

Appendix 1 When a Child or Youth is Missing

Standards for Foster Homes: Standard B.2.2 (f)

Definitions

Missing Child/Youth: any child/youth in care, including respite care, who is:

- unreasonably late;
- whose whereabouts are unknown, and,
- who cannot be found after taking the same actions as a prudent and responsible parent.

Unreasonably late: A child/youth in care, including respite care, is unreasonably late when they have not arrived at their foster home, Specialized Home and Support Service or another location (e.g. school, a friend's house) as expected and an amount of time has passed that causes concern, based on the child/youth's age, developmental capacity and vulnerability.

Prudent and Responsible Parent: The prudent and responsible parent makes careful and sensible parental decisions that are intended to maintain the child/youth's health, safety and best interest.

Provincial Centralized Screening (PCS): Provides 24/7 child protection service across the province, including responding to reports from caregivers and/or the public when a child/youth in care is missing. 1-800-663-9122

Note: Responses taken by a caregiver, the child/youth's worker and/or PCS when a child/youth may be missing must be based on the individual child/youth's developmental capacity (eg. their chronological and/or developmental age), the circumstances at the time the child/youth went missing (eg. weather, if they are emotionally distraught) and any other contextual factors.

Responding When a Child/Youth is Unreasonably Late and Whose Whereabouts are Unknown: Expectations of the Caregiver (child/youth is not yet considered to be missing)

- Contact the police/RCMP if at any time they believe the child/youth's health or safety is in immediate danger, and then contact the child/youth's worker or call PCS and select option 1 for the immediate queue to inform them the police/RCMP were contacted. (See below for list of information to provide police/RCMP).
- Before contacting PCS, take the same actions a prudent and responsible parent would, with consideration of the child/youth's age, developmental and/or support needs, circumstances around their disappearance, and other contextual factors, including but not limited to:

- Actively trying to contact the child/youth directly via their cell phone, etc.;
 - Actively seeking out and contacting anyone who may know about the current or recent whereabouts of the child/youth. This may include the child/youth's friends, family, persons they are in a relationship with, members of the child/youth's Indigenous community, coaches, teachers, or other community professionals involved with the child/youth etc.;
 - Conducting a thorough search of the caregiver's property including the child/youth's room, the home and outdoor area;
 - Identifying and checking likely locations where the child/youth may be in the community; and
- Document any actions taken or efforts made to locate the child/youth at the earliest opportunity.

Note: A youth on probation must be governed by the conditions of their probation with regards to time away from a foster home or Specialized Home and Support Service, curfew and/or required check-ins. Ensure a plan is in place for actions the caregiver should take if a youth breaches their probation, including contacting the youth's worker or PCS, the youth's probation officer or if police/RCMP must be contacted immediately.

Responding When a Child/Youth is Missing: Expectations of the Caregiver

- Follow any specific plan the child/youth's worker has provided when the child/youth is missing. This plan may include details such as:
- Additional actions before contacting a child/youth's worker or PCS.
 - When to contact the child/youth's worker or PCS including when to call PCS and select option 1 for the immediate queue or select option 2 for all other child protection reports or support service.
- If there is no previously provided plan, the caregiver is to contact the child/youth's worker or call PCS and select option 1 for the immediate queue, unless the caregiver has reason to believe the child/youth's health or safety is in immediate danger, then the caregiver is to call police/RCMP.
- Once contacted by the caregiver, the child/youth's worker or PCS must assess the situation and direct the caregiver on specific actions to take next, which may include contacting the police/RCMP.

Note: There is no requirement for a caregiver to wait for a specific amount of time (e.g. 24 hours) before reporting a child/youth missing to the child/youth's worker or PCS, or if needed, directly to police/RCMP.

Note: Reporting a child/youth missing to the police/RCMP does not relieve the caregiver, the child/youth's worker, or PCS of their responsibility to continue working to locate the child/youth in collaboration with the police/RCMP.

- Communicate the following details to the child/youth's worker, PCS and/or the police/RCMP (if applicable):
 - If it is out of character for the child/youth to be missing;
 - If the child/youth has physical or mental health concerns that could increase the risk of harm (eg. require medication) and/or a developmental disability;
 - The child/youth was emotionally distraught when last seen by the caregiver, including any recent history of suicidal ideation or suicide attempts;
 - The child/youth is known to actively use substances;
 - The child/youth is in an area where there are extreme weather conditions such as freezing temperatures or snow and if the child/youth may not be appropriately dressed for the weather;
 - There are any concerns that the child/youth's disappearance may be the result of suspicious or dangerous circumstances that suggest the child/youth may be the victim of violence; or
 - There is reason to believe that the child/youth may have been involved in an accident or mishap.

- The following additional information is to be provided to police/RCMP when the child/youth is reported missing:
 - The child/youth's name (including any aliases), date of birth, and gender;
 - The child/youth's address and cell phone number;
 - The time and place where the child/youth was last seen, by whom and any information pertaining to last contact with the child/youth eg. text message;
 - A current picture of the child/youth and physical description, including:
 - Ethnicity,
 - Height,
 - Weight,
 - Hair Colour/Length,
 - Eye Colour,
 - Distinguishing Characteristics (tattoos, birth marks, piercings, scars, etc.),
 - Other notable characteristics (glasses, braces, facial hair, physical disabilities, etc.),
 - What the child/youth was last seen wearing (describe clothing in as much detail as possible),
 - Items known or likely to be in the possession of the child/youth (backpack, bike, cellphone, etc.);

- A list of anyone who may have information about the current or recent whereabouts of the child/youth. This may include the child/youth's friends and associates, family, persons they are in a relationship with, members of the child/youth's Indigenous community, coaches, teachers, or other community professionals involved with the child/youth etc. Ensure addresses and phone numbers are provided if available;
 - If applicable, the name of the child/youth's school and teacher;
 - Factors that may pose an immediate risk to the child/youth's safety (e.g. sexual exploitation, gang affiliation);
 - That the child/youth being in care under the Child, Family and Community Service Act is not to be included in any information made public in an effort to locate the child/youth; and
 - Clarification about how efforts regarding locating the child/youth will be communicated and to whom.
- If the caregiver informs the police/RCMP of the missing child/youth and requests action to locate the child/youth, they are required to contact the child/youth's worker or to call PCS and select option 1 for the immediate queue and advise that a report to police/RCMP has been made. Once notified, the child/youth's worker must complete a Reportable Circumstances Report.

Responding When a Child/Youth is Missing: Child/Youth's Worker Responsibilities

- It is the responsibility of the child/youth's worker to ensure the following occurs:
- Once a report has been made to police/RCMP about a missing child/youth, ensure all parties involved in searching for the child/youth are provided with all information pertaining to the possible whereabouts of the child/youth and are kept updated.
 - That if a child/youth is reported missing to police/RCMP, the police/RCMP know that the child/youth being in foster care is not to be in any information made public in an effort to locate the child/youth.
 - Clarify how efforts regarding locating the missing child/youth will be communicated and to whom with police/RCMP after a report has been made.
 - Complete a Reportable Circumstances Report if a Reportable Circumstances Report is not currently open due to the child/youth being missing.
 - Unless police/RCMP have directed otherwise, make reasonable efforts to notify the child/youth's parent or guardian as soon as possible, and where appropriate, work collaboratively with them.

- Maintain contact with police/RCMP, the caregiver and parents or guardian regarding updates and revisions to the plan to locate the child/youth.

When a Child/Youth is No Longer Missing: Child/Youth's Worker Responsibilities

- It is the responsibility of the child/youth's worker to ensure the following occurs:
 - All parties involved in searching for the child/youth are notified as soon as possible that the child/youth is no longer missing. The child/youth's worker may direct the caregiver or other staff to assist with contacts.
 - The child/youth is provided with medical assessment and treatment if injuries are observed or suspected. The child/youth's worker may direct the caregiver to take the child/youth for a medical assessment or treatment.
 - That appropriate support is provided for the child/youth if they experienced any form of emotional/psychological trauma while missing.
 - If there is reason to believe that the child/youth was the victim of violence, sexual exploitation or another crime, let the child/youth know you are concerned about them and consult with a supervisor on next steps.
 - If the injuries meet the criteria in the Reportable Circumstances Policy, make a further Reportable Circumstances Report.
 - Meet with the child/youth in person after they have returned at a time and place where the child/youth is comfortable and discuss the following in a way that is trauma-informed and not blaming of the child/youth:
 - Why the child/youth left.
 - What happened while they were missing, who they were with and if they had any concerns about their safety while they were missing.
 - A plan is provided to the caregiver on what to do if the child/youth is missing again in the future. Ensure the plan is documented in ICM. The plan should be based on conversations with child/youth and relevant members of the Care Circle or Team. Include the following:
 - Any additional prudent and responsible parenting actions that must be taken; and
 - Whether the caregiver should call police/RCMP or call PCS and select option 1 for the immediate queue or select option 2 for all other child protection reports or support services if a similar situation occurs.
- Develop a plan with the child/youth, caregiver, relevant service providers, including staff providing contracted agency care, to address identified issues, determine how to strengthen the child/youth's relationship with the caregiver and their feeling of safety and belonging in the home, and offer resources and services to help prevent the child/youth from going missing again.