

PLANNING: A CHILD OR YOUTH MISSING OR ABDUCTED

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Policy Cross References: Planning: A Child or Youth Absent Without Permission; Youth Services Agreements; Placement Resources: Provincial/Territorial Protocol on Children, Youth and Families Moving Between Provinces and Territories; Critical Incident and Death Protocol (QA-2014-001)

Legislative References:

PURPOSE: To outline the process for responding when a child or youth in the care or custody of a manager is missing or abducted. The policy also applies to youth who are residing in a *placement* through a *Youth Services Agreement*.

POLICY:

1. A child or youth is determined to be missing if he or she has been absent without permission for more than five hours and cannot be located or is absent for less than five hours and there are risk factors the social worker determines are likely to impact the child or youth's immediate safety, as outlined in the *glossary* under the definition of a missing child/youth.
2. Where a child or youth is missing, a social worker shall:
 - a) immediately notify a supervisor who shall immediately notify the manager;
 - b) immediately notify all appropriate parties including: police; placement resource (e.g., foster parent(s), residential staff person(s)); parent(s); and where necessary, the on call social worker;
 - c) ensure efforts are undertaken to locate and return the child or youth to their placement; and
 - d) ensure support is provided to the child or youth, the placement resource, and parent(s) following the child or youth's return.
3. Where a child or youth has been abducted, a social worker shall:
 - a) immediately notify the police;
 - b) immediately notify a supervisor who shall immediately notify the manager and regional director (RD). The RD shall notify the Assistant Deputy Minister of Service Delivery and Regional Operations (ADM-SDRO) as soon as possible. When this occurs outside of regular business hours, the on call supervisor shall notify the manager, RD and ADM-SDRO;
 - c) ensure all other appropriate parties are notified immediately including: placement resource, parent(s), and the on call social worker;

- d) ensure efforts are undertaken to locate and return the child or youth to their placement; and
 - e) ensure support is provided to the child or youth, placement resource and parent(s) following the child or youth's return.
4. When a media release or Amber Alert is issued or when a child or youth is missing and it is assessed to be a critical incident, the social worker shall immediately notify the supervisor who shall notify the manager and RD. The RD shall notify the ADM-SDRO as soon as possible. When this occurs outside of regular business hours, the on call supervisor shall notify the manager, RD and ADM-SDRO. A critical incident is defined as: an extraordinary or life threatening incident that directly impacts the safety and well-being of a child/youth, such as: violence, assault, injury, other serious criminal matters, significant threats of self-injury/harm, or suicidal ideation requiring hospitalization beyond the initial assessment.
 5. Where a child or youth is missing or has been abducted and a media release or Amber Alert is planned, a social worker shall advise the police that information regarding the child or youth's involvement with CSSD shall not be publicly released.

PROCEDURES:

Child or Youth Missing

Consultation with a Supervisor

1. A social worker shall **immediately** consult with a supervisor when informed that a child or youth is missing, share all known information with the supervisor, and advise the supervisor of what efforts are being made to locate the child or youth. Updates shall be provided to a supervisor **on a daily basis**, at minimum, during the child or youth's absence.
2. The social worker shall complete the *Missing or Abducted Child or Youth Report* and submit it to the supervisor as part of the internal notification process.
3. Where the social worker, in consultation with the supervisor, assesses the child or youth's missing episode to be a critical incident, the ***Critical Incident and Death Protocol (QA-2014-001)*** shall also be followed.

Working with the Placement Resource

4. In most situations, social workers are informed by the placement resource when a child or youth is missing. If a social worker is advised by another source, they shall contact the placement resource to:
 - a) inform them of the situation;
 - b) discuss all relevant information known about the child or youth and their last known whereabouts;
 - c) determine what steps to take to locate the child or youth; and

- d) identify who shall complete each step.

For example, a foster parent or residential staff person may contact the police to file the missing persons report and/or update other parties regarding the child or youth's status. **However, the social worker is responsible for ensuring the agreed upon steps, as noted above, are undertaken.**

Police

5. A social worker shall ensure the police are **immediately** contacted and a missing persons report filed when a child or youth is missing. The following information shall be provided to the police:
 - a) child or youth's full name, date of birth, language and ethnicity;
 - b) child or youth's cell phone number, if applicable;
 - c) name, address and phone number of the placement resource;
 - d) CSSD social worker's name and phone number;
 - e) child or youth's home community, if different from the placement community;
 - f) physical description of the child or youth, including: height, weight, hair style and color, eye color, unique body markings and clothing worn when last seen;
 - g) whether articles of clothing or personal items are missing from the child or youth's room;
 - h) a picture of the child or youth (digital picture is preferred);
 - i) any known risk factors unique to the child or youth, including: physical, mental health, or medical issues;
 - j) child or youth's state of mind at the time of absence, if known;
 - k) when the child or youth was last seen, by whom, and if the child or youth left with someone;
 - l) known associates and frequented locations;
 - m) names and contact information for family, significant others and friends;
 - n) contact information for person(s) who are to be notified if the child or youth is located;
 - o) where to transport the child or youth once located, if the police are willing to do so;
 - p) any other information requested by the police; and
 - q) any other information assessed by the social worker as being relevant.

Media Releases

6. Media releases regarding missing persons are conducted by the police on a case-by-case basis. A manager's approval is required prior to a social worker making a request for a media release. At times, differences of opinion may arise between CSSD and the police about issuing a media release. Further discussions between the CSSD manager and the police may be required to resolve the matter. In the event that this situation occurs outside of regular business hours, the on call supervisor shall determine if further discussion is required with the police and follow up with the police where necessary.
7. The police may advise a social worker that they plan to issue a media release even if

CSSD has not made such a request. A manager shall **immediately** be notified in these situations to determine if further discussion with the police is required. In the event that this situation occurs outside of regular business hours, the on call supervisor shall determine if further discussion is required with the police and follow up with the police where necessary.

8. When a media release is being issued, a manager shall ensure the RD and the ADM-SDRO, are notified as soon as possible. When this occurs outside of regular business hours the on call supervisor shall notify the manager, RD and ADM-SDRO.
9. Where a child or youth is missing and a media release is planned, a social worker shall advise the police that information regarding the child or youth's involvement with CSSD shall not be publicly released.

Parents

10. A social worker shall ensure the parent(s) is **immediately** notified when a child or youth is missing and is in: interim care, interim custody, temporary custody, or in care under a *Protective Care Agreement*.
11. When notifying the parent(s), the social worker shall:
 - a) provide information about the circumstances surrounding the child or youth's missing episode and the actions taken to locate the child or youth;
 - b) update the parent(s) on a daily basis, at minimum, until the child or youth is located and seek information from the parent(s) that may assist in locating the child or youth; and
 - c) ask the parent(s) to immediately provide any new information regarding the child or youth's status to CSSD.
12. The social worker shall inform the parent(s) of the plan to make a request for a media release prior to making this request when a child or youth is in: interim care, interim custody, temporary custody, or in care under a *Protective Care Agreement*. The social worker shall also advise the parent(s) when the police decide to issue a media release and CSSD has not made such a request.
13. The decision to contact the parent(s) of a child or youth, who is in voluntary custody, or continuous custody, or of a youth residing in a placement through a Youth Services Agreement, will be made in consultation with a supervisor. The decision will be based on the parent's relationship with the child or youth and whether they may have information that will assist in locating the child or youth.

Responsibilities of the Supervisor and Manager

14. The supervisor shall notify the manager by email when a child or youth is missing, including, during evenings, weekends, and statutory holidays.
15. Where a child or youth is missing and it is determined to be a critical incident, the

supervisor shall immediately notify the manager and RD. The RD shall then notify the ADM-SDRO as soon as possible. When this occurs outside of regular business hours, the on call supervisor shall notify the manager, RD and ADM-SDRO. A critical incident is defined as: an extraordinary or life threatening incident that directly impacts the safety and well-being of a child/youth, such as: violence, assault, injury, other serious criminal matters, significant threats of self-injury/harm, or suicidal ideation requiring hospitalization beyond the initial assessment.

16. When a child or youth is missing and it is determined to be a critical incident, the supervisor and manager shall also refer to and follow the *Critical Incident and Death Protocol* policy (QA-2014-001).
17. Where the manager notified is not the manager who has care/custody of the child or youth (e.g. child or youth is placed outside their home zone), the manager notified shall ensure the manager who has care/custody is notified, the next business day, or as soon as possible thereafter.

Monitoring Actions to Locate and/or Return a Missing Child or Youth

18. A social worker shall consult with a supervisor on a daily basis, at minimum, to review the actions taken to locate a child or youth. Daily contact with all parties who have participated in response efforts shall also occur.
19. When a child or youth who was missing has been located but refuses to return to their placement, the social worker, in consultation with the supervisor, and where available, members of the in care planning team, shall develop a case specific response plan based on the needs of the child or youth. The social worker shall attempt to contact the child or youth on a daily basis and try to engage and support the child or youth, including, encouraging them to return to their placement. Where appropriate, other members of the in care planning team may assist the social worker in engaging the child or youth. The social worker shall document the response plan in the child or youth's file.
20. If it is assessed that the child or youth is staying in an environment that may place them at risk, the social worker, in consultation with the supervisor, shall consider requesting the assistance of the police in returning the child or youth to their placement. Where the assistance of the police is requested, the social worker shall document the response of the police to this request in the child or youth's file.
21. The social worker, in consultation with the supervisor, shall review the need for additional requests for police assistance if circumstances change and/or new information is received regarding the safety and well-being of a child or youth.

Sharing Information between On-call and Day Staff Regarding a Missing Child or Youth

22. The sharing of information between a child or youth's social worker and the on-call social worker is crucial. This will help ensure that the staff involved in decisions about

- a missing child or youth have pertinent and up to date information.
23. The child or youth's social worker shall inform the on-call social worker each day that a child or youth is missing using the *On Call Notification Form*.
24. Any follow up provided by the on-call social worker regarding a missing child or youth, including new notifications received during the on-call shift, shall be documented in the case notes and forwarded to the child or youth's social worker **at the beginning of the next working day**. Managers shall ensure processes are in place in their respective zones to facilitate the sharing of information between on-call and day staff.

Return of a Child or Youth who had been Missing

25. Once a missing child or youth has been located, a social worker shall **immediately** notify the placement resource, supervisor, manager (by email), and the child or youth's parent(s) and police, where required. Where the ADM-SDRO had been notified of the missing child or youth, the manager, shall notify the RD, who shall notify the ADM-SDRO that the child or youth has been located. When this occurs outside of regular business hours, the on call supervisor shall notify the manager, RD and ADM-SDRO. Where a child or youth is in continuous custody or a youth is residing in a placement through a Youth Services Agreement, their parent(s) should be notified only if they had been informed that the child or youth was missing. The foster parent(s) or residential staff person(s) may also assist the social worker in notifying appropriate parties; **however, it is the social worker's responsibility to ensure all appropriate parties have been notified.**
26. When the child or youth is located, the social worker shall complete the *Missing or Abducted Child or Youth Located Report* and submit it to the supervisor who shall submit it to the manager as part of the internal notification process.
27. Once a child or youth has returned to a placement, a social worker shall contact the child or youth **within 24 hours** to provide support. In situations where the child or youth's immediate safety was, or is, identified as a concern, a meeting shall occur with the child or youth as soon as possible and **within 24 hours**. At minimum, the social worker shall:
- assess and attend to the child or youth's urgent needs and promptly arrange additional support, if needed (e.g., medical attention, crisis counselling, interview with the police if the child or youth has been the victim of a crime);
 - discuss with the child or youth what happened during the time they were missing;
 - determine if additional supports are needed in the short term; and
 - assess how future missing episodes may be prevented.
28. A social worker shall also discuss the missing episode with the child or youth's placement resource to:
- discuss the circumstances regarding the child or youth's missing episode;
 - obtain information about the child or youth's demeanor since their return;
 - discuss what factors may increase or decrease the likelihood of future missing episodes; and
 - determine what steps may be taken to prevent future missing episodes.

29. Support shall also be provided to the placement resource (e.g., foster parent, residential staff person) who may have been negatively impacted by the child or youth's missing episode.
30. A social worker should also discuss the child or youth's missing episode with the parent(s) and provide support, where appropriate. Support may also be extended to siblings, other family members, and others who have a significant relationship with the child or youth.
31. In situations where a child or youth is repeatedly missing, a social worker shall arrange a case conference with: the placement resource; the child/youth, where age and developmentally appropriate; the parent(s), depending on the child/youth's care/custody status and level of involvement; and other professionals involved with the child/youth, as appropriate. The purpose of the case conference is to:
 - a) identify reasons why the child/youth repeatedly goes missing;
 - b) identify, if possible, where the child/youth goes, with whom, and what they do while missing;
 - c) determine if additional supports are required to assist the child or youth, such as a referral to counselling or other community supports;
 - d) develop a safety plan with the child or youth to reduce the likelihood of harm should a future missing episode occur; and
 - e) develop and document a plan to prevent or reduce missing episodes. The social worker shall ensure the placement provider has a copy of the plan and that the plan is monitored and updated as necessary, based on the child/youth's needs and whether the plan is reducing/eliminating missing episodes.

Child or Youth Abducted

Police

32. Where a child or youth has been abducted, a social worker shall ensure the police are **immediately** contacted and a report is filed indicating that a child or youth has been abducted. The following information shall be provided to the police:
 - a) all known information regarding the circumstances surrounding the child or youth's abduction;
 - b) child or youth's full name, date of birth, language and ethnicity;
 - c) child or youth's cell phone number, if applicable;
 - d) name, address and phone number of the placement resource;
 - e) CSSD social worker's name and phone number;
 - f) child or youth's home community, if different from the placement community;
 - g) physical description of the child or youth, including: height, weight, hair style and color, eye color, unique body markings, and clothing worn when last seen;
 - h) whether articles of clothing or personal items are missing from the child or youth's room;
 - i) a picture of the child or youth (digital picture is preferred);

- j) any known risk factors unique to the child or youth, including: physical, mental health, or medical issues;
- k) child or youth's state of mind at the time of the abduction, if known;
- l) when the child or youth was last seen, by whom, and if the child or youth left with someone;
- m) known associates and frequented locations;
- n) names and contact information for family, significant others and friends;
- o) contact information for person(s) who are to be notified if the child or youth is located;
- p) where to transport the child or youth once located;
- q) any other information requested by the police; and
- r) any other information assessed by the social worker as being relevant.

Consultation with a Supervisor

- 33. The social worker shall immediately consult with a supervisor when informed that a child or youth has been abducted. The supervisor shall immediately notify the manager, and RD of the abduction and the RD shall notify the ADM-SDRO as soon as possible. When this occurs outside of regular business hours, the on call supervisor shall notify the manager, RD and ADM-SDRO. The social worker shall provide updates to the supervisor on a **daily basis**, at minimum, including what efforts are being made to locate the child or youth.
- 34. The social worker shall complete the *Missing or Abducted Child or Youth Report and* submit it to the supervisor as part of the internal notification process.
- 35. A child or youth abduction is considered a critical incident and the social worker, in consultation with the supervisor, shall also ensure the ***Critical Incident and Death Protocol (QA-2014-001)*** is followed.
- 36. Where the manager notified is not the manager who has care/custody of the child or youth (e.g. child or youth is placed outside their home zone), the manager notified shall ensure the manager who has care/custody is notified, the next business day, or as soon as possible thereafter.

Working with the Placement Resource

- 37. The social worker shall **immediately** contact the placement resource to ensure they are aware that a child or youth has been abducted and:
 - a) provide information about the circumstances surrounding the child or youth's abduction;
 - b) discuss all relevant information known about the child or youth and their last known whereabouts and request that they notify the social worker and police immediately if they become aware of any new information that may assist in the search for the child or youth;
 - c) discuss their role in working with the social worker and the police to locate the child or youth; and
 - d) update them on a daily basis, at minimum, until the child or youth is located.

Parents

38. A social worker shall ensure the parent(s) is **immediately** notified when a child or youth has been abducted and is in: interim care, interim custody, temporary custody, or in care under a *Protective Care Agreement*.
39. When notifying the parent(s), the social worker shall:
- a) provide information about the circumstances surrounding the child or youth's abduction and the actions taken to locate the child or youth;
 - b) seek any information the parent(s) may have that could assist the police and request that they notify the social worker or the police immediately if they have any new information; and
 - c) update the parent(s) on a daily basis, at minimum, until the child or youth is located.
40. The decision to contact the parent(s) of a child or youth who is in voluntary custody or continuous custody, or of a youth residing in a placement through a Youth Services Agreement, will be made in consultation with a supervisor. The decision will be based on the parent's relationship with the child or youth and whether they may have information that will assist in locating the child or youth.

Amber Alerts

41. Amber Alerts can only be released by the police. If a child or youth has been abducted, the police may decide to issue an Amber Alert to provide the public with immediate and up-to-date information about the child or youth through widespread media broadcasts soliciting the public's help in the safe and swift return of the child or youth.
42. A social worker shall immediately consult with a supervisor and manager if the police are planning to issue an Amber Alert. The police require the written permission of a parent before an Amber Alert can be issued. In the event that this situation occurs outside of regular business hours, the social worker shall consult with the on call supervisor.
43. Additional Information regarding Amber Alerts can be found at <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/nl/amber-alert-program>.
44. When a decision has been made by the police to issue an Amber Alert the social worker shall immediately notify the supervisor who shall notify the manager and RD. The RD shall notify the ADM-SDRO as soon as possible. When this occurs outside of regular business hours, the on call supervisor shall notify the manager, RD and ADM-SDRO.

Sharing Information between On-call and Day Staff Regarding an Abducted Child or Youth

45. The sharing of information between the child or youth's social worker and the on-call social worker is crucial. This will help ensure that the staff involved in decisions

about an abducted child or youth have pertinent and up to date information.

46. The child or youth's social worker shall inform the on-call social worker each day that a child or youth is abducted using the *On Call Notification Form*.
47. Any follow up provided by the on-call social worker regarding an abducted child or youth, including new notifications received during the on-call shift, shall be documented in the case notes and forwarded to the child or youth's social worker **at the beginning of the next working day**. Managers shall ensure processes are in place in their respective zones to facilitate the sharing of information between on-call and day staff.

Return of a Child or Youth who had been Abducted

48. Once an abducted child or youth has been located, a social worker shall **immediately** notify the: placement resource, supervisor, manager (by email), and the child or youth's parent(s) and police where required. The manager shall notify the RD, who shall ensure the ADM-SDRO is notified of the child or youth's return. When this occurs outside of regular business hours, the on call supervisor shall notify the manager, RD and ADM-SDRO. Where a child or youth is in voluntary custody, continuous custody, or is youth residing in a placement under a Youth Services Agreement, their parent(s) should be notified only if they had been informed that the child or youth had been abducted. **A foster parent(s) or residential staff person(s) may assist the social worker in notifying appropriate parties; however, it is the social worker's responsibility to ensure all appropriate parties have been notified.**
49. When the child or youth is located, the social worker shall complete the *Missing or Abducted Child or Youth Located Report* and submit it to the supervisor who shall submit it to the manager as part of the internal notification process.
50. The social worker shall discuss with the police any required follow up, including if the police will need to interview the child or youth and if there are any safety measures that should be implemented to prevent future abductions.
51. Once a child or youth has returned to a placement, a social worker shall contact the child or youth **within 24 hours** to provide support. In situations where the child or youth's immediate safety was, or is, identified as a concern, a meeting shall occur with the child or youth as soon as possible and **within 24 hours**. At minimum, the social worker shall:
 - a) assess and attend to the child or youth's urgent needs and promptly arrange additional support, if needed (e.g., medical attention, crisis counselling, interview with the police);
 - b) discuss with the child or youth what happened during the time they were abducted; and
 - c) determine if additional supports are needed in the short term.
52. A social worker shall also discuss the abduction with the child or youth's placement resource to:
 - a) discuss the circumstances surrounding the child or youth's abduction;

- b) obtain information about the child or youth's demeanor since their return;
- c) determine what steps may be taken to reduce the likelihood of a future abduction; and
- d) develop a plan with the placement resource to ensure necessary support is provided to the child or youth.

53. Support shall also be provided to the placement resource (e.g., foster parent, residential staff) who may have been negatively impacted by the child or youth's abduction.

54. A social worker should also discuss the child or youth's abduction with the parent(s) and provide support, where appropriate. Support may also be extended to siblings, other family members, or others who have a significant relationship with the child or youth.

Out of Province Placements

55. In accordance with the *Provincial/Territorial Protocol for Children, Youth and Families Moving Between Provinces/Territories (PT Protocol)*, a receiving Province or Territory (PT) will report any significant events, including when a child or youth is abducted or missing, to the originating PT immediately or as soon as reasonably possible.

56. The process for a receiving PT notifying this province when a child or youth is abducted or missing shall be outlined in the Case Planning and Management section of the *Interprovincial Placement Agreement (IPPA)*. The social worker shall:

- a) provide a copy of CSSD policy for children and youth who are absent without permission, as well as, the policy for missing and abducted children and youth, to the designated social worker in the receiving PT and the placement resource where the child or youth resides; and
- b) discuss expectations regarding how the placement resource (e.g. foster home, residential treatment program) and the receiving PT will respond when a child or youth from this province is missing or has been abducted.

EXCEPTIONS TO POLICY: None

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS:

- *Missing or Abducted Child or Youth Report* Form
- *Missing or Abducted Child or Youth Located Report* Form
- *On-Call Notification* Form
- *Provincial/Territorial Protocol for Children, Youth and Families Moving Between Provinces/Territories (April 2016)*, Appendix B
- *Interprovincial Placement Agreement* Form