
OVERVIEW OF CHILD PLACEMENT SERVICES

10/02

AGENCY PLAN FOR ABDUCTED OR RUNAWAY FOSTER CHILDREN

The mission of ensuring a safe, permanent nurturing family for children is supported by an agency's capacity to prevent, and manage, instances in which a child in its legal custody or placement authority may be missing or runaway from a foster care placement. Missing foster children are defined as those who have either left care voluntarily (runaways) or involuntarily (abduction or lost), and can not be accounted for by the agency responsible for their care and placement. Each county DSS is required to have an agency policy regarding missing foster children that addresses both prevention and recovery issues.

The agency's plan must describe steps it will take to prevent the abduction or runaway of a foster child. Examples of these efforts may include the following:

- Maintain administrative oversight of its program and practice to ensure agency compliance with laws and policies concerning case contacts, reviews and hearings.
- Maintain photographs of foster children in the case record.
- Design the work schedules of staff to be sufficiently flexible to meet the child's needs.
- Strictly enforce requirements regarding the frequency of direct contact with foster children.
- Assure supervisory review and staffings of all foster care cases on a regular schedule.
- Recruit and support foster homes in communities from which foster children come into care.
- Utilize the child's Permanency Planning Action Team meetings to facilitate community service provision and collaboration to meet individual needs.
- Maintain close communication with foster parents, group home staff, and GALs to assure that information is shared on a timely basis.

The agency's plan must also describe steps it will take to assist in the recovery of a missing child. At a minimum the agency's plan must include the following activities:

- **Provide immediate verbal notification to the appropriate, local law enforcement agency, and follow up by sending subsequent written notification within 48 hours.**
- **Provide immediate verbal notification to the child's family and GAL and discuss collaborative efforts that all parties can take to locate the child.**
- **File a motion with the Court within 10 to 14 days after the child was known to be missing or runaway to inform it of the child's status and efforts being made towards recovery.**
- **Document in writing the agency's continuing efforts to locate the child and to collaborate with law enforcement, GALs, family members and other appropriate persons.**

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Information to be shared with law enforcement includes:

- Biographical information and photographs
- Names and addresses of friends, relatives, present and former foster parents and placement staff, and acquaintances
- Locations which the child tends to frequent
- Suspected destinations and accomplices
- Prior disappearances and outcomes

Other information regarding special circumstances must be particularly highlighted in communications with law enforcement officials. Examples include:

- Child younger than 13 years of age
- Child believed to be out of the zone of safety for his or her age and developmental stage
- Child mentally incapacitated
- Child drug dependent, including prescribed medication and/or illegal substances, and the dependency life-threatening
- Child missing for more than 24 hours before being reported to police
- Child believed to be in a life-threatening situation
- Child believed to be in the company of adults who could endanger his or her safety
- Child's absence inconsistent with his or her established patterns of behavior and the deviation not readily explained
- Other circumstances involved in the disappearance that would cause a reasonable person to conclude that the child should be considered "at imminent risk".