

SPECIALIZED CHILD WELFARE SUBJECT MATTER

Missing from Care

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Policy

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) shall ensure:

- timely assessment of children and youth in the care and custody of DCF served in congregate care and in foster care who have run away from placement/care provider
- timely notification to appropriate DCF staff, child's attorney and law enforcement of missing children.

Target Population

Children or young adults up to the age of 23 in the care and custody of DCF that are missing from their placement (foster home, in-home cases and any congregate care setting, including placements through the Chafee Grant).

Notifications

There are three designations of notification for children missing from care:

- Immediate Notification
- 12-hour notification
- 24-hour notification

Designation: Immediate Notification

This designation applies:

- if child is under 13 years old

OR

- if child/youth is age 13 to 23 years old and meets one or more of the following high-risk criteria:
 - poses a danger to self, others or the community
 - has high emotional or psychiatric acuity
 - is currently placed in a psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF), crisis stabilization program (CSP) or psychiatric hospital
 - is diagnosed with serious medical conditions such as, but not limited to, insulin-dependent diabetes that requires schedule medication and timely monitoring
 - has developmental and/or cognitive functioning delays
 - has a prior history of sexual exploitation or has been identified as high risk, suspected or confirmed for human trafficking.

These are the highest risk children/youth. If they are missing from care, an immediate response to locate them is required. This includes the development of a plan by the care provider and DCF to search for the child/youth.

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**Designation:
Immediate
Notification**
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This search may include:

- looking in the community where the youth is placed/residing
- contacting the youth on their cell phone
- contacting the youth's family and/or friends
- checking the youth's social media accounts

These efforts shall be ongoing during the period the child/youth is missing.

The care provider **shall notify law enforcement first and then immediately report the incident to Careline.**

A formal reassessment of the plan to locate the child/youth will be done within three hours of the original call and regularly during the child's/youth's absence.

**Designation
12-hour
Notification
to DCF**

This designation applies if the child is age 13 to 18 years old.

Children in this age range are more likely to be placed in foster care or congregate care. These youth have daily schedules which are closely supervised, and they are accountable throughout each day to their caregivers.

If it is determined that a child who does not meet the immediate notification criteria is missing, the caregiver(s) shall immediately look for the child. The search may include:

- looking in the community where the youth is placed/residing
- contacting the youth on their cell phone
- contacting the youth's family and/or friends
- checking the youth's social media accounts.

These efforts shall be ongoing during the period the child is missing.

For open DCF cases, the caregiver shall notify the area office social worker that the child is missing from care as soon as it has been determined. The plan for locating the child shall be discussed and ongoing updates on efforts to locate the child shall be shared.

After 12 hours, if the child cannot be found and a plan for them to return has not been established, the child shall be reported as missing to the DCF Careline unit and law enforcement.

**Designation -
24-hour
Notification**

This designation applies if the youth is age 18 to 23 years old.

Youth in this age range are more likely to be in supportive placements

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Designation - 24-hour Notification (continued)
with less direct supervision from caregivers daily. These youth have more access to the community as they work, attend school, and socialize with peers and family.

Missing curfew or lack of contact by the youth with their caregiver shall not immediately lead to an assumption that the youth is missing. In these circumstances, the primary caregiver shall attempt to locate the youth by:

- calling or texting the youth on their cell phone
- contacting their friends and/or family
- looking for the young adult at places where they frequent
- checking the young adult's social media

These efforts shall be ongoing during the period the youth is missing.

For open DCF cases, after exhausting reasonable efforts to locate the youth without success, the care giver shall then notify the area office social worker that the youth is missing from care. The plan for locating the youth shall be discussed and updates on efforts to locate the young adult shall be shared.

After 24 hours, if the youth cannot be found and a plan for them to return has not been established, the youth shall be reported as missing to the DCF Careline and law enforcement.

Assessments These designations are guidelines to follow regarding notifying DCF Careline and/or law enforcement when a DCF involved youth/young adult is missing from care.

If a DCF involved child/youth falls into a 12-hour or 24-hour designation notification, the caregiver (i.e. congregate care setting, foster care, or any other placement where the youth resides) shall contact the DCF area office or Careline to discuss the circumstances if they believe the child/youth is at risk to themselves, others or the community. A joint assessment shall be conducted, which may result in a decision to elevate this notification to an immediate notification.

Reporting of Missing from Care to DCF Careline

Designation Immediate Notification is a Critical Incident

Designation 12-hour is a Significant Event - reported after 12 hours to Careline

Designation 24-hour is a Significant Event - reported after 24 hours to Careline

Careline will follow the notification process for Critical Incidents and Significant Events as outlined in policy.

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Reporting of Missing from Care to DCF Careline (continued)

Through the Critical Incidents and Significant Events notification process, the agency will ensure that the appropriate local law enforcement agent and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) are notified and maintain regular communication with law enforcement and NCMEC to provide a safe recovery of a missing or abducted child or youth, including sharing information about the child's or youth's recovery and circumstances related to the recovery.

Where reasonably possible, reports submitted to law enforcement agencies and NCMEC should include the following:

- a photo of the missing or abducted child or youth (reference KIDPIX requirements pursuant to Policy 23-3)
- a description of the child's or youth's physical features, such as height, weight, sex, ethnicity, race hair color, and eye color, and
- endangerment information, such as prescription medications, suicidal tendencies, vulnerability to being sex trafficked and other health or risk factors.

This notification process shall also include written notification to the child's attorney by the social worker assigned to the case.

Cross-reference: DCF Policy 22-1-2, Notification of Exceptional Circumstances; DCF Policy 23-3, Removal from Home and Placement
Legal reference: C.G.S. section 46b-129(j)(4); Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, the Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2022

Human Trafficking

Any child or youth that has a prior history of sexual exploitation or have been identified as high risk, suspected or confirmed for Human Trafficking are designated as Immediate Notification.

In these cases, children/youth Missing from Care, the Human Trafficking Policy and Human Trafficking Practice Guide shall be referenced to ensure proper notification and follow up occurs.

After-hours and on weekends/holidays, DCF Careline will notify the NCMEC. During regular business hours, the DCF area office social worker will notify NCMEC.

Any child/youth that has been determined to be missing from care, NCMEC shall also be notified. Once the child/youth has been found, NCMEC will be notified regarding the child/youth's return.

Cross-reference: DCF Policy 21-14, Human Trafficking, DCF Policy 21-14 PG, Human Trafficking Practice Guide

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Missing from Care for More than 72 Hours Any child/youth who is missing for more than 72 hours shall be referred to the HART ("Human Anti-trafficking Response Team") liaison by the area office social worker within two business days.

The HART liaison shall complete the HART consult, within 72 hours of the request, in consultation with the social worker and the RRG assigned clinician to assess the child/youth for risk factors of child sex trafficking or labor trafficking.

Prevention/ Education

DCF Policy 28-1 PG, V.I.T.A.L. Practice Guide has a Run Prevention Plan form and a Return to Care Debriefing form. These forms may be used to assist a care provider in developing a plan to support a child/youth so that they remain in placement or if they run, to debrief with them upon their return. These are child/youth driven plans that identify triggers as to why the child/youth runs and builds supports around them to address these triggers. DCF encourages the use of these tools.

Each congregate care provider and foster care provider should be aware of strategies to reduce or eliminate youth from running from placement. The V.I.T.A.L. Practice Guide also has a Run Prevention Tip Sheet that provides strategies to engage youth.

Cross -reference: DCF Policy 28-1 PG, V.I.T.A.L. Practice Guide
