Missing Children Guide

Reporting, Location, Stabilization and Prevention

Introduction

The Missing Children Guide was created by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Central Office Child Location Staff in collaboration with DCF local Child Location Staff, Community-Based Care (CBC) providers and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE). The purpose of this guide is to provide user-friendly information to caregivers, caseworkers, Child Protective Investigators and other relevant individuals to assist them in knowing what to do when a child under court ordered supervision or in an active child protective investigation goes missing.

Instructions included in this guide for reporting, documentation, location and recovery are based on DCF Operating Procedure (CFOP) 175-85, *Prevention, Reporting, and Services to Missing Children,* the Florida Safe Families Network - Missing Child Report (MCR), Florida Administrative Code (FAC) 65C and Florida Statute (FS) Chapter 39. Tips and effective practices provided in all sections of this guide are based on input from the field and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement/Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse (FDLE/MEPIC) and on national research related to children missing from the care of the state.

The Missing Children Guide will be updated at least annually to incorporate effective and best practices and changes in regulatory requirements. When the Missing Children Guide is updated only the pages that were updated will be sent out. Also, an update log will be sent out each time the guide is updated. The log will contain the Update Number which will be the two digit month, then a dash, then the two digit year the update was issued. A list of what was updated will be given and the effective date for said update. The log will be sent out in a table format.
You may contact the DCF Central Office Child Location Unit for any update information or any questions concerning the Missing Children Guide.

Developed by

The Department of Children and Families (DCF), Community Based Care providers (CBC), and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement/Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse (FDLE/MEPIC)

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Section I: Reporting Children Missing

This section is for use by individuals responsible for determining if a child is missing from the care of the Department, taking initial steps to locate the child and reporting the child missing to local law enforcement and other relevant individuals within required time-frames.

Step One: Determine if the child is missing

1. When should a child be considered missing from the Department's care?

A child should be considered missing when the child's whereabouts are unknown and:
1. The child has been adjudicated dependent and placed in out-of-home or in-home care; and/or
2. The child is the subject of an active protective supervision case; and/or
3. The child is the subject of an active or emergency shelter order; and/or
4. The child is the subject of an active abuse investigation, there is a preponderance of evidence to support the abuse, neglect or abandonment allegations, a Take into Custody Order will be sought for the child and:
   - the parent or legal custodian has been notified of the requirement to report a change in residence or location of the child to the protective investigator and the parent causes the child to move,
   - or allows the child to be moved, to a different residence or location,
   - or the child leaves the residence on his or her own accord and the parent or legal custodian does not notify the protective investigator of the move within 2 business days.

2. When should a child <u>not</u> be considered missing from the care of the department?

A child should <u>not</u> be considered missing when:
1. The child is receiving Voluntary Protective Services (VPS); or
2. The child is the subject of an active abuse investigation in which no contact has been made with the family and there is insufficient probable cause to petition the court for a Take Into Custody Order (65-29.013, F.A.C.); or
3. The child's whereabouts are known and a social service provider or law enforcement agency has physically confirmed the child's whereabouts; or
4. A child, age 12 or older, states they are going to a location unsupervised and no effort is made to confirm the child is at that location, or any other location where the child might have gone; or
5. The child returns to their placement within four (4) hours and a Law Enforcement report number has not yet been initiated. **Important: Once a Law Enforcement report number has been issued, regardless of time frame and/or recovery, a Missing Child Report (MCR) must be completed.**

Tip:
- Not all children who have contact with the Department, or other social service agencies, can be considered missing from care.
- For questions on how to determine if a child is missing, please refer to FAC 65-29.013, 65-30.019 or F.S. Chapter 39.
- For questions regarding how to report a child missing, please contact your local Child Location Point of Contact, your Regional Criminal Justice Coordinator or the DCF Child Location Unit located at Headquarters in Tallahassee.

Step Two: Report the child missing

1. A child is missing, now what?

Once it has been determined that a child meets the criteria for reporting a child as missing, be sure to follow the steps below:

A. For children age eleven (11) or younger: contact local law enforcement immediately to report the child missing

B. For children of any age who are believed to be at a high risk: for example, the child is believed to be with someone who may harm them, may be a risk to themselves, or has a known medical condition or disability, contact local law enforcement immediately to report the child missing

C. For children age twelve (12) or older who willingly left care, but are not at high risk make immediate efforts to locate the child prior to contacting local law enforcement

- Valid efforts to locate a child prior to contacting local law enforcement include all those that apply to the child, but are not limited to the following:
    - Contact friends
    - Contact neighbors
    - Contact school
    - Check locations the child is known to frequent
    - Contact relatives
    - Contact employers/co-workers
    - Contact former placements
    - Contact DJJ case managers
    - Contact former DCF/CBC case managers
    - Contact local hospitals
    - Check local transportation terminals

Important Note:

Efforts to locate the child prior to contacting local law enforcement should not exceed four (4) hours from the time it was learned the child went missing from care. If after four (4) hours the child's location remains unknown, contact local law enforcement to report the child missing. Please be advised that you must be conducting efforts to locate the child during the four hour period.

2. What information must be provided to local law enforcement when reporting a child missing?

When reporting a child missing to local law enforcement, be prepared to provide the following information:

- Documentation that states that the child is in the court-ordered custody of, or under the supervision of the Department, for example, the shelter order or order of adjudication or an open investigation with a preponderance of evidence.
- The child's full name including any known aliases and nicknames
- The child's date of birth
- The child's Social Security Number
- A detailed physical description of the child, including:
    - Height
    - Weight
    - Eye color
    - Hair color
    - Skin complexion
    - Condition of teeth

- Any identifying scars, marks, or tattoos including a brief description of the location and design of the scar, mark, or tattoo
- A description of what the child was last seen wearing
- The last known location of the child
- A recent photo of the child
- Whether the child may be in the company of a companion/abductor (be prepared to give as much demographic and descriptive information for this individual as possible)
- Whether the child took any clothing or personal belongings with them
- The overall mental or emotional state of the child
- Whether the child has any known medical conditions that require immediate or ongoing care
- Whether the child is currently taking any medication
- Whether the child has run away in the past and if so, where the child was located
- A list of the child's known friends and associates
- A brief description of what efforts, if any, have already been made to find the child
- The name and contact information of the child's primary case worker
- Information on whether the child has been receiving or making/sending any unusual phone calls or emails

3. What if local law enforcement refuses to take a missing child report?

If the law enforcement agency refuses to accept a missing person's report, the following steps should be taken:

A. Caregivers should:
1. Ask the responding officer to explain why they will not take a missing child report, and
2. Contact the child's case manager and explain the situation to them

B. Case managers should:
1. Contact the local law enforcement agency that refused to take the missing person's report and attempt to report the child as missing, and
2. If the officer still refuses to take the report, the case manager should contact the shift supervisor and attempt to resolve the issue preventing the agency from accepting the missing child report, and
3. If the local law enforcement agency still refuses to take a missing child report, the case manager should contact their local child location point of contact for assistance
4. If the local child location point of contact requires further assistance in getting a child reported as missing to local law enforcement they should contact their Regional Criminal Justice Coordinator or the DCF Child Location Unit in Tallahassee.

Important Note:
Effective July 1, 2008, House Bill 7077 went into effect which gives law enforcement the ability to accept and investigate a missing child report from the Department or its contracted providers or from a Sheriff's Office that conducts child protective investigative services for the Department. This amends Florida Statute 937.021.

4. What are Pick-Up Orders and how should they be used?

What is a Pick-Up Order?
- A pick-up order is a court order that notifies local law enforcement that they (local law enforcement) are required to deliver a child to the care/supervision of the Department upon the child being taken into custody.
- Once the court has issued a pick-up order that order is transferred to the local sheriff's department. There is no state or federal requirement that a pick-up order be assigned as an active case to any unit or deputy within the sheriff's department nor is there any requirement that the pick-up order be entered into any local, state, or federal data information system.

Important Note:
> It is for the reasons stated above that the seeking of, or granting of, a pick-up order should never be considered to meet any requirement associated with reporting a child as missing to local law enforcement.

When should a pick-up order be sought for a child that is considered to be missing?

- **For a missing child that has already been adjudicated dependent and placed in out-of-home care, there is no reason to seek a pick-up order.**
  - **The only exceptions to this are:**
    1. **if the court orders that a pick-up order be issued or**
    2. **local law enforcement refuses to take a missing child report absent a pick-up order or**
    3. **there is an active abuse investigation with a preponderance of evidence to support the allegations.**

Step Three: Notify the child's primary case worker

1. A child has been identified and reported as missing to local law enforcement, what next?

Make sure that the child's case manager is immediately informed that the child is missing so that they can enter a Missing Child Report in the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) which must be completed within one working day of notification.

This section is for use by DCF or contracted Community-Based Care employees who are responsible for entering the Missing Child Report (MCR) into the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN). If you do not know who is responsible for completing the MCR, please contact your local Child Location Point of Contact or the Regional Criminal Justice Coordinator (RCJC) concerning the policies and procedures in your area.

Step One: Creating a New Missing Child Report in FSFN

Important Note:
- The Missing Child Report must be entered into the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) within one working day from the time that the DCF/CBC was notified that the child went missing.
- If local law enforcement has refused to take a missing child report, a "dummy" police report number should be entered into the police report number field of the MCR. If you need to do this, please use all zeros in the field (i.e. 000000). This will allow for the Missing Child Report to be completed within the one working day time requirement.

1. How Do I Create a New Missing Child Report?

1. Log on to Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN)
2. Click "Create" at the top left of the desktop and then click "Case Work"
3. Click on the "MCR" under the "Create Case Items" on the left side of page
4. Select the case name under "Cases" on the top right of the page
5. Select the child's name under "Participants" on the bottom right of the page
6. You will then be taken to the Child Information page of the MCR. Make sure that all demographic information is correct. If not, return to person management and make the necessary corrections before proceeding. When information is correct, click yes to continue.

Potential Problems

If you have any problems entering a missing child report, you will need to contact the Statewide Help Desk at 850-487-9400 or Child Location staff at 850-410-8543.

2. How Do I fill out the Missing Child Report?

Important Note:
It is important to remember that all MCRs have the potential to be submitted to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement/Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse (FDLE/MEPIC) and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). It is crucial that all information entered be correct and that proper spelling/grammar/punctuation/capitalization be used. For example: when filling out the caller's first name, do not type in JANE or jane. Instead, type in Jane.

Tip:
After you fill out the child information page, you may fill out the pages of the MCR in any order you wish; however, be sure to fill out all of the pages/tabs that are applicable to the missing child episode.

The following instructions are given in the order in which the pages/tabs appear on the MCR

1. The Child Information Page of the MCR:

A. Date Reported to DCF/CBC
   1. Type in the date that the CBC or DCF learned or was notified that the child was missing
   2. Type in as: MM/DD/YYYY (e.g. 08/16/2008).

B. District/Region
   1. Choose the child's primary district.
   2. Children who go missing while under courtesy supervision should be assigned to the district where the primary case manager is located (e.g. if the child is missing from district 1 but the primary case manager is located in district 2, choose district 2).

C. Eye Color
   1. Choose the option from the drop down box that best describes the child's eye color (e.g. if the child has brown eyes, choose "Brown").
   2. If the eye color is unknown, leave blank.
   3. If there is a picture of the child, check the picture before leaving the information blank.

D. Hair Color
   1. Choose the option from the drop down box that best describes the child's hair color (e.g. if the child has black hair, choose "Black").
   2. If the hair color is unknown, leave blank.
   3. If there is a picture of the child, check the picture before leaving the information blank.
   4. If the child wears a wig, changes hair color frequently, has a mohawk or anything that cannot be described with the drop down box, make sure to document it in the Narrative Section of the MCR.

E. Height
   1. Type in the child's height. For example, if the child is 5'4", type in as 504.
   2. If this information is not known, leave blank.

F. Weight
   1. Type in the child's weight. For example, if the child is 120 lbs., type in as 120.
   2. If this information is not known, leave blank.

G. Build
   1. Choose the option from the drop down box that best describes the child's build. For example, if the child has a medium build, choose "Medium."
   2. If the child's build is unknown, leave blank.

H. Complexion
   1. Choose the option that best describes the child's complexion. For example, if the child's complexion is light, choose "Light."
   2. If this information is not known, leave blank.

I. Teeth
   1. Choose the option that best describes the child's teeth. For example, if the child's teeth are crooked, choose "Crooked."
   2. If this information is not known, leave blank.

J. Scars/Marks/Tattoos
1. Choose the option from the drop down box that best describes any scars/marks/tattoos associated with the child.
2. If the child has more than one of the listed options, choose multiple. For example, if the child has a tattoo, choose "tattoo." If the child has a tattoo and a body piercing, choose "Multiple."
3. If this information is unknown or the child does not have any scars/marks/tattoos, leave blank.

K. Scars/Marks Description
1. If applicable, briefly describe the scars/marks/tattoos along with the location of the scars/marks/tattoos.
2. Using the example for "Multiple" from above, you would type in "star shaped tattoo on the left shoulder and nose is pierced."
3. If this information is unknown or the child does not have any scars/marks/tattoos, leave blank.
4. If there is a picture of the child, check the picture for any identifying scars/marks/tattoos before leaving this information blank.

L. Case Type
Choose one of the three options from the drop down box. The remaining classifications (Involuntary, Disabled, Disaster, Hague) are highly specialized categories for missing children and should not be utilized without receiving specific instruction from or consulting with the Child Location Staff in Tallahassee.
1. **Runaway** is defined as any child age 12 or older whose whereabouts are currently unknown who is believed to have left his or her placement voluntarily and has been missing for more than four (4) consecutive hours from the time that it was learned that the child's location was unknown.
2. **Endangered** is defined as any child whose whereabouts are currently unknown who is considered to be missing under circumstances that would indicate that the child is at a high degree of risk of immediate physical harm to themselves due to medical or physiological reasons or is believed to be with someone who places them at a high degree of risk. Any child age 11 or younger who is believed to have left his or her placement voluntarily should be classified in this category.
3. **Parental Abduction** is defined as any child whose whereabouts are unknown and is believed to be in the company of a custodial parent who has absconded from care in direct violation of a court order or any child that has been removed from his or her placement by a non-custodial parent whose whereabouts are unknown. If it is believed that the child being in the company of the custodial or non-custodial parent places the child at a high degree of risk the episode should be classified as Endangered.

Important Note:
The remaining classifications are highly specialized categories for missing children and should not be utilized without receiving specific instruction from or consulting with the Child Location Staff.

M. Alert Type
Choose the alert type that best describes the type of missing episode and therefore the type of alert.

Important Note:
All alerts are automated in FSFN. Once a MCR is submitted on a child, the alert is turned on in FSFN. If an alert does not turn on for a specific child, the helpdesk would need to be contacted. Headquarters staff with the Child Location Unit can no longer turn alerts on and off in the FSFN system. Also, an alert will not turn off for a child until the MCR has been completely closed with FDLE. If you do not know whether or not the case is still open with FDLE, please check their website.

N. Missing From date

1. Type in the date the child was last seen
2. Type in as: MM/DD/YYYY, for example, 08/16/2008

O. Missing From Location
1. Choose one of the options in the drop down box. For example, "playground/school" if the child was last seen at school.
2. In general, you will need to focus on the following locations for children placed in out-of-home care: Home-Foster, Home-Group Home, Home-Shelter, Gov't facility, Office Bldg., Playground/School, or the location where the child was last seen
3. The Missing From Location for children placed in in-home care should be focused on the type of home. For example, Home-Single Family, Home-Townhouse, Playground/School, or the location where the child was last seen.

P. Missing From Street
Type in the street address where the child was last seen. For example, 123 North Monroe Street. Do not type in "paternal aunt's home." There is no need to type in the City, State or Zip Code as you will enter this information in a separate field.

Q. Missing From Unit Designator
1. This refers to any apartment number, suite number or the like. For example, Apartment 23.
2. If there is not a unit designator, leave field blank.

R. Missing From City
Type in the city/town where the child was last seen. For example, Tallahassee

S. Missing From County
Choose the county where the "missing from city" is located from the drop down box. For example, Leon

T. Missing From State
1. This field will default to Florida.
2. If another State is required, choose the State from the drop down box. For example, Georgia

U. Zip
Type in the five-digit Zip Code for the address where the child was last seen.

V. Missing From Country
Choose the country where the child was last seen from the drop down box. For example, United States.

W. Status/Behavior/Attitude Check List
1. At the end of this page, there is a set of statements dealing with the general status of the child and the general behaviors and attitudes of the child
2. Choose Yes or No for each of the fields listed that best describe the child's behavior and attitude for each category, for example, if the child has runaway before, choose yes under the "Has Runaway Before" statement. If the episode involves a child that is not a runaway and/or the child has never runaway before, choose no

Important Note:
Click on the "View Current Photo" at the top of the page to review the child's photo. It is very important that the most current, quality photo is in FSFN for the missing child. Quality photos are one of the most essential tools in recovering missing children.

2. The Caller/Law Enforcement Information Page of the MCR:

Caller Information

> **Important Note:**
> The person responsible for entering efforts to locate on the child should be the one that is listed as the caller on the MCR. If you have any questions about which individual this should be, please contact your Child Location Point of Contact, or the Regional Criminal Justice Coordinator.

The Caller Information will pre-populate using the information contained in FSFN for the person entering the form.
1. If the person filling out the form is the one that should be listed as the "caller" then check the information for accuracy and move on.
2. If the information for the "caller" should be a different individual, click the blue search button to the right of the caller information to search for the correct caller. You would do this in cases where the secondary worker is entering the Missing Child Report, but the primary case worker needs to be placed as the caller.

Law Enforcement Information

> **Important Note:**
> The law enforcement information is designed to capture information as it relates to the local law enforcement agency that has taken the missing child report. FDLE and NCMEC will utilize this information to forward potential leads and location information to the local law enforcement agency. It is extremely important that information be entered as accurately as possible.

A. Case Number
1. Type in the Local Law Enforcement (LLE) Agency's Missing Child Report Case number. Please type in the case number using the same format, as the LLE agency would enter it in their system. For example, if Tallahassee Police Department uses 08-123456, then you would enter the report number in that format.
2. If you are unsure or do not know the missing child report case number, contact that local law enforcement agency to confirm or obtain the number prior to entering the MCR into FSFN.
3. If local law enforcement has refused to take a missing child report, you may enter a "dummy" number in this field (i.e. 000000).

B. Date Law Enforcement was notified
Type in the date LLE took a missing child report as: MM/DD/YYYY. For example, 08/16/2008

C. LE Agency (Pick List)
This field contains a drop down box with nearly all of the law enforcement agencies in Florida. If you choose the agency from this list, the system will automatically fill out all of the other necessary information pertaining to the law enforcement agency that you chose. For example, if you choose "Tallahassee Police Department" on the drop down menu, the system will fill out the address and phone number for this agency. If the agency that took the missing child report is not listed in the drop down box, you can type it directly below in the "LE Agency Name."

D. LE Agency Name
If you chose an agency in the drop down menu from above, this is to be left blank. If the agency you needed was not in the drop down menu listed above, you must enter it here. For example, if the law enforcement agency is out of state, type in the name of the agency in this field. For example, Los Angeles Police Department.

E. Address
Only enter the address if you did not select an agency from the drop down menu.

F. City
Only type in the city if you did not select an agency from the drop down menu.

G. State
Only type in the state if you did not select an agency from the drop down menu.

H. Zip
Only type in the zip code if you did not select an agency from the drop down menu.

I. Phone
Only type in the work number if you did not select an agency from the drop down menu.

3. The Narrative Page of the MCR:

A. Relevant Information
1. The narrative is to include only information that is relevant to the missing episode and which would assist in the location of the child.
2. Do not put placement issues, issues with Law Enforcement, or the reason why an MCR was not entered timely in this section.
3. Relevant information for this section would include:
   a. information on where the child was last seen that is not included in another section of the MCR
   b. the child's direction of travel
   c. what the child was last seen wearing
   d. the child's possible destination
   e. information on prior missing child episodes (where the child went, where the child was located)
   f. any information that could not be listed on the MCR, but might be helpful in the location of the child. An example of this would be, "child's hair is naturally brown, but is currently dyed pink" or "child frequents local area video arcades."
4. If there is no information available that would help in the location of the child, please use the following narrative exactly as it appears here: "The child ran away from placement. Direction of travel is unknown. Clothing description is unknown."
5. Please do not use abbreviations or acronyms that are not known by the general public. For example, do not use "CM" for Case Manager or "TPD" for Tallahassee Police Department. Also, make sure to use proper grammar when filling out this section.

4. The Companion/Abductor/Vehicle Information Page of the MCR (if applicable):

Companion/Abductor Information
1. If a child is believed to have left their placement with another individual(s), information pertaining to the individual(s) should be entered on this page. This should include information on custodial and non-custodial parents who have absconded from the supervision of the Department with a child.
2. An entry for each individual that the child may be with is required in this section For example, if a child and his three siblings are abducted by both parents, an entry will be needed for each of the three siblings as a companion, as well as for each parent as an abductor.

Vehicle Information
1. If you have any information on any vehicle that might be involved in the child's disappearance, please enter the information in this section. If this information is not known, leave blank
2. If you have information on more than one vehicle, each vehicle will require an entry.

5. Final Submission
Read through the paragraphs on this page and check the "I Agree" box if you agree with the statements and understand that you are submitting an official legal document to law enforcement personnel.
1. Once you have checked the final submission box, click "save" to save the document.
2. Click the options button on the bottom left of the screen and choose "Missing Child Report" to print a copy of the document.
3. Click the options button again and choose "Approval" to begin the approval process.

3. To Approve a MCR
1. After you choose "Approval" at the bottom of the MCR, it will take you to approve the MCR. Click the "Approve" button under "Approval Decision."
2. Under "Supervisor Approval" please choose the blue "Other" button if the Supervisor listed is not the person who should approve Missing Child Reports in your area. If you need to click other, you can choose the correct person to route the form to for approval. Once this is completed, choose "Continue" at the bottom of the screen.
3. The individual responsible for reviewing the MCR (Regional/District MCR Approver) would then go into their approval queue to review the document. Once the document has been reviewed and is ready for submission to Headquarters in Tallahassee, the Regional/District MCR Approver would select "Approval" under "Options" on the Final Submission page/tab of the MCR. Choose Approve for the "Approval Decision" and select the blue "Other" link to search for the HQ Specialist. Select the appropriate person and click "continue." Again click "continue" and then click "close." The MCR is now at Headquarters awaiting final submission to FDLE.
4. If the report is sent to the wrong person, it cannot be approved and will not be reviewed; only the person who created the MCR and the person who the MCR was routed to can re-route the document. Please pay close attention when routing forms to ensure that none are held up in the process by misrouting. If there are any concerns about who the Regional/District MCR Approver is, please contact your Child Location Point of Contact or Regional Criminal Justice Coordinator.

Important Note:
Once you complete the MCR in FSFN, make sure to update the child's placement status in FSFN to an abducted, absconded or runaway status.

The information contained in this section outlines requirements/responsibilities of the case manager/designated worker in regards to locating a missing child.
The case manager/designated worker is required to:
1. Provide law enforcement with relevant information.
2. Conduct and document efforts to locate the child.
3. Review the FDLE Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse Website.
4. Prepare for the return of the child.
5. Resolve the missing child episode.

Step One: Communicating with Law Enforcement

1. What information does law enforcement need to assist in the location of a missing child?

A. The following information needs to be provided to law enforcement immediately:
1. A recent photo of the child (see Missing Child – Photos Handout).
2. Any leads regarding the possible location of the child.
3. Documentation of any efforts to locate the child.
4. A list of locations the child frequents and any possible destinations.
5. A list of the child's relatives and friends.
6. Information on any companions.
7. Information related to any prior missing episodes (location information, etc.).
8. Contact information for the case manager/designated worker as well as contact information for the individual responsible for picking up the child or where the child should be taken if/when located by law enforcement.
9. Information on problems at school or at home.
10. Child's email, screen names and access to computers.

Tip:
School records, yearbooks, driver's licenses, state identification cards, juvenile probation officers, and past placements can be excellent resources for finding recent photos for children when no photo is on file or the only available photo is considered to be out-of-date.

B. The following information needs to be provided to law enforcement within the first 30 days of the investigation:
1. Copy of the child's fingerprints.
2. Copy of the child's dental records.
3. Copy of the child's case file (when requested by law enforcement).

Tip:
Meeting with local law enforcement to go over a missing child's case file within the first week of the missing child episode is a valuable location tool for local law enforcement, as it provides them with the opportunity to generate potential leads as to the child's whereabouts and gives them insight into child's past and state of mind. In fact, during Operation SafeKids, the FDLE/MEPIC found that over 40% of all social services missing child cases could be resolved quickly by specific information that was contained within a missing child's case file.

C. The following information needs to be provided to law enforcement <u>on an ongoing basis</u>:
1. Any changes or updates related to the missing child's case status (i.e. case manager/designated worker changes, changes in legal status).
2. Results of any efforts to locate the missing child that were undertaken by the case manager/designated worker.

D. The following information needs to be provided to law enforcement as soon as the child is located (this is especially important if law enforcement did not assist in locating the child):
1. Address where the child was located (including street address, city, state and zip code).
2. Physical condition of the child when the child was located.
3. General circumstances regarding the location (who, what, where, when and how).

Important Note:
The law enforcement agency that initiated the Missing Child report enters the child into FCIC/NCIC and as such is the only agency that can remove the child from the system. In other words, it is critical that they are notified of the location to ensure that the child's FCIC/NCIC entry is removed from the system. The child's episode will remain open in FSFN and with FDLE until the child is removed from FCIC/NCIC.

Step Two: Efforts to Locate

1. What is an effort to locate a missing child?

An effort is any activity that is directly undertaken by the case manager/designated worker in an effort to identify the physical location of a child that has gone missing from care.

2. What would be considered an effort to locate?

The following list offers suggestions and does not include every example of an effort to locate. Remember to be creative and use your imagination.
1. Contact friends, relatives, parents, caregivers, school personnel, employers, Guardian ad litem, therapist, counselor, service provider and other significant individuals to see if they can offer any leads.
   - *Effective Practice*: Make notifications count as efforts to locate! After advising the required individuals that the child is missing, follow up with questions, such as:
     -Have you seen the child?
     -Do you know where the child might be?
     -Do you know who the child might be with?
     -Did the child mention running away?
     -If the child contacts you, can you contact me?

2. Contact other programs and services for help locating the child. For example:
   - -ESS Checks
     - Search for benefit activity and/or new addresses for the missing child or individuals associated with the missing child after the date child went missing from care.
   - -Medicaid Billing
     - Search for benefit activity and/or new addresses for the missing child or individuals associated with the missing child post the missing from date.
   - -Child Support
     - Search for benefit activity and/or new addresses for the missing child or individuals associated with the missing child after the date child went missing from care.

- ♦ -School Records
  - ▪ Review attendance records in an effort to ascertain if the missing child has been attending school post the missing from date.
  - ▪ Attempt to discover if requests have been made to provide transcripts information for the missing child to new/different schools after the date child went missing from care.
- ♦ -Vital Statistics
  - ▪ Attempt to determine if requests have been made regarding vital statistic records post the missing from date.
- ♦ Driver's License
  - ▪ Attempt to ascertain if new/updated driver's licenses or state identifications have been issued to the missing child or individuals that may be associated with the missing child after the date child went missing from care.
- ♦ Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)
  - ▪ Contact DJJ facilities to see if the missing child has been or is currently being held in a DJJ facility post the missing from date.
  - ▪ Contact DJJ case manager to see if they have had any contact with the missing child after the date child went missing or any information on the whereabouts of the missing child.
- ♦ Clerk of Court
  - ▪ Attempt to identify if the child or individuals that may be associated with the missing child have attended court hearings or are scheduled to appear in court in the near future (note: these proceedings may or may not be related to dependency court proceedings).
- ♦ SSN and SSI Benefits
  - ▪ Search for benefit activity and/or new addresses for the missing child or individuals associated with the missing child post the missing from date.
- ♦ Immigration and Customs
  - ▪ Attempt to have passports flagged in those cases where the missing child or individuals that might be associated with the missing child may attempt to leave the country.
  - ▪ Attempt to have the missing child or individuals that maybe associated with the missing child flagged so that they may be identified if and when they attempt to re-enter the country.
- ♦ United States Department of State
  - ▪ Attempt to work with embassies and consulates in possible destination countries in an effort to locate the missing child or individuals that may be associated with the missing child.
- ♦ Public Records Checks
  - ▪ Accurint/AutoTrack.
  - ▪ Attempt to identify address information for the missing child or individuals that may be associated with the missing child post the missing from date.
- ♦ Out of State Social Service Agencies
  - ▪ Attempt to ascertain if the missing child or individuals associated with the missing child have had contact with an out-of-state social service agency after the date child went missing from care.

3. Make home and field visits to places familiar to the child, such as malls, schools, playgrounds, neighborhood where the child currently resides, past neighborhoods and neighborhoods of friends and family. Also, visit runaway shelters, DJJ facilities, hospitals, transportation hubs and areas where children and teens congregate.
- • Effective Practice: when checking physical locations for a missing child, make sure to bring missing child flyers for posting and distribution.

3. Where would I document efforts to locate?

Efforts to locate must be documented in FSFN:
- Efforts to locate missing children are required to be entered into FSFN within 48 hours or in a timeframe that is consistent with your agency's internal policy.
- Efforts should contain who, what, where, when and how narratives.
- Make sure to choose the "Missing Child Attempt to Locate" case note type when entering any efforts in FSFN.

4. How often do I need to conduct and document efforts to locate?

At a minimum, efforts should be made and documented once a week for the first three months and monthly thereafter. No more than 30 days should go by without an effort to locate a missing child.

Step Three: The FDLE Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse (MEPIC)

1. What is the FDLE/MEPIC?

The MEPIC is located within the FDLE Division of Criminal Justice Information Services and is a central repository of information regarding missing endangered persons. The information is collected and disseminated to assist law enforcement agencies, public and private organizations and the citizens of Florida in locating missing endangered persons. The MEPIC is utilized as a resource center and information exchange service and compliments the state and federal computerized missing person's files.

2. What does FDLE do with the DCF missing child information once it is submitted to them?

Once the information is reported to law enforcement, they accept a missing child report, enter the child as missing in FCIC/NCIC and a Missing Child Report is electronically submitted, FDLE (Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse) opens a case on the child. MEPIC provides analytical and investigative assistance to law enforcement agencies. Some of the services they provide are:
1. Posting the child's picture and information on their website. The website is accessible to the public and missing child flyers can be printed directly from the site
2. Conducting both public and private database searches
3. Flagging birth records and school records

3. Why do I need to access FDLE's Missing Endangered Persons website?
The case manager/designated worker needs to access the website to ensure the child is posted, all of the information associated with the event is correctly documented and the child's photo is properly displayed. Also, you can print missing child flyers directly from the website.

4. How Do I access FDLE's Missing Endangered Persons website and print flyers?

1. The website is: www.fdle.state.fl.us. Once at the site, click on the Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse link on the right side of the page.
2. To print flyers: click on the search tab at the top of the page, type in the child's last name and/or first name, and click submit. Click on the child's picture and the flyer will come up. Click printable flyer under the child's picture. You may then print the flyer.
   - Make sure the page is set to landscape.
   - Make sure to use a color copier as the picture will be in color as long as the picture that was provided was in color.
   - Flyers can be distributed to service providers, schools and may be posted in the community.

Important Note:
If there is no available picture of the child, it will limit the need to print flyers. Submitting updated, quality photos can play a crucial role in the location of a missing child.

Step Four: Preparing for the child's return

Tip:
You need to plan for the child's return before the child returns.

How do I secure placement for the child?

- Interview the current caregiver to determine whether or not the child will be placed there when he/she is located.
- If the current caregiver is not willing to take the child back or the child has expressed a strong aversion to returning to the placement, explore other placement options.
- Check to see if there is a more appropriate placement.

Important Note:
If/when the child returns and expresses a desire to live with a relative or non-relative, the case manager will follow all necessary procedures to assist in the placement (background checks, notifying the court for approval, etc.).

Step Five: Locating the Missing Child

1. What steps need to be taken once a child is located?
When a child is located, the following steps should be followed:
- See the child as quickly as possible to assess safety and well-being.
- Make sure basic/immediate needs are met and obtain any needed medical care, counseling and/or other services.
- Immediately notify law enforcement. This is especially important if law enforcement did not assist in locating the child.
  - Contacting law enforcement will ensure that the missing child entry is removed from FCIC/NCIC.
  - **A child is not considered located until the child is seen by law enforcement or a child welfare professional.**
- Notify the child's parents, legal custodian, relatives, substitute caregivers, Guardian ad litem, and the court of the child's location.
- Document the location in FSFN. Also, remember to end date the runaway, abducted or absconded status in Other Placement in FSFN once the child is located.

- Complete the Recovery Form on the MCR in FSFN.
- Florida Administrative Code 65C-30.019 requires that the services worker or CPI shall interview the child within 24 hours of the child's return to determine the child's need for further services and/or change in placement. Debriefing tools and effective practice information can be obtained by contacting the DCF Child Location Unit in Tallahassee (see resources section).

Important Note:

If the child turns 18 years old while reported as missing, all agencies notified that the child was missing must be contacted by the case manager. The case manager will inform the court and request the case to be closed. If requested, information from the case file will be given to the local law enforcement agency for their continuing efforts to locate the missing person. **When notifying law enforcement, make certain that they understand that the child was never recovered.**

Tip:

Many times, children will run away to a location where they were previously found. Keeping detailed information on past locations may help locate a child who frequently runs away from care.

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2. How do I complete a Recovery Form in FSFN?

A. To complete and submit a Recovery Form, follow the steps below:
1. Log onto FSFN.
2. Open the case file and click on the Missing Child Report Symbol.
3. Click on the Open MCR.
4. Enter all of the information requested and click "save" at the bottom of the screen.
5. There are two types of recoveries, rapid and standard. A rapid recovery occurs when a child is reported and recovered before it is submitted to FDLE/MEPIC. A standard recovery occurs when FDLE/MEPIC has opened a case on the missing child. The MCR should default to whatever recovery is needed.
6. Once you complete the recovery form, click "Options" and then "Approval." Make sure you approve the recovery form to your Regional/District MCR Approver.
7. The Regional/District MCR Approver will review the recovery form and approve it to MCR HQ.

Important Note:

In order to submit a recovery form, you must be assigned to the child's case in FSFN.

B. To complete the narrative section, use the following guidelines:
- The section must include one of the following headings:
  1. Child returned to placement on his/her own.
  2. Child was located by DCF/CBC (name worker).
  3. Child was located by Law Enforcement (name the agency).
  4. Child aged out without being located.
  5. Court removed jurisdiction without the child being located.
  6. Child found deceased.
- A brief description of the child's condition is very important to include in the narrative section as is a general description of the circumstances involving the location.

C. To complete the address section, use the following guidelines:
- Make sure to fill out the street address, city, state and zip code where the child was located.
- Many times, children will run to the same location where they were previously located and this information is vital in locating children that are habitual runaways.

- If the information is not included, the point of contact or the case worker may be contacted for this information as FDLE may request the location address for their records.

Important Note:
The completed recovery form is sent electronically to Headquarters for review and closure with the FDLE/MEPIC. Incomplete information may result in the local Children Location Point of Contact or the Regional Criminal Justice Coordinator being contacted by local law enforcement, the FDLE/MEPIC or the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) for detailed information related to the resolution of a missing child investigation.

The information contained in this section outlines requirements/responsibilities of the case manager or designated worker related to stabilizing a child upon his/her return. This section also contains effective practices, as suggested from the field along with national research.

1. How do I stabilize a child once they are located?

See the child as quickly as possible to assess safety and well-being:
- Make sure basic/immediate needs are met.
- Obtain any needed services.
- Interview/Debrief the child.
- Conduct staffings to discuss needed services.
- Identify and provide any additional training or support to caregivers.

Important Note:
Florida Administrative Code 65C-30.019 states that the child is to be interviewed by the services worker or CPI within 24 hours of the child's return to determine the child's need for further services and/or change in placement.

2. What are some effective practices for stabilizing children upon their return?

1. A team approach (worker, placement, mental heath/substance abuse/education) in managing children who run from care.
2. Positive and supportive caregiver interaction with children.
3. Specialized case management for children who run away.
4. Monthly meetings to staff children/youth, coordinate efforts and share best practices.
5. Be creative: start with identifying the needs of the youth, then be creative in meeting them.

3. What does national research suggest regarding the stabilization of children?

There is little research or published information on this subject. However, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) has published *Location and Reunification of Missing Children: A Team Approach*, which describes different stages a child will go through, depending upon who has abducted the child. The following are examples of what the child may experience:
- Non-Family Abductions
  - Brief Euphoria
  - Hyperarousal
  - Hypervigilant Recall
  - Compliance/Resistance
  - Denial and Help-Seeking
- Family Abductions
  - Lack of Control
  - Belief Confusion
  - Fear
  - Role and Identity Confusion
  - Divided Loyalties
  - Guilt and Shame
  - Abandonment

If the child was abducted by a parent, the parent may have told the child lies or made negative statements about the other parent and/or about the Department/child welfare agency. Statements made by the parent to the child prior to his/her return may negatively impact the child once he/she is located and placed.

Children most often will feel a lack of control in these situations. The child should be assessed and receive counseling regarding the abduction.

The information contained in this section provides suggestions on how to prevent missing children incidents, based on national research and effective practices from the field.

Tip:
Increase prevention efforts in order to decrease missing episodes.

1. How can a parentally abducted, involuntary or endangered episode be prevented?

- Research suggests that Parentally Abducted, Involuntary or Endangered (PIE) children should never go places alone and should be taught to trust their own instincts and to run if they feel they may be in danger.
- Caregivers should know where the child is at all times and talk openly about safety with the child.
- Regular parent-child visits and regular worker-child visits that allow for private conversations with the child are very important.

2. How can a runaway episode be prevented?

National Research concerning runaway prevention lists a number of factors that will reduce or eliminate the number of runaway episodes:
- Placement stability.
- Providing more activities/less downtime.
- Mental health and substance abuse assessment and treatment.
- Normalcy.
- Independent living/transition planning and activities.
- Placement or visitation with sibling(s).
- Positive relationship/bond with at least one adult.
- Increased flexibility (a more flexible set of rules tied to each individual child's ability to handle more responsibility).
- Granting family visits or phone calls during holidays, weekends or during a family crisis.
- More openness regarding the child's case information.
- Attentive case management.

Tip:
- What **does not** help reduce runaway episodes is punishments, lecturing, name calling or labeling, criticizing or hassling, raising voice or yelling and isolating.
- Children are either "pulled" to run or "pushed" to run. Interviewing the child to find out why he/she is running will help stabilize the child and prevent future runs.

3. What are some effective practices to prevent children from running from care?

1. Normalcy
   - Statewide Normalcy workgroup.
   - Childnet Normalcy workgroup.
   - Memo from Sec. Lucy D. Hadi (*dated August 31, 2005*).
   - Florida Administrative Rule 65C-13.002, 65C-13.003, 65C-13.008.

2. Placement Preference Assessment
   - Critical placement meetings to plan for placement in advance of return from runaway.

3. Teen Homes Certification Program
   - Program to establish specialized homes for difficult teens/runaways.
   - Program includes intensive training and maintenance requirements for selected caregivers as well as special incentives/support services as compensation for program participation.

4. Group Home Training
   - Intensive training for group home staff aimed at teaching skills needed to work with teens.
   - Ongoing assistance and consultation by BASP regarding group home incentive systems and behavior management programs.

5. Risk Assessment
   - The Chapin Hall study related to children who run from foster care has identified variables associated with an increased risk of running away.
   - Information can be gathered from a child/youth and their family during a variety of naturally occurring assessments and interviews to determine if a child/youth has a history of running away—good predictor of future behavior.

6. Runaway Steering Committee
   - Multi-disciplinary and multi-agency group who meet to problem assess and address the needs to children/youth who run from care.
   - Very effective intervention for youth who run frequently and have complex needs and behaviors.
   - Youth should be included when possible to ensure the identification of needs and interventions are accurate and effective (youth-guided care).
   - Circuit Four is a good resource.

7. Resource mapping and building/system of care to ensure individual needs of teens are met
   - Identifying and meeting the individual needs of teens in out of home care to reduce the risk of them running requires access to a variety of services and supports.

8. Specialized Teen Counselors

9. Teen Courts

5. What are some resources related to children who run from care?

1. National Runaway Switchboard
   - Web site: Prevention education material, free community education materials.
   - Community education and runaway prevention material.

2. Local Law Enforcement and Florida Department of Law Enforcement/Missing Endangered Perosns Information Clearinghouse (FDLE/MEPIC).

3. 211/Information and Referral Networks.

4. The Transition Center at University of Florida
   - Transition Individual Education Plans (IEPs).
   - Requirements for special education students.

5. Florida Department of Education web sites:
   - General.
   - Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services: Clearinghouse Information Center.

6. Casey Family Foundation
   - Independent living resources/Information.

7. Annie E Casey Foundation
   - Resources/information on child welfare.

8. Project Safe Place

9. Chapin Hall, Center for Children at the University of Chicago
   - Study: *Youth Who Run Away from Substitute Care.*
   - Web site.

10. Child Welfare League of America
    - Best practice Guidelines: *Group Homes for Teenagers* and *Children Missing from Care.*

11. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
    - Web site, publications, material related to abduction and safety, links to other resources.

12. Florida Network of Youth and Family Services

13. Adopt US Kids
    - Web site.

14. Local Child Location Points of Contacts, Substance Abuse and Mental Health staff, and Independent Living Coordinators.

15. Florida's Center for the Advancement of Child Welfare Practice
    - Web site: resources on system of care, collaboration and links to other resources.

16. National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY)
    - Web site has a statewide cheat sheet with numerous resources

17. Central Office Child Location staff:
    - Ed Hardy: (850) 921-7929
    - Hans Soder: (850) 487-8897
    - Reagan Rogers: (850) 922-4863
    - Greg Schmidt: (850) 410-8543

Please contact the Central Office Child Location Unit if you would like additional information on the Missing Child Report or resources related to youth who are missing from care.