

November 1, 2023 Changes to Missing Children and Youth in Care Policy

Definitions have been updated to make it clearer when a child should be considered missing. Additional safety concerns no longer present before a child/youth was considered missing.

- *Missing child/youth: A missing child/youth is 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.*

Headings were revised and added to be clearer about responsibilities of the caregiver and the child/youth's worker.

- *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)*
- *Responding When a Child/Youth is Missing: Expectations of the Caregiver*
- *Responding When a Child/Youth is Missing: Child/Youth's Worker Responsibilities*
- *When a Child/Youth is No Longer Missing: Child/Youth's Worker Responsibilities*

The following was added when a child/youth is unreasonably late and their whereabouts are unknown, the caregiver is to take steps to locate the child/youth:

- *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 PCS to inform them the police/RCMP were contacted.*
- *Conduct a thorough search of the caregiver's property including the child/youth's room, the home and outdoor area;*

The following was added after the caregiver has taken steps to try to locate the child/youth unsuccessfully and the child/youth is considered missing:

- It is the responsibility of the child/youth's worker to ensure the caregiver knows that if they are unable to locate the child/youth they are expected to:
 - Follow any specific plan the child/youth's worker has provided when the child/youth is missing. This plan may include details such as:

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- Additional actions before contacting a child/youth's worker or PCS (e.g. whether to contact parents based on the child/youth's legal status and current relationship with parents).
- When to contact the child/youth's worker or PCS including when to use the PCS Immediate Queue or the PCS Absent Child/Youth Line.
- If there is no previously provided plan, the caregiver is to contact the child/youth's worker or the PCS 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.

Habitually was removed from the policy

- This was done to ensure that planning is done for children and youth in care after they go missing the first time. Previous policy indicated that exploring the reasons why the child/youth went missing only occurred when they were habitually missing.

New requirements have been added to ensure appropriate steps are taken once a child is found.

- 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 the PCS Immediate Queue or Absent Child/Youth line if a similar situation occurs.
- Develop a plan with the child/youth and relevant service providers, including those providing residential care, to address identified issues and offer resources and services to help prevent the child/youth from going missing again.