



**Division of Family and Children Services
Child Welfare Manual**

**Chapter: 1011: Needs of
the Child
Effective Date:**

Previous Policy #: 1011.16

POLICY TITLE: Service Needs of Runaway Children/Youth

POLICY NUMBER: 1011.16

CODES

REQUIREMENT

The Division of Family & Children Services (DFCS) shall ensure that the safety and well being of all children in care is the highest priority and will therefore immediately initiate the following tasks when a child in the custody of DFCS is determined to have run away:

1. File a missing person report with the law enforcement agency,
2. Activate a Protective Services Alert in SHINES,
3. Conduct a comprehensive search for the child.

When a caregiver or placement provider has determined that a child in DFCS custody has run away, the following tasks shall be initiated immediately:

1. File a missing person report with the law enforcement agency,
2. Notify the DFCS SSCM,
3. In conjunction with the DFCS SSCM, conduct a comprehensive search for the child.

DFCS defines a runaway child/youth as a child up to age 18 in the care and custody of DFCS, whose whereabouts are unknown to the caregiver, and the circumstances of the absence indicate the child voluntarily left the placement without the permission of the caregiver, placement provider or DFCS; where there is reasonable suspicion that the child has absconded without the intent to return; and preliminary efforts to locate the child/youth have yielded no results.

PROCEDURE

Determine whether the child has run away, based on the following:

1. The child is missing, and any of the following are true:
 - a. The child has stated their intent to run away.
 - b. The caregiver, SSCM or another party has indicated that they have reason to believe the child is not returning to the placement.

- c. Some or all of the child's possessions are missing.
 - d. The child has a history of running away.
 - e. The caregiver, placement provider, and/or SSCM suspects the child has run away.
2. The following actions have been taken to locate the child have not yielded the child's safe return:
- a. Contact with the child on his or her cell phone, or social media site.
 - b. Contact with the child's parent, other family members, friends or other persons with whom the child frequently associates.
 - c. Contact with the caregiver/placement resource and other household members to determine when the child was last seen and the child's state of mind at that time.
 - d. Visit to the location (s) the child was last seen or where the child frequents.

If the child is determined to have run away:

- 1. File a missing person report with law enforcement immediately. (See Practice Guidance for information that should be provided to law enforcement to assist in locating the child)
 - i. Ensure to obtain the case report number and the name and contact information of the officer to whom the report is made
 - ii. Input all information into SHINES, Contacts/Summaries Tab, along with any other contact information provided by law enforcement.
 - iii. Activate a Protective Services Alert in SHINES.
 - i. Deactivate the alert when the foster child is located or the agency is relieved of placement authority.
- 2. Continue to conduct a comprehensive search for the child. Search efforts, at a minimum, shall include the following actions:
 - a. Interview/Re-interview the caregiver or placement resource to determine the child's state of mind when last observed.
 - b. Continue efforts to determine where the child was last known to be located and whom s/he was with.
 - c. Continue to attempt contacts with the child via their cell phone or if they utilized social media (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc). Utilize voicemail, text messaging and other messaging to communicate to the child the need to return or to a safe place (police station, fire department, hospital, government building, homeless shelter)
 - d. Interview/Re-interview other children at the child's placement to determine if the child shared their plans, or whom his/her known friends are and how the friends can be contacted. Again, ask about the child's use of cell phones or social media.
 - e. Interview/Re-interview the child's friends to determine if they are aware of the child's whereabouts and/or of their plans.

- f. Contact the child's parent(s), extended family members and other adults who work with the child/youth to gather information that may be of assistance in locating them. Assure that they understand their legal responsibility to notify DFCS should the child contact them.
 - g. Visit/Re-visit locations where the youth is known to frequent.
 - h. Frequently check the child's social media account for activity.
3. Notify the parent as soon as possible.
- Note:** If parental rights have been terminated, consult with the supervisor/county director prior to notifying the parent.
- a. When feasible, contact should be done in person.
 - b. Solicit the parent's assistance in locating the child. Remind them that the court's order for protection contains legal sanctions for the child's return home if the court's consent has not been granted.
4. Notify the court within two (2) work days of the child's disappearance by filing a motion. The motion shall include efforts made to date to locate the child.
5. Call 1-800-THE-LOST 800-843-5678 – National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) to report the child missing. To utilize this resource, there must be an active missing persons/police report. Report that the runaway child is in the temporary or permanent custody of the agency.
- a. Provide the child's name, DOB, Social Security Number, the address or location of where the child is missing and the SSCM's contact information.
- Note:** The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children will send media forms requesting a release of information and a photo of the child. The media release, including the photo can **only** be authorized under the following circumstances:
- i. If the child is in the temporary custody of DFCS, written parental authorization or a court order is required for any media release of the photograph.
 - ii. If the child is in the permanent custody of DHS/DFCS, the DHS Office of Communications may authorize the media release.
6. Notify any other Division/Department/Agency/Organization that also serves the child, within two (2) work days of the child's disappearance, including the child's school officials, attorneys, service providers, etc.
7. Send a "Runaway Alert" through the Georgia Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) Office, if it is believed that the child may be in another county or state but there is insufficient information to know which county or state.
- a. Cancel the alert if the child is found or if DFCS is relieved of custody.

If the foster child is located,

- 1. Discontinue the Runaway Alert (CPS Alert) in SHINES;
- 2. Notify law enforcement that the child has been located.

3. Notify any other agencies or persons assisting with the search and inform them that the child has been located.
4. Notify the parent and the placement resource that the child has been located.
5. Interview the child within 24 hours of the child's return. (See Practice Guidance for sample interview questions)
6. As appropriate, schedule a medical examination with the child's primary physician for the child within 48 hours of the child's return;
NOTE: This decision should be based on information revealed during the interview with the child and/or based on the length of time the child has been on runaway.
7. Update the case plan when there are newly identified or modified services, treatment and/or placement needs; ensure the case plan is developed collaboratively with the child. All case plan revisions require judicial approval.
8. If the child is placed with a CCI or CPA, update the treatment plan/safety plan to address the runaway behaviors. Ensure the plan is developed collaboratively with the child.
9. Visit the child frequently; treat it as an initial placement in order to work with the child and caregiver to stabilize the placement to prevent further disruption.
10. Assist the child in making a contingency plan for situations that might lead to a recurrence of the runaway episode.

If the child is not located:

1. At least monthly, contact Law Enforcement and persons identified during the comprehensive search which you have reasonable cause to believe the foster child may have contacted.
2. Continue comprehensive efforts to locate the child. (Refer to items above in # 2 (c).
3. Document on a monthly basis the continuing efforts to locate the child/youth.
4. If the child remains on runaway (whereabouts unknown) for 90 days or more, the child is considered on long-term runaway status.
5. If the county department exercises court-ordered temporary custody, the county department on a case by case basis, may consider petitioning the court to be relieved of custody after the child is on long-term runaway status.
 - a. Prior to the decision to petition the court the case manager and supervisor should conduct a staffing with all relevant parties (County Director/Designee, placement provider). Consider the following:
 - i. Whether the department has made sufficient efforts to locate the child,
 - ii. The child's age, number and type of previous placements,
 - iii. The permanency plan and case plan goals,
 - iv. The child's progress and compliance with services,
 - v. Does the child have a runaway history,
 1. Is this a one time event verses chronic runaway pattern,

- 2. Whether the child is running to a specific place or person,
 - vi. Whether there is a plan in place for the child to receive on-going support/services.
- b. Document the reasons for requesting to be relieved of custody in SHINES.
- c. If the court relieves the DFCS of custody, close the foster care case.
- d. If the court does not relieve the county department of custody,
 - i. Maintain an open foster care case and document the filing of the petition and outcome in the SHINES legal tab.
 - ii. Continue comprehensive efforts to locate the child.
 - iii. Continue six-month periodic reviews and permanency hearings on the original schedule as long as DFCS maintains custody of the child that is on runaway status.
- 6. If parental rights have been terminated/surrendered and the county department has permanent custody and placement authority:
 - a. The child's case remains open until the department is relieved of custody through the child reaching 18 years of age.
 - b. Efforts to locate the child are to continue and must be documented at least monthly.

Upon notification by the SSCM that a child has run away, the supervisor will:

- 1. Confirm that the SSCM has completed all required reports and contacts.
- 2. Assist the SSCM in developing and implementing a plan that contains specific strategies to locate the missing child and assure the child's safety as quickly as possible. This plan will include daily and weekly activities to locate the child and include the following:
 - a. Review the ongoing strategies and efforts to locate the child;
 - b. Determine if additional steps should be taken to locate the child;
 - c. Develop a placement plan for when the child is located;
 - d. When appropriate, identify alternative case goals, such as changes in guardianship status, case termination, or referral for services;
 - e. Confirm that the SSCM has updated documentation of efforts to locate the child in SHINES within 72 hours of occurrence.
- 3. Document supervisory guidance in SHINES.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Runaway Children

Runaway children are at great risk of victimization and exploitation. They usually do not perceive the inherent risks or see themselves as potential victims. This is especially true for children where there are present danger indicators. Because of the potential dangers to the child, the child's SSCM is to consider a runaway child as a major event that requires intensive intervention.

Present Danger Indicators:

Conditions or behaviors that, in conjunction with their absence from an environment known to be safe, severely compromises the child's safety. Present danger may include one or more of the following:

1. The child has been or is believed to have been abducted.
2. The child is age 13 or younger.
3. The child has one or more health/mental health conditions that will place the child at serious harm without required treatment.
4. The child is pregnant and/ or parenting and the infant/child is believed to be with him or her.
5. The child has a physical or developmental disability/delay that impairs the child's ability for self care.
6. The child has a substance abuse problem.
7. The child was previously the victim of human trafficking or sexual exploitation
8. The child is in a potentially life threatening situation
9. The child is believed to be with persons who could endanger his or her welfare.

Law Enforcement Report on Missing Children

When notifying law enforcement of a missing child, the following information shall be provided:

1. The child's full name, aliases and nicknames, age and date of birth;
2. The child's social security number; driver's license number, if applicable;
3. The child's description i.e. height, weight, hair color, eye color, skin color; braces, contact lenses, eyeglasses, dentures, gold or silver teeth, impairment (physical, hearing, vision, speech), moles, scars, body piercings, tattoos;
4. Physical or psychological conditions, developmental delays, or any condition that may affect the ability of the child to respond to environmental dangers;
5. Other factors of endangerment, such as young age, hazardous location, medical needs, disability, etc.;
6. Medications or history of suspected substance abuse;
7. Photo of the child; (If written consent is received from the parent/custodian or a court order granting such consent has been received. If the child is in the permanent custody of DFCS, consent can be granted from the DHS Office of Communications.)
8. A copy of the most recent court order granting legal custody of the child and other relevant facts about child's custody status;
9. Type of missing episode (runaway, family abduction, non-family abduction, etc.
10. Where, when, and with whom the child was last seen;
11. Clothing worn, including eyeglasses, hat, book bag, shoes, etc.;
12. Possible method of travel, i.e. car, bicycle, public transportation, or on foot;

13. Names and addresses of foster parents, birthparents, relatives, former foster parents, and friends; Locations and activities the child is known to frequent;
14. Any suspected destinations; and any prior disappearances and outcomes.

Interview with the DFCS or CPA Foster Parent, CCI Staff

The SSCM must explore with the placement provider the following issues:

1. Has the child ever run away before, for how long, and where did the child go?
2. Did the child express a desire to run away, go to a specific place or see a specific person?
3. Did the placement provider observe any cues that the child was planning to run away?
4. Whom is the child permitted to visit? Where (neighborhood, home, school)? Are the parents of the child's friends known by the placement provider?
5. What are the rules of the residence concerning allowable areas for the child to be without first securing caregiver permission?
6. Has the child started any new friendships, or "hanging out" with new people?
7. Has there been any changes in the child's behavior? What are the changes?
8. Are there issues being experienced by the placement provider that may have contributed to the child running away?
9. Who are the child's friends? Is their contact information known to the placement provider?
10. What steps can be taken to avoid future occurrences of running away?

Interview with Child/Youth Returning from Runaway

The SSCM/CPA/CCI staff must explore the following questions with the child/youth:

1. Why did you run away from the placement? (Explore what they expected to accomplish from running away)
2. What lead up to the decision to run away?
3. Who did you run away with?
4. Were you encouraged to run away, if so, by whom?
5. Where did you go? (list all the places)
6. What were all the places you visited while they were gone?
7. Who were some of the people you visited or stayed with while away?
8. What is your relationship with them?
9. How did you survive while away? (food, clothing, shelter, hygiene, money)
10. Did you engage in any risky behaviors? (i.e. sexual activity, substance abuse)
11. Were you the victim of a crime while away? If so, is a referral to law enforcement needed?
12. What was the best thing about being away?
13. What was the worst thing about being away?
14. What did you miss the most while you were away?
15. What would have stopped you from running away?

16. What services/supports did you need while being away?
17. What were some of the reasons you returned?
18. Have you thought about leaving again since you've been back?
19. What would prevent you from running away again?
20. What can the caregiver/DFCS do to prevent you from running away again?
21. What advice would you give another kid who was thinking of running away?

Important Tips When a Child First Enters Care

1. Obtain the child's medical and dental records.
2. Take the child's picture and upload it to SHINES. Update at a minimum, every 6 months.
3. Request parent/guardian's signature on consent forms for DFCS to release the child's picture to NCMEC should the child become missing, or obtain a court order granting such consent. (This is especially important if the child has a history of running away)
4. Provide the child with the contact information for the National Runaway Switchboard (1-800-RUNAWAY) and explain the purpose.
5. Assist the child in making a contingency plan for situations that might lead to the child running away from care.

REFERENCES

RESOURCES FOR MISSING OR ABDUCTED CHILDREN/YOUTH

National Runaway Switchboard (Crisis Hotline for Youth)

1-800-RUNAWAY (1-800-786-2929)

www.nrscrisisline.org/

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

1-703-274-3900

Hotline: 1-800-843-5678

www.missingkids.com

Amber Alert

Georgia Bureau of Investigation

404-244-2600

SHINES TIPS (Protective Services Alerts (aka Runaway Alerts))

Protective Service Alerts can be activated in any active stage in SHINES. For children in DFCS custody the most appropriate stage to activate an alert is in the FCC stage.

Steps for Documenting a CPS Alert

- Click Stage Name hyperlink on the Assigned Workload page
- Click the 2nd level Person tab
- Click the 3rd level Protective Service Alert tab

- Enter the Date and Time
- Enter the Date Absconded (runaway or missing)
- Select Reason For Alert
- Enter a Comment in the text box
- Select The check box next to the name of the Person Absconded
 - You can select one or more names from the list
- Click the **Save button**
 - A **red** exclamation mark will display next to the Runaways and/or missing persons name

To remove the Alert:

- Click Stage Name hyperlink on the Assigned Workload page
- Click the 2nd level Person tab
- Deselect The check box next to the name of the Person Absconded
- Select the **All Person Located** check box

NOTE: You can select this box even if you found one person; the red exclamation mark will only be removed for that individual. The name person who was located will move to the bottom of the list

How to View an Alert

- Click the 1st level Search button
- Select Full Name from the Person Information Search list
- Enter the last Name and First Name
- Enter DOB, Gender, County
- Click the Search button
 - A **red** exclamation mark will display next to the Runaway and/or missing persons name in the Match results on the Person Search page