

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

CHILDREN'S DIVISION

P. O. BOX 88

JEFFERSON CITY, MISSOURI

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: CHILDREN'S DIVISION AND CONTRACTED STAFF

FROM: DAVID WOOD, DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: MISSING CHILD/YOUTH POLICY UPDATES

DISCUSSION:

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform staff of changes to the policy surrounding the missing person protocol.

Missing Person Procedures

When children and youth are missing from their CD approved caregivers/placement, they are at heightened risk of experiencing harm, exploitation, and human trafficking. For these reasons, CD staff must ensure that the runaway episodes are reported promptly to those who will assist in searching for the missing child or youth.

Staff are required to ensure that a report has been made to law enforcement within 24 hours. This report can be made by the placement provider, but it is the case manager's ultimate responsibility to ensure it has been done. When reporting to local law enforcement, staff should try to avoid using language that the child or youth has 'runaway' and focus on language that the child or youth is 'missing' and it should be stressed to that agency that the child is in CD custody. Contact information for the case worker must be added to the report. Federal law requires law enforcement to take a report of missing children/youth under the age of twenty-one (21). If the local law enforcement agency refuses to take a missing child/person report, staff should contact the Missouri State Highway Patrol for assistance. This should be done by contacting the MULES trainer in the appropriate troop. Staff should explain the situation and ask the MULES trainer to assist by contacting the local law enforcement agency.

The case manager will also initiate a report to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) within 24 hours. NCMEC will accept a report when given the name of the law enforcement officer that took the report, name of the precinct, and the report number. NCMEC will take a report with the above information even if law enforcement refuses to take a report on youth ages seventeen to twenty-one.

A court may issue an order for the child, after the Division notifies the Juvenile Office in writing about the child being missing. This procedure should be established on a local level as each circuit's response to the notification may vary. If staff experience difficulties in obtaining an order they may make a referral to DLS to request assistance. Staff should utilize the DLS referral form and make sure to include when the child/youth went missing, the last time CD received communication from the child/youth, and any available information about their possible whereabouts. Requests to release the child from jurisdiction should be made separately.

Each time a child is missing from a placement, a new report to law enforcement must be made.

As part of this enhancement, it is now required that contact entries be entered into FACES (as contact notes) to document: efforts made to find the child; information regarding the law enforcement agency, officer's name and the report number; NCMEC number; and other related activities. It is especially important to document all report numbers and attempts to locate the missing child/youth for future reference.

When a child/youth is located, there are several factors that should be considered including any trauma the child/youth may have experienced. Updates on trauma sensitive responses have been included in the Child Welfare Manual.

Protective Service Alerts

As part of the updates to the Missing Person protocol, CD will discontinue the use of the Protective Service Alerts (PSA) procedures.

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| NECESSARY ACTION | |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review this memorandum with all Children's Division staff. 2. Review revised Child Welfare Manual chapters as indicated below. 3. All questions should be cleared through normal supervisory channels and directed to: | |
| CENTRAL OFFICE CONTACT Kara Wilcox Kara.B.Wilcox-Bauer@dss.mo.gov | MANAGER CONTACT Sara Smith Sara.E.Smith@dss.mo.gov |
| CHILD WELFARE MANUAL REVISIONS Section 4 (Alternative Care), Chapter 4 (Working with Children), Subsection 9 (Missing Person Report Procedures) | |
| FORMS AND INSTRUCTIONS N/A | |
| REFERENCE DOCUMENTS AND RESOURCES | |

RELATED STATUTE

N/A