvement and refer to services if applicable

If youth refuses to return

- (a) Attempt face-to-face contact for safety checks
- (b) Hold CFT meeting to explore support options
- (c) Develop a youth-led plan for safe return when ready
- (d) Maintain ongoing supportive contact

HARM REDUCTION STRATEGY

Preventative Measures

Develop individualized, youth-informed harm reduction safety plans that include:

- (a) Emergency contacts and safe adults
- (b) Youth-preferred safe places
- (c) Social media handles
- (d) Emergency supplies (hygiene kits, bus passes, etc.)
- (e) Check-in protocols while missing

Engagement while missing

- (a) Maintain non-punitive, supportive communication
- (b) Use youth's preferred communication channels

- (c) Coordinate with CFT and avoid over-contacting
- (d) Reassess safety risk continually
- (e) If danger suspected, notify law enforcement

CSE-SPECIFIC PROCEDURES (PC 11166)

For youth identified as at-risk of or victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation:

- (a) Document CSE risk/status in CWS/CMS and relevant files
- (b) Ensure appropriate trauma-informed services
- (c) Train all relevant staff in identifying and supporting CSE youth
- (d) Maintain communication with NCMEC and law enforcement post-report

STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

- (a) Probation Officer: Primary locator, notifier, documenter, support planner
- (b) Supervisor: Oversight, ensure timeliness, approve plan for return
- (c) Tribal representative: Collaborate on Indian youth cases

DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

All efforts and reports must be documented in CWS/CMS, including:

- (a) Missing youth alerts
- (b) All notifications (date/time/recipient)
- (c) Search efforts and contact attempts
- (d) Debriefing outcomes
- (e) CSE risk assessments
- (f) Tribe engagement activities (if applicable)
- (g) Updated case plan and CANS (if required)
- (h) Refer to Attachment A for detailed data entry guidance

PROTOCOL REVIEW AND UPDATES

- (a) Review annually
- (b) Revise as needed: To reflect legal updates, community input, and best practices
- (c) Stakeholder engagement required: Including tribes, youth with runaway experience, and local runaway/homeless youth providers
- (d) Reach out to local Continuum of Care for assistance (CSOC).