

IV. DEFINITIONS

For a complete list of definitions, see the [OCFS Policy Manual Glossary](#). In this document, the first reference to any word that is defined is hyperlinked to the Glossary.

V. POLICY

The Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) recognizes an increased risk to youth when they have run away, been [abducted](#), or go missing from an approved placement. Staff have a responsibility to respond immediately when youth in the care and custody of the State have run away or are missing.

OCFS believes youth should have a safe place to sleep every night and should have responsible adults to care for them. This policy is designed to delineate tasks that OCFS staff will do when youth, who are in the care and custody of the State, become missing and/or have run away from an approved placement, or have been abducted. The policy also gives guidance to staff for those youth not in state custody and are missing and or run away.

OCFS believes that children's needs are best served in a family that is committed to the child. OCFS supports placements that promote family, siblings, and community connections, and encourage healthy social development.

VI. PROCEDURES

[Responsibilities to be completed within the first twenty-four \(24\) hours.](#)

When a youth in care is reported missing, abducted, or [runaway](#) the caseworker will complete the following:

- a. The Intake Caseworker will immediately contact the assigned worker or standby worker in the district when Intake receives a report of a [missing youth](#), in addition to completing steps outlined in the [2.1 Intake Screening and Assignment Policy](#).
- b. The District caseworker will:
 - i. Conduct a review of case records in an effort to determine where the youth may have gone and/or who may have been involved in the youth's disappearance, or unauthorized absence.
 - ii. Contact other individuals who may have had previous contact with the missing youth (i.e., school personnel, physical and mental health providers, law enforcement

- personnel, friends, neighbors, relatives, family members, other youth who may have shared a placement with the youth, etc.).
- iii. Contact other community partners to inform them that the youth may be missing and to request they keep us informed if they come in contact with the youth or learn about their whereabouts. Be sure to connect with the local Homeless Youth Outreach agencies as well as Emergency Shelters.
 - iv. Communicate with the law enforcement entity that covers the area that the youth resides in and file a missing person's report. Confirm with them that they have or will place the information into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database. If there is reason to believe that the youth was possibly abducted, alert law enforcement of that possibility right away and give as much detail as possible about who was last with the youth, the relationship between them, etc. **Note:** The Caseworker who filed the missing person's report is responsible for immediately documenting what the plan will be to respond to law enforcement's notification that the youth has been found and being held for pick up. The plan should be documented on the Child's Person record in the Runaway/Missing related list and on the Case in the Special Instructions related list.
 - v. Notify the assigned Guardian ad litem (GAL)
 - vi. Review the [7.10 Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation \(HTCSEC\) Policy](#) and assess the level of risk the youth is at utilizing the screening tool and follow next steps.
 - vii. Report to the National Center on Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) when the youth has been missing for twenty-four (24) hours (Appendix A). Documentation of the report to the NCMEC is completed by selecting Yes or No in the Runaway/Missing record in the child welfare information system.
 - viii. Document the placement type in the Placement related list in the child welfare information system (Appendix B).

Ongoing responsibilities while youth is missing.

Until the youth is located the caseworker will:

- a. Maintain ongoing, weekly contact with the biological family (when appropriate), as well as the youth's current placement provider to share information and to obtain new or additional information regarding the youth.
- b. Inform the GAL, on a weekly basis or when there is a change, of the attempts to locate the youth.
- c. Ensure ongoing contact and collaboration with NCMEC and law enforcement.

When the youth is located.

When the youth in care that was missing has been located the caseworker will:

- a. Pick the youth up as soon as possible from law enforcement and assess the need for safety, placement, and care. Instructions on who will pick the youth up when they are found will be documented in the Runaway/Missing record and Special Instructions in the child welfare

information system. (When a youth is picked up on a Missing Persons report, the youth cannot be confined unless they have been identified as an out of state runaway).

- b. Contact the NCMEC and the law enforcement entity where the youth was reported missing, to notify them that the youth has been located, provide the pertinent information pertaining to the child's or youth's recovery, circumstances related to that recovery, and that the missing person's report should be cancelled. Contact any other individuals or organizations who have been contacted about the youth's status. This should include but is not limited to, the GAL, NCMEC, other law enforcement agencies, and community partners. There should be one entry in the child welfare information system that these people were contacted and updated that the youth has been located. This is documented in the Runaway/Missing record and in the Person Notified related list.
- c. Utilize the screening tool found in the [7.10 HTCSEC Policy](#) and follow next steps based on the results of the screening as soon as possible and no later than twenty-four (24) hours after being located.
- d. Gather information regarding circumstances of the youth's absence from their approved placement. For a sample of questions that may help elicit this information, see Appendix C. Document this information using the Runaway/Missing related list. In the record created, use the Runaway Details section to describe any specific circumstances (Appendix D).

When a youth has run away from an approved placement.

The caseworker will:

- a. Review all of the youth's options regarding placement. If the youth does not agree to return to their previous placement, plan with them around where they will be staying and follow next steps in the [3.4 Selection of Substitute Care Placement Policy](#) for next steps in regard to placement.
- b. Plan with the youth around when, where and how to contact them using all relevant communication technology available and make a plan for the next meeting with the youth.
- c. Review the [7.10 HTCSEC Policy](#) and screening tool and follow next steps based on screening tool risk factor category.
- d. Gather information regarding circumstances of the youth's absence from their approved placement. Reference Appendix C for a sample of questions. Document this information using the Runaway/Missing related list. In the record created, use the Runaway Details section to describe any specific circumstances (Appendix D).
- e. Enter the appropriate placement type in the Placement related list in the child welfare information system (Appendix B).

For youth who have run away who are not in the care and custody of the State.

OCFS staff will:

- a. Inform and encourage the youth's parent/legal guardian of the steps to take as outlined in 'Responsibilities to be completed within the first twenty-four (24) hours' section of this policy.
- b. Recommend that the parent/legal guardian make a referral to a homeless youth outreach worker.

- c. Ensure the parent/legal guardian and treatment team (if applicable) is aware of resources for runaway youth and suggest that a supportive person (known to the youth) reach out to the youth to plan for their safety and where they will be staying.
- d. Encourage parents/legal guardians and the youth's treatment team to contact Child Protective Intake with questions regarding when Child Protective Services would become involved with a runaway youth and their family and/or if there is any suspicion of child abuse or neglect by the parent/legal guardian. **Note:** OCFS staff will report suspected abuse or neglect per the requirement of [22 M.R.S. §4011-A](#).
- e. Notify law enforcement that the youth has run away or become missing if the parent/caregiver is unwilling or unable to do so.

VII. POLICY SUPERSEDES

V. B Missing and Runaway Youth Policy

VIII. LINKS TO RELATED POLICIES

[2.1 Intake Screening and Assignment Policy](#)

[7.10 Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Policy \(HTCSEC\)](#)

[3.4 Selection of Substitute Care Placement Policy](#)

IX. APPENDICES

[Appendix A: Reporting to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children \(NCMEC\)](#)

[Appendix B: Placement Documentation](#)

[Appendix C: Questions That May be Helpful When a Youth Has Runaway](#)

[Appendix D: Missing/Reasons for Running](#)

Note: The hyperlinks to these documents only work on DHHS issued computers. If you would like to request a copy of these documents, please email your request to:

OCFSPolicyTraining.DHHS@maine.gov