

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
Child and Family Services Agency



**Business Process: Missing and Absconded Children**

**I. POLICY**

The Agency has established these requirements and instructions for CFSA and contracted agency staff when children who are in CFSA custody or protective supervision, or who are served through an in-home case are reported or believed to be missing.

**II. DEFINITIONS**

*Abducted* – a child in CFSA custody or who has an open in-home case whose whereabouts are unknown and it is known or suspected that the child has been taken from his or her placement (or home) or other location by a person or persons either known or unknown to the child, in violation of a valid court order regarding the child's custody status.

*Abscondence* - a child who is absent from his or her place of residence without the knowledge or consent of the person(s) responsible for the child's welfare.

*High Risk Child*- a child who is missing or has absconded and whose safety is compromised for one or more of the following reasons:

- ) The child is age 12 or younger.
- ) The child has one or more serious health conditions that require treatment or ongoing care (including prescription medications) that without would cause serious harm to the child.
- ) The child is pregnant and there is a concern that the unborn child or children in her care may be at risk.
- ) The child is parenting and the infant/child is believed to be with him or her and there are concerns regarding the safety of the infant child.
- ) The child has emotional problems that require treatment and without treatment the child is believed to be a danger to themselves or others.
- ) The child has a developmental disability that impairs the child's ability to care for her/himself.
- ) The child has a serious documented alcohol and/or substance abuse problem and could be a danger to self or others.
- ) The child is absent under circumstances inconsistent with his or her established patterns of behavior and this absence cannot be readily explained (i.e., is believed to have been abducted).
- ) The child is believed to be a victim of commercial sexual exploitation/sex trafficking. See the [Sex Trafficking Identification and Response administrative issuance](#) for more information.

*Missing Child* - a child under 21 years of age who is absent from his or her place of residence without the knowledge and/or consent of the child's caregiver, resource provider or CFSA, where there has been no contact with the child, and whose whereabouts are unknown.

*Unauthorized Absence* – a child who is absent from his or her place of residence for a short periods but there is no apparent risk and they are not believed to be immediately at risk of harm and whose whereabouts are known. In some cases a child may be absent for short periods repeatedly on a regular basis. The risk indicators above should be used to assess risk in these cases.

Commented [A1]: How is this assessed?

Commented [A2]: Has this been discussed with MPD? They don't identify youth over the age of 15 as "Critically Missing." Their efforts are different depending on the age of the child.

Commented [A3]: Review for adjective-noun agreement

## PROCEDURES

### A. Reporting Requirements for Resource Providers and Caregivers

1. In the event that a child is believed to be missing, to have been abducted, or to have absconded, the resource provider, group home provider, or caregiver (the child's parent, guardian, or legal custodian) shall:
  - a. Make reasonable efforts to locate the missing or absconded child (e.g., contact neighbors, the school, and the missing or absconded child's friends).
    - i. In instances where a child's whereabouts are known, immediately make reasonable efforts to return the child home.
    - ii. In instances where a child's whereabouts are unknown and there has been no contact with the child, follow items b and c below.
  - b. File a police report with the local law enforcement agency (in the jurisdiction where the home or facility is located or where the child was last seen) within 1 hour from the time the child is missing or absconded.
    - i. Group home providers that are located in the District of Columbia shall make an electronic report to the Telephone Reporting Unit (TRU) system at <http://311.dc.gov/> within 1 hour from the time the child is deemed missing or absconded, unless the child is identified as being high risk (see *Definitions section above*).
    - ii. If the missing child is deemed high risk, District of Columbia group home providers shall file a police report with the local law enforcement immediately via 911.
    - iii. If the missing or absconded child is not deemed high risk and is not on an unauthorized absence, District of Columbia group home providers shall file a police report with the local law enforcement immediately via 911 if the provider has not had contact with the child.
  - iii.iv. All group home providers must also complete an Unusual Incident report and send the form to the appropriate social worker, supervisory social worker, and program monitor.
  - c. Immediately report the missing or absconded child to the CFSA Hotline (202-671-SAFE), the assigned social worker, and provide both the Hotline, and the social worker with the police report number.
    - i. In instances where a police report number is not obtained or provided, the resource provider or caregiver shall obtain the name of the police officer who received the call and the reason the report was not accepted and provide that information to the social worker, who shall document this information in FACES.NET.
2. If the child is located or returns home, the resource provider or caregiver shall immediately notify the local law enforcement agency, CFSA's Hotline, the assigned social worker, and other relevant parties who may have been notified that the child was missing or absconded.

### B. Reporting Requirements for the Social Worker

1. Within 24 hours of learning that a child is missing or has absconded, the social worker shall complete the following steps:
  - a. Contact the resource provider or caregiver to confirm the report and to verify whether or not the missing or absconded child has returned.
    - i. If the child has returned, the social worker shall follow the steps outlined in *Procedure E* of this business process.
    - ii. In instances where the child's whereabouts are known, the social worker shall make immediate efforts to return the child home. The social worker shall document these efforts in FACES.NET.

**Commented [A4]:** Would CFSA consider including reporting failures in Faces so that reporting compliance can be discussed when placement is deciding whether to place other children in the resource provider's home?

**Commented [A5]:** Added because children in group homes are especially vulnerable for exploitation if no one has had contact with the child.

**Commented [A6]:** Does this apply to group home providers?

- iii. If the child has not returned, the social worker shall verify that the resource provider or caregiver has filed a police report with the local law enforcement agency. The social worker shall also document the police report number in FACES.NET.
  - iv. If the report was not made, the social worker shall contact the law enforcement agency in the missing or absconded child's jurisdiction to make the report. The social worker shall ensure receipt of a police report number.
- b. Immediately provide verbal notification (and when appropriate, provide written notification by email or letter) to the following entities or individuals that the child is missing or absconded:
- i. CFSA Hotline (if the resource provider or caregiver has not already alerted the Hotline)
  - ii. Supervisory social worker
  - iii. Missing or absconded child's parents or legal guardians and significant relatives (e.g., relatives who may have been involved in case planning, and with whom the child has frequent contact or a meaningful relationship)
    - )] When contacting the missing or absconded child's parent or legal guardians and significant relatives the social worker shall advise them to contact the Agency if any information regarding the child's whereabouts is known.
  - iv. Family Court (child's neglect judge)
  - v. Assistant Attorney General (AAG)
  - vi. Guardian ad litem (GAL)
  - vi-vii. School
  - vii-viii. Other appropriate [service providers and](#) members of the child's case planning team
2. The social worker shall use reasonable efforts to locate the missing or absconded child within 24 hours from receipt of notice that the child is missing. These efforts may include, but are not limited to contacting the following entities or individuals:
- a. Any other resource providers with whom the child is known to have now or has had a close or long term relationship
  - b. Relatives, including the child's parents and siblings
  - c. Neighbors and landlord of the child's last known address
  - d. School and school staff
  - e. Probation or parole officer, if applicable
3. Social workers shall follow up on all leads by telephone and/or home visits as new information is received regarding the location of a missing or absconded child.
4. If the child is located upon completion of the social worker's search, he or she shall follow the steps outlined in *Procedure E*.
5. If the missing or absconded child is under protective supervision or is in the legal custody of CFSA and efforts to locate him or her are unsuccessful [within 24 hours](#), the social worker shall immediately request assistance from the absconder unit to locate the missing or absconded child. To initiate this request, the social worker shall complete a request for a custody order through the Abscondence Screen in FACES.NET and complete the following additional tasks:
- a. Follow-up with the absconder unit to review the FACES.NET request for a custody order and ensure it is accurate and complete.
  - b. Upon receipt, sign the *Request for the Issuance of a Custody Order Form (Attachment A)* that is generated by the absconder investigator and forward the form to the supervisory social worker for review and signature. Return the form to the absconder investigator within 1 business day of receipt.
  - c. If a warrant has been issued for the child, the social worker shall notify and provide the absconder unit with a copy of the arrest warrant, as well as the delinquency/PINS number.

Commented [A7]: This needed a timeframe.

d. Notify the Placement Reconciliation Unit to initiate a bed hold on the placement or submit a replacement request if the child will not return to their previous placement.

J. When it is in the child's best interest to hold their placement longer than 3 days, a Request for Bed Hold Payment for Children in Abscondence form shall be completed.

6. If the missing or absconded child is identified as being at high-risk, the social worker shall initiate a Child Locator Staffing. The social worker shall consult with the supervisory social worker to determine the timeframe to conduct the staffing, which should take place as soon as possible, but no later than 2 business days from the time the child was deemed missing or absconded.

a. The Child Locator Staffing shall include the following individuals:

- i. Child's family, if deemed clinically appropriate by the social worker
- ii. Social worker or supervisory social worker
- iii. Absconder investigator
- iv. Child's resource provider
- v. Assigned AAG and the GAL
- vi. Placement Services Administration (PSA)
- vii. Other relevant parties that impact the case

b. The Child Locator Staffing shall discuss why the child has been identified as being at "high-risk".

c. Resources and immediate supports for the family while the child is missing shall be identified, as well as services for the child and family once the child returns.

d. A written plan shall be developed to locate the child. Responsibility for each action step in the plan will be designated during the meeting.

*Note: The Child Locator Staffing shall determine the need for the social worker to contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) at 1-800-843-5678.*

e. A plan that is developed at the child locator staffing shall supersede any other plan.

**Commented [A8]:** How does this payment differ from regular stipend?

7. The social worker shall maintain weekly contact with the child's resource provider.

8. The social worker shall consult with police/law enforcement weekly concerning progress towards locating the child and any leads the police have discovered.

9. If the social worker discovers information that the child may be residing in another State, the social worker shall make weekly contact the police in the state where it is believed the child is residing.

7-10. The social worker shall document in FACES.NET all ongoing attempts to locate the missing or absconded child.

**Commented [A9]:** CFSA should report all missing (see above definition) children to NCMEC.

### C. Requirements for Supervisory Social Workers

Upon notification by the social worker that a child is missing or absconded, the supervisory social worker shall complete the following tasks:

1. Confirm that the social worker has completed the requirements listed in *Procedure B* above.
2. Assist the social worker in developing and implementing a plan that includes specific strategies to locate the missing or absconded child and assure his or her safety.
3. Review and sign the *Request for the Issuance of Custody Order Form* and ensure submission to the absconder unit within 1 business day from the time of signature.
4. Review and, if necessary, revise the plan with the social worker during supervision, or as necessary to ensure progress is made toward locating the missing or absconded child.
5. Inform all staffing members of any revisions to the plan.

#### D. The Role of the Absconder Unit

1. Upon receipt of the *Request for the Issuance of a Custody Order Form* from the social worker, the absconder investigator shall submit the form to [the AAG so that the AAG can notify counsel and submit the form via CaseFile Express to the Juvenile Clerk's office](#) for processing. (See Procedure B (5) for the *Request for the Issuance of a Custody Order process*).
2. Once the custody order is issued by the judge, [forwarded to counsel](#), and forwarded to the absconder unit supervisor or designee, he or she shall assign the case to an absconder investigator for review and follow-up within 24 hours.
  - J The absconder unit will not conduct a community search for the missing or absconded child until a custody order is issued and received by the absconder investigator, but will conduct preliminary searches utilizing online resources and information found in the case record.
3. The assigned absconder investigator shall contact the social worker, [the child's GAL and/or the child's counsel](#) within 24 hours of receiving the signed custody order.
4. The absconder investigator shall use reasonable efforts to locate the missing or absconded child. Such efforts may include but are not limited to contacting the following individuals or entities, and completing any associated steps towards locating the child:
  - a. The assigned social worker
    - J The absconder investigator shall obtain relevant information from the social worker regarding the child and where s/he may be located.
  - b. All known family members of the missing or absconded child
  - c. Teachers, counselors, and other personnel at the school (including vocational schools) where the child is known to have last attended, as well as any previous school where the child is known to have maintained close relationships with any personnel.
    - J The absconder investigator shall also visit the neighborhood where the school is located, as well as the neighborhood where the child has been known to frequent.
  - d. The local law enforcement agency, emergency shelters, and homeless youth programs (to verify that the child is not in their custody or care), when appropriate.
    - J The absconder investigator shall also review the Washington Area Law Enforcement System and the National Crime Information Center database for any leads.
  - e. Most recent resource provider and any other resource providers with whom the child is known to have now or has had a close or long term relationship.
  - f. Neighbors or the landlord of the missing or absconded child's last known address.
  - g. Friends and classmates of the child, including any known boyfriends, girlfriends, or anyone else in the community with whom the child may have developed a significant relationship.
  - h. Juvenile and adult detention centers, or the missing or absconded child's parole/probation officer, if applicable.
  - h.i. [Law enforcement in other States when the absconder investigator discovers that the child may be in another state.](#)
5. The absconder investigator shall maintain open communication with the social worker requesting the search to obtain needed information and provide updates on efforts made to locate the missing or absconded child. Updates shall occur on a weekly basis.
6. The absconder investigator shall update the FACES Contact Screen with all efforts made to locate the missing or absconded child within 48 hours.
7. If the child is missing or in abscondence for over a month, or is high risk, and whereabouts are unknown, or s/he is believed to be outside of the Metropolitan area, the absconder investigator and

social worker shall jointly contact the NCMEC at 1-800-843-5678 (<http://www.missingkids.com/home>) for assistance.

8. If the missing or absconded child is located by the absconder investigator, he or she shall complete the following tasks:
  - a. Immediately notify the social worker and/or supervisor and return the missing or absconded child to CFSA.
    - ) The social worker shall meet the absconder investigator at the Healthy Horizons Assessment Center(HHAC) to have the child screened and placed. *Note: the absconder investigator shall not assist with screenings or placements.*
  - b. For afterhours CFSA assigned cases, CPS-I shall assist with the screening and placement of the child.
    - ) For private agency cases, the on call social worker for that agency shall conduct the screening and placement
  - c. Forward (via email) the *Request for the Withdrawal of Custody Order Form (see Attachment B)* to [the AAG so that the AAG can notify counsel and submit the form via CaseFileXpress the Juvenile Clerk's Office](#) for review and processing.
9. If the missing or absconded child is located, but not returned to the Agency, the absconder investigator shall alert the social worker to schedule a case staffing (see procedure E (3) below).
10. Following the case staffing, the absconder investigator shall forward (via email) the *Request for the Withdrawal of Custody Order Form* to [the AAG so that the AAG can notify counsel and submit the form via CaseFileXpress the Juvenile Clerk's Office](#) for review and processing.
- ~~11.~~ The absconder investigator shall contact MPD to close out the police report and request MPD to remove the child's photo, name, and contact information from any of MPD's social media missing person alerts.
- ~~12.11.~~ The absconder investigator shall enter a contact note in FACES.NET indicating that the child has been located and the custody order withdrawn, and the absconder unit case closed.

#### E. Social Worker's Tasks When a Missing or **absconded-Absconded** Child is Located

1. Once a child is located, the social worker shall engage in a conversation with the child within 48 hours to determine why the child was missing or absconded and to prevent further disruptions. During the conversation, the social worker shall:
  - a. make close observations of any evidence of physical abuse, substance abuse, or new tattoos/brands the child may have gotten while on runaway
  - b. pay close attention to any unexplained purchases such as new clothes, cellular phone, sex paraphernalia, large amounts of cash or any other known indicators of possible sex or labor trafficking victimization

If during the conversation the social worker suspects the child has been a victim of sex or labor trafficking or the child disclose being a victim of sex or labor trafficking, the social worker shall call the CFSA Hotline and notify the police within 24 hours. The social worker shall then follow the CFSA protocol for sex trafficking identification and response.
- ~~4.2.~~ The social worker shall complete the following tasks upon the child's return:
  - a. Immediately assess the child's safety using XXXX tool/procedure.
  - b. Ensure the child has transportation to is screened at the HHAC (if applicable) for screening
  - c. Notify the following parties of the child's return within 24 hours of receiving notice of the child's location:
    - i. Absconder investigator

**Commented [A10]:** Has MPD delineated what efforts they will put forth for non "critically missing" youth?

**Commented [A11]:** Is there a standardized measure/scale/tool that social workers will use so that they all ask the same questions and CFSA leadership can easily monitor for trends?

**Commented [A12]:** Using a standard tool could be helpful here.

**Commented [A13]:** If the child is missing as defined above, wouldn't it always be applicable to do a health screen?

- ii. Local law enforcement agency
  - iii. Child's parents, resource provider, and other relatives, as appropriate
  - iv. Family Court
  - v. AAG
  - vi. GAL
  - vii. Other relevant parties who may have been notified that the child was missing or absconded
3. A Return Staffing shall be held for all missing or absconded children who return to CFSA after 72 hours and are chronic absconders or are high risk, and those who are located but do not returned to the Agency. The social worker shall schedule the Return Staffing to include the following participants:
- a. Social worker and supervisory social worker
  - b. Child, as appropriate
  - c. Absconder investigator
  - d. Child's resource provider or caregiver
  - e. Assigned AAG and GAL
  - f. Placement Resource Development Specialist
  - g. Trauma coach/ clinical services staff
  - h. Nurse care manager, as applicable
- Note: the Return Staffing shall be scheduled within 1 business day of locating the child. In cases involving sex trafficking, this staffing would replace the internal commercial sex trafficking committee (CSEC) meeting. If the in foster care and not returning to the same placement, the Return Staffing replaces the Disruption Staffing.*
4. The Return Staffing shall follow the consultation and information sharing framework and serve as a formal hand-off between the absconder investigator and social worker.
- a. A plan for ensuring the child's safety, how to prevent future abscondences and next steps shall be developed during the meeting.
  - b. The child's current placement shall be evaluated and a determination of the most appropriate placement for the child based on his or her safety and well-being and the circumstances which led to the child being missing or in abscondence shall be made.
5. The social worker shall document all tasks completed upon locating the missing or absconded child and the child's return in FACES.NET.



**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
Child and Family Services Agency**



**Request for the Issuance of a Custody Order for a Neglect/Abuse Missing/Absconded Child**

**Commented [A14]:** Would it be helpful to include the GAL and parent's attorneys contact information on this form? Something like a "Copies to" field?

<b>D.C. Superior Court Juvenile Neglect Clerk 500 Indiana Ave, N.W., Room 4310 Washington, D.C. 20001 Phone: (202) 879-1319 Fax: (202) 879-0099; Backup Fax : (202) 737-0807</b>		Date:		
		Time:		
Respondent's Name (Last, First, Middle Initial)	Docket Number	Social File Number	Race:	Height:
			DOB:	Weight:
Respondent's Home Address and Telephone Number:				
Parent(s)/Guardian's Name, Address and Telephone Number:				
Name, Address, and Telephone Number of Facility From Which Respondent Went Missing/absconded:				
Date and Time of Occurrence:				
Circumstances Surrounding Occurrence:				
Is the Respondent a Suicide Risk? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No:    If Yes    Please Explain:				
Does the Respondent Have Any Health Problems? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No				
Is the Respondent Taking Any Medication? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No				
Does the Respondent have a GAL? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No				
If the Answer to Any of These Questions is <u>Yes</u> , Please Explain:				
Special Instructions: (Places Frequented; Regular Companions; boyfriend/girlfriend; Visible Scars; etc.)				
Name Address, and Telephone Number of Respondent's Attorney/GAL:				
Name Address, and Telephone Number of Respondent's Parent's Attorney:				
Custody Order Request By:				
<u>Printed Name:</u>	<u>Signature:</u>	<u>Phone Number:</u>	<u>Date:</u>	
Supervisor of Requester:				
<u>Printed Name:</u>	<u>Signature:</u>	<u>Phone Number:</u>	<u>Date:</u>	
<b>RESPONDENT IS NOT TO BE TREATED AS AN OFFENDER; THE ABOVE NAME RESPONDENT IS A NEGLECTED/ABUSED CHILD. AFTER CHILD IS TAKEN INTO CUSTODY, BRING CHILD TO THE CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES AGENCY: ADDRESS: 200 I Street SE, Washington DC 20003 Fax to Assistant Attorney General at (202) 727-3737</b>				



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**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
Child and Family Services Agency**



**Request for the Withdrawal of Custody Order for a Juvenile/Neglect Missing/Absconded Child  
Or Youth**

**Commented [A15]:** Would it be helpful to include the GAL and parent's attorneys contact information on this form? Something like a "Copies to" field?

<b>To: Superior Court of the District of Columbia</b> Family Division Juvenile/Neglect Branch Room 4310 FAX: (202) 879-0099; BACKUP: (202) 737-0807 Date: _____			
Respondent's Name (Last, First, Middle Initial)	Docket Number	Social File Number	Date of Birth
Date Custody Order Issued:			
Facility Requesting the Withdrawal of the Custody Order: <b>Child and Family Services Agency Child Locator and Support Services</b>			
Address of Facility: <b>200 I Street, SE</b>			
Telephone Number of Facility: <b>(202) 727-7321</b>			
Circumstances Surrounding Reason for the Withdrawal:			
Name and Telephone Number of Social Worker:			
Name and Telephone Number of Respondent's Attorney <u>GAL</u> :-; <u>Name Address, and Telephone Number of Respondent's Parent's Attorney</u>			
Withdrawal of Custody Order Request By:			
<u>Printed Name:</u>	<u>Signature:</u>	<u>Phone Number:</u>	<u>Date:</u>
Supervisor of Requester			
<u>Printed Name:</u>	<u>Signature:</u>	<u>Phone Number:</u>	<u>Date:</u>

**Please present the child for a hearing before me on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ A.M./P.M.**

**Quash Custody Order; no hearing necessary**

\_\_\_\_\_  
JUDGE'S SIGNATURE