

DSS Policy and Procedure Guide

Division 03: Child Welfare

Chapter 04: Ongoing Case Management/Practice

Item 001: Outreach to Missing Dependents

Suggested changes send to: [DSS PSOA](#) Mailbox

Issued: **January 23, 2017**

References: Division 31 Regulations [31-320.51](#) and [31-320.711](#); Welfare and Institutions 300 Codes; California Penal Codes; All County Letter (ACL) [16-08](#) and [16-15](#)

Revisions in Red

Replaces Issue: December 2, 2011

[Accessing OMD Emergency Response Worker Services](#) / [Assigned SW Responsibilities](#) / [When a Child/Youth Becomes Missing or Runs Away](#) / [When a Missing Child/Youth is Located](#)

Preamble

Child Welfare Policy and Procedure Guides are meant to be used as tools to relay best practice and staff expectations. It is understood that specific case scenarios may not always align themselves with the stated practices and that at all times what is of paramount importance is the Safety and Well-being of the children we are charged to protect.

Policy

The Department of Social Services (DSS), Child Welfare, in collaboration with the Court and law enforcement, will diligently search for and discover the whereabouts of “Missing Dependents” and provide services to ensure their safety, well-being, permanence and stability. **Dependents include both children under 18 as well as non-minor dependents (NMD).**

Purpose

This PPG provides guidelines to DSS staff to implement outreach, assessment of, and case planning for missing dependents or dependents who chronically run from placement.

Procedure

The Outreach to Missing Dependents (OMD) program may be utilized by staff of all **Child Welfare** task areas or divisions.

OMD Emergency Response (ER) Social Worker (SW) Responsibilities

Perform outreach and investigations to locate missing dependents.

Generate **ER** Referrals on runaway **dependents**, when appropriate.

Follow-up on referrals or incidents generated by other DSS staff, such as Standby or Swing, involving runaway **dependents**.

Provides crisis intervention and participates in case conferences and case planning for newly located dependents with other DSS staff as needed.

Perform other duties such as transport, placement, referral investigation, etc., as needed.

Act as liaison with Fresno Police Department's Child Abuse and Missing Persons Unit.

Collaborate with community partners such as other departmental task areas, the Sanctuary, community resources and law enforcement.

Collaborate with community partners and resources such as law enforcement, Fresno County schools, Fresno Unified School District, and Eligibility to assist in locating missing minors.

Update CWS/CMS to document **any** search activity on the status of runaway **dependents that they have completed or participated in.**

Accessing OMD ER SW Services

For assistance in locating **missing** or runaway minors, **SWs** should email the OMD **ER SW**. Be prepared to provide as much of the following information as available:

- Name and birth date of missing **dependent**;
- Case name and number;
- Date and time when **dependent** went missing;
- Name, address and phone number for last care provider, or notation that the information in CWS/CMS is accurate;
- Report number, officer, and agency, from law enforcement;
- Addresses and phone numbers for known associates with whom **dependent** may be residing;
- Photograph of **dependent** when available;
- [Body Attachment](#)

Assigned SW Responsibilities

When a Child/Youth Becomes Missing or Runs Away

Ensure that a report has been made to law enforcement within two hours of the dependent running. Whoever is the first to discover the dependent as missing (i.e., the care provider, Child Welfare staff, etc.) should contact law enforcement. The assigned SW shall obtain the police report number.

NOTE: If it is believed that the youth may be victim, or at risk of being a victim, of commercial sexual exploitation, this must also be reported to law enforcement within 24 hours. If another person made the initial runaway report and did not mention this fact, the assigned SW will call the appropriate law enforcement agency to add this to the report.

Call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 1-800-843-5678 and provide as much of the following information as possible:

- Child/Youth's full name
- Child/Youth's date of birth
- Date child/youth went missing (to the best of your knowledge)
- City and state from where child/youth went missing
- Guardian information including agency name, and telephone
- Law enforcement report number, agency name and telephone
- Physical descriptive information (e.g. height, weight, hair and eye color, clothing worn)
- Any risks or endangerments to the child
- Circumstances surrounding the incident
- Description of any person who may be with the child.

Immediately (within two hours) inform the youth's parents (for NMDs, only notify the parents if the family is receiving Family Reunification services), attorney, tribal representative, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), and/or any other involved parties of the youth missing. Ask if they have any knowledge of the youth's whereabouts.

Complete and file a [Body Attachment](#) with Juvenile Court within one business day of learning of the youth missing.

Advise Eligibility staff via the [ETA Foster Care Placement](#) mailbox of the youth missing/change in placement.

In accordance with [PPG 03-11-001](#), *Incident Reporting and Investigation*, report the youth missing as a Reportable Incident.

Ensure the Case Plan is current and includes the contact waiver of "Child's whereabouts unknown".

Ensure Court requirements are met including maintaining an active [Body Attachment](#). Since the court cannot proceed on cases involving a missing **dependent**, court reports will include the following:

- Request to continue the hearing until the **dependent** is located;
- Evidence of proper notice;
- Documentation of search efforts;
- Justification and request for any court orders that may be needed for case planning purposes when the **dependent** is located.
- For NMDs, recommend in the court report whether or not the NMD's case should be dismissed. If the NMD is located prior to their 21st birthday, they can choose to re-enter foster care.

Coordinate with the OMD SW to locate the youth, including:

- Contacting significant people in the youth's life, such as family, friends, care providers, service providers, and/or school staff to find out if they know where the youth is located. If not, ask if they are willing to help locate the youth.
- Follow up on any lead(s) received about the youth whereabouts.
- Physically check the places (i.e., residences, school, mall, etc.) where the youth is likely to be.
- Search public locator databases [e.g. California Missing Child Clearinghouse (1-800-222-FIND or missing.persons@doj.ca.gov), National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (<http://cmfc.missingkids.org/Home>), etc.].
- Search social media websites, if authorized.

Document the following in CWS/CMS:

- When the dependent went missing/ran.
- When it was reported to law enforcement that the dependent went missing/ran and the report number.
- The people or entities (i.e. Court, CASA, etc.) entitled to know that the child/youth is missing, and when they were advised of the child/youth missing.
- The plans to return the child/youth to placement.

- Narrate in the contact notebook at least once every month the efforts to locate the missing youth.
- For commercially sexually exploited children (CSEC), ensure the CSEC Data Grid in CWS/CMS is updated as “CSEC Victim While Absent from Placement” – Dependent who has run away, is abducted, or is otherwise absent from placement and is CSE as described in WIC §300(b)(2) or Penal Codes §236.1 or §11165.1 during absence from placement and identified as such upon return to placement. (See screen shot below.)

NOTE: A new row must be created each time a CSE child/youth runs.

The screenshot displays the 'Client Services - Referral' application window. The 'CSEC Data' section is prominent, featuring a table with columns for 'CSEC Type', 'Start Date', and 'End Date'. Below this table are dropdown menus for 'CSEC Type', 'Start Date', and 'End Date'. Other sections include 'Client Information' with fields for name, gender, SSN, and date of birth; 'Other Client Information' with checkboxes for ICWA eligibility and Indian ancestry; 'Language' with primary and secondary language dropdowns; 'Race/Ethnicity' with ethnicity selection options; 'Safety Surrendered Baby' with a checkbox; 'Confidentiality' with an effective date field; 'Drug/Mental Health Issues' with checkboxes for drug, alcohol, and mental health issues; and 'Safety Alert Information' with activation and deactivation details.

When a Missing Child/Youth is Located

When determining appropriate placement options for the youth, ask the youth if there are any prior resource families they would like to be placed with. If yes, check with the resource family about their willingness to have the youth placed back in their home.

Inform the youth's parents (for NMDs, only notify the parents if the family is receiving Family Reunification services), attorney, tribal representative, CASA, and/or any other involved parties of the youth being located.

Recall the [Body Attachment](#) with Juvenile Court.

Contact the Fresno Sheriff's Department at 559-600-8402 to cancel the [Body Attachment](#) (this is a 24-hour number).

Call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 1-800-843-5678 to advise them that the youth has been located.

Advise Eligibility staff via the [ETA Foster Care Placement](#) mailbox of the youth returning/change in placement.

Advise CSEC staff at the [CWS CSEC](#) mailbox that the youth has been located.

No later than three business days after returning to care, the assigned SW will privately interview the youth to assess the following:

- Assess the immediate needs of the youth, including medical care, mental health services, re-enrolling in school, possible law enforcement report due to victimization, etc.
- The primary factor(s) contributing to the child/youth running or missing, and how they may affect placement. When possible, address these factors.
- The child/youth's experiences while on the run/missing, including where the youth may have stayed.
- Whether the child/youth was a possible victim of CSE.
- Explore options to running from the resource family, including developing a safety plan and/or putting supports in place. This can be accomplished through talking with the youth and/or a teaming meeting.

NOTE: Unless otherwise required by law, the information disclosed by the child/youth should not be used to implicate them in a criminal matter or for any purpose other than tailoring services for the child/youth and to meet reporting requirements. For example, if the child/youth prostituted while on runaway, contacting law enforcement would be to report that the child/youth was a victim of CSE, as opposed to reporting a criminal charge of prostitution.