

Missing From Care**21-15****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).

Definitions of Missing From Care

Federal Law 34 U.S.C. section 11292 defines a child missing from care as a person younger than 18 whose whereabouts are unknown to their legal guardian.

DCF classifies missing from care incidents as follows:

- Runaway/Missing: Child left their placement and DCF does not know where they are and cannot communicate with them.
- Abduction: Unauthorized removal of a minor from the custody of the child's parent, guardian or congregate care facility.

Under federal and state law, children missing or abducted must be reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). Children who are AWOL are not required to be reported to NCMEC.

NOTE: DCF also defines an AWOL when a child is not where they should be, but DCF knows where the child is or is communicating with them. The child may have left the residence without permission or may not have returned at a predetermined time from school, work or other event. AWOL children are not considered missing from care under the federal definition and notification to NCMEC is not required.

Legal reference: Federal Law 34 U.S.C. section 11292; 42 U.S.C. section 671; C.G.S. section 17a-8b

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Prevention Every effort should be made to prevent a child from running away or go missing.

When a child is considered a risk to run away, the child's social worker will use the DCF-21-15P, "Youth Run Prevention Plan" to develop an action plan and strategies to prevent future occurrences.

Each congregate care provider and foster care provider should be aware of strategies to reduce or eliminate youth from running from placement

Mobile Crisis Intervention Services (MCIS) and Urgent Crisis Centers (UCC) should be accessed as appropriate.

Cross Reference: DCF 21-15PG, Missing from Care Practice Guide

Missing Persons Notification When a child is missing from care, a report shall be made by telephone, to the DCF area office, during business hours, or to Careline, after hours and on holidays.

Through the Critical Incidents and Significant Events notification process, DCF will ensure that the appropriate local law enforcement agent is notified and will report running/missing and abducted children to NCMEC.

DCF will 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.

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Missing From Care**21-15****Missing
Persons
Notification**
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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

**NCMEC and
Law
Enforce-
ment
Notification**

When a child is missing from care from a congregate care setting, DCF foster home or therapeutic foster home, DCF shall report immediately, and in no case later than 24 hours after receiving report of a missing child, information on missing or abducted children or youth to the law enforcement authorities for entry into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Factors to be considered, and reported to NCMEC as required, include the child's:

- danger to self, others, the community
- risk of being a victim of trafficking
- medical and physical health
- chronological age
- developmental age
- behavioral and mental health status, including prior trauma history and especially sexual abuse, exploitation or trafficking
- social and emotional functioning
- geographical location, and the location of family and friends
- appropriateness of placement.

When a report is made to NCMEC, a DCF point of contact for NCMEC must be identified.

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Missing From Care**21-15****Immediate
law
Enforce-
ment
Notification**

The decision to contact law enforcement *immediately* to file a missing person report for entry into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database shall be governed by the following criteria:

- the facility staff or foster parent(s) belief that the child is a danger to self, others or the community, regardless of age
- the child has a prior history of sexual exploitation, or
- the child is under the age of thirteen years.

In these cases, the facility staff or foster parents shall:

- immediately notify, by telephone, the DCF area office, during business hours, or Careline, after hours and on holidays
- Then DCF shall immediately notify law enforcement.

**Plan for
Locating
the Child**

DCF shall develop a plan to locate the child with the child's parents or guardians, area office staff, congregate care staff, law enforcement and any other party associated with the child. Action steps must be followed in accordance with the "Missing From Care Practice Guide."

Cross reference: DCF 21-15PG, Missing From Care Practice Guide

**Return to
Placement
Setting**

When a child returns to the placement setting, the facility staff, foster parent(s) or TFC agency staff will immediately notify area office staff during business hours or Careline after hours and holidays to assess the child's needs and discuss planning.

DCF shall:

- contact law enforcement and NCMEC that the child has returned
- contact other individuals and agencies involved with the child
- conduct a debriefing interview using the DCF-21-15D, "Returning Child De-Briefing" form with the child to assess any services or supports the child needs, and
- update the child's safety plan based on such assessment.

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Missing From Care**21-15****HART
Consult**

The assigned child protective services team must request a Human Anti-trafficking Response Team (HART) consult when there is any indication the child was sexually abused or the child is missing for more than 72 hours. During the HART consultation, the HART Liaison shall use the DCF screening instrument to assess child trafficking.

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

**Quality
Assurance**

Each region, on a weekly basis, shall send a reminder to social work staff who have children missing from care on their caseloads to update the Missing from Care Database and document all efforts to locate the child.

QI staff shall review databases regularly to ensure accuracy.

**Documen-
tation**

Documentation of all activities regarding a child missing from care is essential. DCF, congregate care providers and TFC agencies will be expected to document the following:

- all efforts, discussions and planning in their respective client record narratives within the established time frames for completing narrative entries
- the plan developed and updated to locate the child, including the action steps and justification for not contacting the police
- any information gathered while child is missing from care, and
- any relevant circumstances related to the recovery of the child.

The DCF narrative completed by Careline staff (when Careline responds after hours) will be cut and pasted into an email and sent to the area office chain of command (i.e., social worker, social work supervisor, program supervisor).

All contacts with the on-call physician should be documented in the client record. Careline staff will document such contacts that occur after hours and during holidays.

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Missing From Care**21-15****Documen-
tation,
continued**

Significant Event Report forms must be completed and submitted within 12 hours of the incident to DCF Risk Management and in accordance with the Exceptional Circumstance policy.

Cross reference: DCF Policy 22-1-2, Notification of Exceptional Circumstances