

## Missing Child/Young Adult:

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### *Foster Parent/Caregiver Guide*

*A child/young adult who is missing can mean several things. The circumstances as to why the child/young adult is missing may determine the approach taken to locate and return the child/young adult to where he or she is supposed to be, in foster care, residential care or another location as determined by DHS Child Welfare. Every child/young adult should be considered unsafe if missing including when he or she has occasional contact with the caseworker or a family member despite not being where he or she is supposed to be.*

*Of course when a child/young adult is not where you thought he or she would be (for example at school, in his or her bedroom or at his or her friend's house) it is reasonable to take a few steps to determine if the child/young adult is actually missing or if there was a reasonable explanation they were not in the expected location (look around the house, call the child/young adult's cell phone, check with the school or a neighbor). The specific circumstances and the characteristics of the child are considered when determining what steps to take and how long to take before determining the child/young adult's whereabouts are truly unknown.*



**A. When a Child/Young Adult is Missing: Actions to take**

The following activities should be completed when the foster parent/caregiver receives information that a child/young adult is missing. While there are varying timelines on when to complete the following activities, efforts to locate the child/young adult must be made immediately. It is important to complete these activities every time a child/young adult is missing, even when he or she may have only returned to placement briefly before being missing again.

1. Notify the DHS Child Welfare caseworker for the child/young adult.
2. Report to Law Enforcement (LEA)

Be prepared to provide a recent photo of the child/young adult if one is available, as well as information such as:

- A physical description, including tattoos and piercings, what he or she was wearing when seen last, and a description of personality traits
- Information about the child/young adult's routine, friends, activities, social media presence, etc. including any recent changes in his or her life
- Click on this link to view a checklist of information to gather:

<http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/ChildIsmissing/ch1ck.html>

*Not having this information or collecting this information should not prevent a report from being made.*

The caseworker will follow up with LEA regarding your report.

3. Report to The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)

*When the caregiver is the one to identify the child/young adult is missing they must report to NCMEC by calling the Hotline Number, 1-800-THE-LOST (800-843-5678). The caseworker will also be following up with NCMEC to provide contact information, potentially additional information about the child/young adult and to confirm NCMEC knows the child/young adult is in the custody of child welfare.*

Just like the report to LEA, also be prepared to provide a recent photo and description of the child/young adult. *Not having this information or collecting this information should not prevent a report from being made.*

**Providing information to NCMEC, including the child/young adult's photograph, does not violate Department confidentiality rules.**

This notification must occur if the child/young adult is missing, even if he or she is missing, but maintaining contact and refusing to return to an approved placement.

## B. Search

There are many ways to search for a missing child/young adult, including but not limited to physically looking, using the internet, using the phone, and accessing others to assist with efforts to locate. Keep in communication with the child/young adult's caseworker in regards to how to assist with outreach efforts and providing information on known family and friends, regular hang outs or places frequented, and/or any immediate area around the place the child/young adult was last seen. In conversation, the caseworker and their supervisor will make decisions on how to search for the child that considers safety for those looking for the child.

If the foster parent/caregiver has any contact with the child/young adult, let the caseworker know immediately. The caseworker needs to gather information about the missing child/young adult regarding:

- Their location
- Any information about where they are staying for any period of time
- Any information about individuals they may be with
- Information about their health and safety *Note: If the child/young adult requires medical help, encourage them to seek prompt medical attention by going to the nearest emergency room or urgent care clinic.*
- Whether they are attending school and where
- Whether they are employed and where
- Any contact they have made with family, friends, providers, etc

## C. When a child/young adult is located

Engaging a child/young adult is essential when they return. It is important that they feel welcome, supported and cared about.

*As the caregiver you can ask some key questions to assure the child/young adult is feeling safe:*

- *Are you ok?*
- *Do you need any support or medical attention?*
- *What do you need right now to feel safe?*

When a child/young adult is located, if the child/young adult needs to be seen by a medical professional, the Department or foster parent/caregiver will arrange the appointment within 24 hours.

The caseworker will schedule a team meeting to debrief and develop a plan to support the child/young adult.

The caseworker will be making face to face contact with the child/young adult to gather information to:

- Determine and, to the extent possible, address the primary factors that contributed to the missing status of the child/young adult;
- Determine the child/young adult’s experiences when missing; and
- Determine if the child/young adult is a sex trafficking victim or at risk of being a sex trafficking victim.

Work closely with the caseworker and child/young adult’s service providers to ensure the child/young adult is feeling safe and supported. If you are the foster parent/caregiver that the child/young adult was placed with at the time of the episode the child/young adult went missing, the caseworker will also gather your perspective as to the circumstances around the child/young was missing. Updated Safety Plans or Run Prevention Plans may be made. **Do not gather information about the circumstances around the child/young adult missing;** that information is for the caseworker to gather. The foster parent/caregiver’s job is to help the child/youth feel safe.

**Other Resources:**

Citizen Review Board: Preventing Sex Trafficking & Strengthening Families Act 2014 Summary <http://library.state.or.us/repository/2016/201606281043112/index.pdf>

US Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Trafficking in Persons: What is Human Trafficking <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/otip/about/what-is-human-trafficking>

US Department of Health and Human Services, Family & Youth Services Bureau, Publication: Recognizing and Assisting Youth Victims of Domestic Sex Trafficking <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/resource/bought-and-sold-o>

US Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Trafficking in Persons: Poster <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/otip/resource/sex-trafficking-poster>

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If you have questions, please contact:

Child’s Caseworker: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Certifier: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_