



DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILIES
Making a Difference for Children, Families and Communities



Joette Katz
Commissioner

Dannel P. Malloy
Governor

To: Congregate Care Providers
Careline Staff
DCF Regional Administrators and Office Directors

From: Fernando J. Muñiz, Chief of Quality and Planning

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Subject: Runaway / AWOL Notification Process

Current DCF practice requires providers to notify both DCF and the local police if a child has run away or is absent without leave (AWOL) from a congregate care setting. Our review of data over time shows that many young people who are absent from their placement return on their own within several hours and that, often, their physical whereabouts are known to the provider or to DCF staff even while on a runaway episode. In these instances, calling the police may not always be an appropriate course of action.

Therefore, we are hereby revising the protocol to be used when a child runs away or is AWOL from a placement. This new protocol includes a joint assessment by DCF and the facility to determine whether the police should be called in certain cases.

If the facility feels that a child or youth is a danger to self or others, police will be contacted immediately then followed by a phone call to the area office or Careline (after hours). Additionally, if the child or youth is age 13 or younger, the police will be contacted immediately followed by contact with the Area Office or Careline (after hours). In all other instances, the facility should call DCF and together assess the nature of the absence to determine if police intervention is needed. Some factors to be considered include whether the child or youth may be a danger to self or others, his/her medical/physical health, developmental stage, behavioral health and social and emotional functioning.

Upon contact with DCF, the facility staff member will be asked the following:

- Why did the child or youth runaway/AWOL? What triggered this behavior?
- Name, phone # and address of all persons on the child's contact list.
- Name and phone number of mother, father and any other family members involved with child.
- Names of any friends that the child or youth may have. Have they been contacted?
- Does the child or youth have a cell phone?
- Have other children at the same placement setting been spoken to regarding child's or youth's whereabouts?
- Has child or youth ran away/went AWOL with other children or youth from the facility?
- How did the child or youth run away/AWOL? What was the mode of transportation?

- What has been done to locate the child or youth?
- How many times has the child or youth runaway/AWOL within the last six months and how long have they typically been away?
- Is there a place the child or youth typically runs to?
- Was the placement setting searched in an effort to locate the child or youth?
- Have you checked the local settings that the child or youth frequents?

If a complete assessment of the child's or youth's runaway/AWOL status does not meet the criteria for police intervention, DCF and the facility staff will develop a plan to search for the child or youth to ascertain his or her whereabouts. This plan will include actions steps mutually agreed upon by area office staff, Careline staff (after hours) and the placement setting staff. The area office or Careline staff will document the plan, including the justification for not calling the police.

If the child or youth's whereabouts are unknown, DCF and foster parent of facility setting staff will continue searching and a formal reassessment will be done within three hours, and/or prior to area office closing and the next Careline shift change during the child or youth's absence. If during the reassessment process, it is determined that police intervention is needed, DCF shall direct the program staff member to contact the local police department and report the child or youth as missing.

When there is knowledge of the child or youth's whereabouts, DCF Area Office or Careline on-call staff will work with the facility staff members to ensure the child or youth's immediate return. A child's or youth's refusal to immediately return should not by itself be a reason for police intervention. DCF Area Office or Careline on-call staff will work with the child or youth to determine how to maintain the current placement or if another placement is needed. Regional Resource Group staff or on-call Doctors will be utilized when necessary.

All efforts, discussions and planning will be documented in the LINK narrative. Additionally, if Careline responds after-hours, the narrative will be cut and pasted into an email and sent to the area office responsible for the child or youth. Information will be entered into the Runaway Log and updated by the Area Office.

If child or youth returns to the placement setting on his/her own accord, the facility staff will notify the DCF area office staff during business hours or the Careline after hours immediately in order to assess child and youth's needs and discuss planning.