

Tips for Reporting and Locating Missing Children and Youthⁱ

The federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act requires that diligent efforts be made to locate a child who is missing. These diligent efforts are meant to locate the child so that the responsible adult will be able to identify whether the child or youth is has runaway or possibly been abducted, or (depending on the child's age, development and history) merely hiding or delayed in returning from an activity.

Foster homes and caregivers should know where a child is or is expected to be at all times. If the child cannot be located, licensed foster homes and caregivers are required by regulation NAC 424.476 to immediately verbally notify local law enforcement and the agency responsible for supervising the placement of the child. If the foster parents and residential care staff becomes aware that a child's whereabouts are unknown, immediate efforts should be taken to locate the child. No more than 3 hours from the time you determine the child is missing should a report be made to law enforcement and the supervising agency.

The length of time between the onset of the diligent efforts to locate the child, and the determination that the child is missing may vary based on a number of factors, including but not limited to:

- 1) the age and developmental level of the child.
 - If a preschool child disappears, the absence should be reported immediately. If a teenager with no physical, cognitive, or emotional issues misses curfew, the situation can be dealt with by making diligent efforts to locate the youth and then, if the youth is located within a couple of hours, logical consequences to such behavior is the appropriate response;
- 2) the health status of the child. Children with medical needs that require regular medication and/or monitoring should be reported immediately.
- 3) the child's history. Children considered to be in a high-risk category should be reported immediately, including but not limited to children with:
 - Mental health issues which could pose a danger to themselves or others;
 - History of substance abuse
 - History of sex trafficking or for whom previous screenings have shown "high risk" for sex trafficking.
 - Children younger than 13 years of age
 - Previous runaways
 - Abduction is suspected.

The following are some suggestions on how foster parents, relative caregivers, residential staff and caseworkers can go about making efforts to locate children in foster care whose whereabouts are unknown. Law enforcement may ask if you have conducted these initial location efforts. If you suspect that a child has been abducted by someone other than a parent, immediately contact local law enforcement and NCMEC.

- 1) If the child is young, search anywhere a young child could hide or crawl into and not be able to get out such as closets, piles of clothes, in and under beds, inside large appliances, in car trunks, the crawl space underneath the house.

- 2) Check with the child's friends and neighbors. Be careful to respect confidentiality of the child and their family when contacting others.
- 3) If the youth has a cell phone, make repeated attempts to call or text the youth directly. If the youth answers the phone, confirm that the youth is safe, and determine where he/she is currently located. Make arrangements for the child's return.
- 4) If the youth does not have a cell phone, identify the last known location of the youth. Contact anyone associated with that location. If the youth was scheduled to participate in an activity contact the adult who is responsible for the activity or the parent of another child who was participating in the activity (e.g., a teammate's parent). Be careful to respect the child and their family's confidentiality.
- 5) Contact faculty and staff of the school the child most recently attended, as well as professionals who work with the child.
- 6) If it is safe to do so, check previous locations a youth has runaway to or is known to frequent.
- 7) Contact the child's parent, guardian, or other family members by phone, text or other means of communication that have been agreed upon or approved previously with the family. If the child had been on a home visit and hasn't yet returned, the family can confirm whether the child is still there or has left.
- 8) Check social media. Many youths have social media accounts, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. These sites may be helpful in locating the child as the child may post a picture that indicated where he/she is currently located. Additionally, the posts or tweets of family members and friends may provide clues as to whether the child is with them. Information from social media may be provide information that can be used when contacting the child's friends and family members as they may be familiar with the location or other individuals in the picture or post. It is important to remember that to protect confidentiality, foster parents and caregivers may not identify youth as being in foster care on social media.
- 9) If it is age-appropriate for the youth, contact local jails or detention facilities.
- 10) Contact local hospital.

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