



PROBATION DEPARTMENT PROCEDURE

Date	03/26/2026
Procedure Number	01-26
Procedure Title	Missing from Care
Related MCP Procedures	Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC); Child and Family Team (CFT) and the CFT Meeting (CFTM)

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DOCUMENTS

[CWS/CMS Instructions for “Runaway” or Missing – Absent from Care, or Left Placement without Permission](#)
[Instructions for entering the Abuse Sub-Category while Substantiating a CSEC Allegation of Exploitation](#)
[Instructions for locating and entering the CSEC Data and Start and End Date](#)
[CMS Instructions for Inputting CSEC](#)
[MCDSS Form 1023-X; MCDSS Form 1023-AB12](#)
[Case Worker Quick Reference Guide: Missing Child Reports to NCMEC Form](#)

REFERENCES

[ACIN I-13-17; ACIN I-14-19; ACIN I-59-18;](#)
[ACL 16-15; ACL 19-26; ACL 22-100; ACL 24-18; ACL 25-67](#)
[Public Law 113-183; Public Law 117-348](#)
[Senate Bill 794; Assembly Bill 2108; Assembly Bill 161](#)
[PEN 11166](#)
[WIC 16501.45; WIC 16501.35; WIC 16524.6; WIC 827.14; WIC 317; WIC 634; WIC 224.1](#)
[Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act](#)

CWS/CMS Section(s)

Contact Notebook; Referral Notebook; Client Notebook

ICPM Practices and Behaviors

Engagement, Assessment, Teaming, Planning & Plan Implementation

PURPOSE

To identify the actions taken when a child, youth, or non-minor dependent (NMD)—herein referred to collectively as youth—goes missing, or is considered a runaway from foster care, and the process taken when the youth is located and returned. This policy embodies key elements of the California Child Welfare Integrated Core Practice Model (ICPM), including:

- Engagement
- Assessment
- Teaming
- Planning & Plan Implementation

POLICY

It is the policy of Mendocino County Probation (MCP) to utilize a harm reduction approach when working with youth to determine steps the adults in the youth's life, as well as the youth, should take in the event they go missing from care. This policy builds on existing protocols to ensure compliance with state-mandated requirements outlined in [ACL 16-15](#) and [ACL 25-67](#). MCP staff must make reasonable and appropriate efforts to expeditiously locate any youth missing from foster care and document the necessary information required by state and federal law.

SCOPE

WIC 16501.35(c) defines missing from care as “when the whereabouts of a child subject to an order of foster care placement are unknown to the county child welfare agency or probation department, or when the county child welfare agency or probation department has located a child subject to an order of foster care placement in a location not approved by the court that may pose a risk to the child, taking into account the age, intelligence, mental functioning, and physical condition of the child.”

In the case of a nonminor dependent (NMD), this definition shall apply only if, based on the totality of the circumstances, the county child welfare agency or probation department suspects that the NMD did not voluntarily leave foster care or is at risk of substantial harm (WIC16501.35(c)(2)).

Most youth who run away from care are truly missing. However, there may be instances in which a youth, often an older youth, runs away but their whereabouts are known to the Social Worker/Probation Officer (e.g., left the approved placement and is with a friend or family member and refuses to return to their placement). As the youth has absented themselves from care, this youth is to be considered missing from foster care.

ACL 16-15 and ACL 25-67 describe in detail the required protocols for county child welfare or probation staff to expeditiously locate youth missing from care. These include timeframes for reporting, notification requirements to specific entities and persons, documentation requirements, and due diligence search expectations.

PROCEDURE

Reporting and Notification Requirements When a Youth or NMD is Missing

Probation Officer (PO) Responsibilities:

Immediately, but no less than 24 hours from receiving information that the youth is missing from care, the PO shall ensure notification is provided and include PO contact information to the following parties:

- Contact the youth's parent(s), legal guardian(s), or Indian custodian to inform them that the youth has run away or is otherwise missing from care. **DO NOT** contact if there is an order in place, or other facts showing that the parent(s), legal guardian(s), or Indian custodian should not be contacted (e.g., termination of rights, no contact order).
 - Ask if the parent, legal guardian, or Indian custodian is aware of the whereabouts of the youth.
Direct the caregiver to inquire among neighbors, peers, schools, etc., in an effort to attempt to locate the missing youth.
 - If contacting the parent(s), legal guardian(s), or Indian custodian via phone is not possible, attempt to make contact by making a home visit to their known address.
 - Ask the parent(s), legal guardian(s), or Indian custodian to contact MCP immediately if they receive any information regarding the youth. Verify contact information where the parent or legal guardian can be reached.
- Contact local law enforcement agency and, in the case of an Indian child, the tribal law enforcement agency associated with the youth's Tribe.
 - Ensure a Missing Persons Report is filed with the law enforcement jurisdiction where the youth was reported missing. The law enforcement authority will enter the information into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Under no circumstances should contact with law enforcement be delayed more than 24 hours after receipt of information.
 - If the youth is 17 years old or under and the PO is coordinating with the caregiver, direct the caregiver to immediately notify law enforcement and obtain a case number. Follow up with the caregiver within 24 hours to

- obtain the case report number from the law enforcement agency. Input the case report number into the CWS/CMS Contact Notebook.
 - If the youth is a NMD in a Supervised Independent Living Plan (SILP), and, if circumstances of their disappearance warrant such action, file a Missing Persons Report with law enforcement and obtain a case report number. Input the case report number into the CWS/CMS Contact Notebook.
 - If abduction and/or the risk of Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) is suspected, ensure law enforcement is contacted and provide information as to the youth's absence from care. Coordinate efforts to attempt to locate the youth. Ensure procedures for CSEC are in place and being utilized.
- Report to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) at the following website: <https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/missingfromcare> or by telephone at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).
 - Review the included "*Case Worker Quick Reference Guide: Missing Child Reports to NCMEC*" to ensure you have all the information required to make a report. Information required should include, but is not limited to:
 - Youth's full name and a description of the youth's physical features (height, weight, sex, ethnicity, race, hair/eye color, alias, clothing worn if applicable)
 - Date/time, city, and state youth went missing
 - Recent photo of the missing or abducted youth
 - Endangerment information (prescription medications, suicidal tendencies, vulnerability to being trafficked, pregnancy status, etc.)
 - SW information (name, agency/full contact information, relationship to youth)
 - Whether the youth is or may be an Indian Child
 - Law enforcement information (agency name, contact number, police report number)
- Notify the youth's attorney, assigned County Counsel, and, if applicable, tribal representative and Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) via email as soon as possible, but no later than two hours after receipt of the information.
- Notify the attorneys for the parent(s), legal guardian(s), or Indian custodian unless notification of the parent(s), legal guardian(s), or Indian custodian has been limited or terminated by the court.
- Notify the Juvenile Court of jurisdiction. As soon as possible, but no later than 24 hours, file a Request for Warrant with the Juvenile Court.
- Contact the youth's current school of record. Instruct school personnel to notify the PO if the school receives a records request regarding the youth. Ensure all efforts to find the youth are documented in CWS/CMS and include the information in the court report.

Placement Preservation and Placement Termination

Placement Preservation Strategy Requirements

A placement preservation strategy is a youth-centered process to support, equip and wrap a family with resources in the pursuit of preserving the stability, placement, and wellbeing of youth placed in out-of-home placement. Whenever placement becomes a concern, and prior to making any placement change, MCP must immediately develop, implement, and document a placement strategy in consultation with the Child and Family Team (CFT).

A Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) will be convened by the assigned PO and a facilitator to identify and apply placement preservation strategies in an effort to maintain the youth's current placement. If a placement change is necessary, the CFT will monitor the transition to ensure the needs of the youth and family are continuing to be met. The PO will ensure written notice of the placement change at least 14 calendar days prior to the placement change to the following parties:

- Youth's parent(s)/guardian(s)
- Youth's caregiver, including any resource families, foster family agencies, and short-term therapeutic programs (STRTP)
- Youth's attorney

PO Responsibilities

- As soon as practicably possible, schedule a CFTM with the youth's/family's CFT to discuss placement preservation strategy that explores options and establishes a plan regarding the youth missing from care's needs (refer to procedure number 03-20: Child and Family Team (CFT) and the CFT Meeting).
- If applicable, notify the youth's tribal representative, CASA, and foster care eligibility staff regarding the placement change.
 - Fill out and forward a copy of the MCDSS Form 1023-X to placementdocs@mendocinocounty.gov in order to stop payment on a placement change. Once received, the Eligibility Staff will file the document, and payment will end.
 - For NMD's, the PO will fill out the MCDSS Form 1023-AB12
 - Once termination of payment is complete, notify the out-of-home caregiver of the payment termination date. The PO will ensure Eligibility provides notice to the caregiver(s) via written notice. This must be documented in the Contact Notebook by the date and notice provided to the caregiver(s). If it is expected to be difficult to find an alternative placement for the youth due to behavioral issues, a bed can be held with the current caregiver for up to 14 calendar days, and does not have to be consecutive, or until the end of the month, whichever comes first. Under certain circumstances, and upon approval by the PO Supervisor, a bed may be allowed to remain available for no longer than 30 calendar days, but payment for the bed cannot exceed 14 days.
 - The PO will, at a minimum, indicate a description of the youth in the Warrant, and will attach any further information (i.e., current photos of the youth) upon the request of the Juvenile Court Judge.

- MCP does not usually collect the clothing or belongings of the youth until the placement closes. When a placement ends, an inventory of the youth's belongings will be completed, and the belongings brought to the MCP office for storage and safekeeping with the youth's name attached.
 - Belongings can be safely stored for the youth as long as needed, and can be accessed by the owner of the property by contacting the PO. The PO will provide access and supervise while the youth collects their belongings.
- For detailed instructions, refer to the CWS/CMS Instructions for "Runaway" or Missing – Absent from Care, or Left Placement without Permission instruction form.
- Ensure all efforts made are documented in the court report.

Active Efforts and Due Diligence

Active efforts are affirmative, thorough, and tailored to prevent family breakup, focusing on access to services and supports that are culturally appropriate. Whenever a youth is missing from care, and it is known, or there is reason to know, the youth is an Indian child, MCP must work collaboratively with the designated Tribe. Engagement with a youth's Tribe may provide additional information to assist in locating the youth. These efforts include, but are not limited to:

- Notifying the Tribe/tribal representation immediately, but no later than 24 hours after receiving information that the youth is missing from placement.
- Collaborating with tribal representatives on efforts to locate the youth.
- Ensuring the Tribe is regularly updated regarding the youth's status (particularly when the youth has been located) to determine the most appropriate placement when/if a placement change is necessary.

These active efforts must also be documented in CWS/CMS and the court report.

In the case of a youth missing from care, due diligence refers to the immediate steps taken to locate and return absent youth who have run away or are otherwise missing from care.

PO Responsibilities

- Maintain regular communication with NCMEC and all applicable law enforcement agencies, to include tribal law enforcement, for all reported Mendocino County youth missing from care. This may include:
 - Location of the youth, or a recent location
 - Names of persons recently in contact with the youth
 - New social media handles of the youth or recently uploaded information on existing handles
 - Any new photos obtained from persons in contact with the youth, or from social media
- Conduct a due diligence search in an effort to locate the youth, as information is provided, but no less frequently than every month, and document all contacts and efforts made to find the youth in the Contact Notebook of CWS/CMS. Efforts to locate the youth should include, but are not limited to:

- Asking the caregiver, parent, Indian custodian, or legal guardian to make inquiries into the whereabouts of the youth, and to immediately inform MCP if any information about the youth's whereabouts is obtained. The PO can continue to make inquiries to:
 - Law enforcement
 - Schools, friends of the youth
 - Former out-of-home caregivers
 - Other POs
 - Any person who might have knowledge about the youth's whereabouts (e.g., clergy, mentors, mental health providers, etc.)
- Physically check all places where the youth is likely to be
- For NMD's, these searches must continue until the court is notified in a Judicial Review process or Ex-Parte application that the youth's whereabouts are unknown and the court terminates jurisdiction
- Follow up on leads received regarding the youth's whereabouts
- Conduct visits to relevant addresses or request a welfare check by law enforcement when possible
- Search known social media accounts and reach out to youth online or via text message to try to make contact
 - Assess for safety. Should there be any suspicion that the youth is in danger, or at risk of danger, contact local law enforcement
- Complete an inmate search of the youth using the Mendocino County Sheriff Booking Logs or any other relevant database.
- Ensure all efforts made are documented in the court report.

When a Youth is Found or Returned

PO Responsibilities:

- Welcome the found or returned youth by showing genuine appreciation for their return. Retuning may be very difficult for the youth, whether voluntary or not. Verbally acknowledge this and thank them for their return. When engaging with a found youth:
 - Do not appear as if you are judging them, and be especially conscious of facial expressions and body language
 - Utilize neutral language and avoid initially commenting on what may have occurred while missing
 - Offer the youth something to eat, a shower, clean clothes, medical attention if necessary, and a place to rest for a while
 - Remain neutral and focus on the well-being of the youth. Be honest, express concern, and refrain from using language that is punishing or condescending
 - Provide youth an opportunity to explore what they feel is in the youth's best interest

- Utilize the youth's Child and Family Team (CFT) members to engage and communicate with the youth, and coordinate with the CFT to ensure the youth does not become too overwhelmed by too much communication
- Create a safe plan for return with the CFT, broken down by achievable steps
- Have the youth lead the return plan when ready
- Within 24 hours of being notified the youth has returned or been found:
 - Contact the law enforcement agency with the case record and ask that the Missing Persons Report be withdrawn. Follow up with law enforcement to ensure the report has been withdrawn
 - Contact NCMEC with appropriate information about the circumstances. At a minimum, provide:
 - Time and specific location of the youth's recovery
 - Additional details may be helpful to inform direct response to future missing from care situations
 - Contact the Juvenile Court and fill out a report asking to recall the Warrant.
 - Withdraw all photographs and public information regarding the missing youth from social media platforms
 - Document the information surrounding the circumstances of the youth's return or location in CWS/CMS
 - Notify the parent or legal guardian that the youth has returned or been found, if the parent or legal guardian has been involved.
 - If applicable, notify the youth's tribal representative and CASA
- While it is important to determine if a youth may have been exploited, it is equally important to allow them an opportunity to decompress and feel welcome before disclosing information. As soon as possible, but no later than three (3) business days after the youth has returned to care, arrange a meeting with the MCP and youth in a private, comfortable setting to debrief and explore the following:
 - Assess all immediate needs
 - Determine whether the youth has any medical needs; is on any medication; should be medically examined to detect or treat any potential injury, illness, or exposure to sexually transmitted diseases; or requires a mental health assessment
 - Arrange for medical care as appropriate
 - Determine the primary factors contributing to the youth running away or was otherwise missing from care
 - Determine the youth's experiences while absent from care. Remain objective, non-judgmental, open, and engaged. To identify motivations/reasons for leaving, or for concerns, ask the following questions, while focusing on the youth's return:
 - Where did the youth stay?
 - With whom did the youth stay?

- How were the needs of the youth provided (food, clothing, housing, transportation)?
 - Were there experiences with drug use, sexual activity, or abuse?
- Submit a new MCDSS Form 1023-X to placementdocs@mendocinocounty.gov to restart payment (if applicable). For NMD's, submit a new MCDSS Form 1023-AB12.
 - Eligibility Staff will begin the process of change of placement and restart the payment process
 - If the child or youth cannot return to the previous placement, discuss with them the possibility of placement with a suitable relative, NREFM, Resource Family Home, or other licensed facility best suited for the needs of the youth. This new placement should consider the unmet needs surfaced during a debriefing interview
- If the youth is an NMD and in a SILP, reassess the NMD's readiness for a SILP at this time.
- Assess the youth's risk of CSE. If there is reasonable suspicion that the youth has been a victim of CSE while absent from care, follow the mandated protocols described in MCP/FCS's CSEC policies and procedures.
- Ensure all efforts are documented in CWS/CMS and included the information in the court report.

Strategies for Preventing Youth from Leaving Care

PO Responsibilities:

- Know of and maintain contact information for people important to the youth.
- If the youth often leaves care to be with individuals above, work with those individuals to find appropriate ways to stay connected while the youth is in placement.
- Ensure the caregiver(s)/placement provider(s) is aware of the importance of the above relationships and encourage support for the youth to maintain a healthy relationship with them. Determine if in-person visits or video conferencing with the youth can be arranged.
- Coach caregiver(s)/placement provider(s) on how to create a supportive environment and assist in making developmentally appropriate house rules.
- Determine whether a curfew extension, planned activities with friends, and planned time alone in a private space would be appropriate and helpful.
- Coach caregiver(s) to be attentive to certain times during the day/week that may be particularly difficult and determine if the child may need more support or attention during those times (e.g., youth accustomed to being out on Fridays).
- Help caregiver(s)/placement provider(s) to plan outings or activities with the youth and connect them to activities that support their interests. Attempt to add whomever the youth feels is important.
- Support caregiver(s) in keeping the youth balanced; remain cognizant of services overload; and provide the youth with healthy, exciting, and fun experiences. Boredom can be a vulnerable place for adolescents.
- Identify triggers that may encourage the youth to leave or run away, and when the child is likely to encounter said triggers. Co-create a safety plan with the youth that identifies

alternatives for leaving (e.g., contacting a trusted adult or friend or listening to music, etc.).

Safety Planning

When possible, the PO will use a Child and Family Team Meeting or will meet with the youth in an effort to develop a safety plan to prevent the youth from running away or being absent from care in the future.

PO Responsibilities:

Strategies the PO can use for engagement around safety planning for when a youth may leave care include:

- Discuss the desire for the child to stay in placement/care, as well as the understanding that a youth may decide to leave.
 - Have honest discussions with the youth about how they can maintain their own safety in the event they are missing from care or run away. This does NOT mean that leaving placement is encouraged or condoned, but instead meets the child on a level where they are, and encourages open communication and trust
- Ask the youth to define safety and use their definition to assist in developing safer behaviors and making decisions. Their definition will influence their decision-making.
- When engaging with the youth, safety measures can include:
 - Emergency contact information and locations of various community resources
 - Contact information for one person the youth specifies they would be willing to check in with while absent from care, whether by phone, email, or social media
- Keep current photos of the youth to provide to law enforcement and/or NCMEC if the youth runs away or is otherwise missing from care.
- Monitor social media accounts and usernames.
- Pay attention to warning signs that indicate the youth's desire to leave placement. Utilize support and/or CFT to engage the youth and brainstorm about what can be done to prevent the youth from leaving placement.
- Ensure all efforts are documented in CWS/CMS and included in the court report.

Youth in Custody or Residing in Another County or State, and a Warrant has been issued:

Warrants issued by the juvenile court are not enforceable outside the State of California. However, law enforcement in other states typically will cooperate and assist in sending a youth back to Mendocino County in coordination with the Probation Department. Coordination for the transport and return of the child is the responsibility of MCP and the case-carrying PO.

- Within 24 hours, contact the law enforcement agency where the youth was located in reference to the Warrant, and discuss the circumstances of the youth's runaway/missing status.
 - If in another county within California, and depending on the circumstances (e.g., safety and health concerns), MCP may request the holding juvenile hall provide temporary detention (5 working days) until arrangements can be made for the PO to collect the youth and return the youth to Mendocino County.
 - If temporary detention is not available or possible, the PO will immediately make arrangements to leave the county and return the youth to Mendocino County
- If the youth is still in an active placement, MCP will contact that placement to ensure the bed is still open and the youth can return to the placement.
 - If the youth will need to move to a new placement, MCP will make proper arrangements to ensure the youth is placed in a safe and healthy environment, suitable to his/her needs
- The Juvenile Probation Supervisor and PO will meet to discuss where and by whom the youth was found/located. This will also include where the youth was returned or placed.
- PO will submit a request to recall the Warrant on the next court day.
- Ensure all efforts are documented in CWS/CMS and included in the court report.

Returning a Runaway/Missing Youth from Another State or County

When returning a youth to another county, contact the Probation Department/Juvenile Hall in that county to make arrangements for them to assume custody as soon as possible, rather than placing the youth in a foster home.

PO Responsibilities:

- Without delay, contact the local child Probation Department in the other state or county of jurisdiction to advise of the location of the youth, and to determine if a missing person's report/warrant has been filed.
- For youth runaway or missing from another state or country, follow the procedures outlined in the section "When a Youth is Found or Returned" above, as applicable.
- If the youth alleges child abuse and neglect, contact the child welfare agency where the child resides and make a child abuse report
- Arrange for the youth's return to their home county or other state. Check with the local Probation Department/Juvenile Hall to determine procedures for getting transportation for the youth to return home.