

	INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY	
	Chapter 5: General Case Management Section 22: Missing and Runaway Children	
	Effective Date: April 1, 2025	Version: 6

- [Procedure](#)
- [Definitions](#)

- [Forms and Tools](#)
- [Related Policies](#)

- [Legal References](#)
- [Practice Guidance](#)

POLICY OVERVIEW

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) has procedures to locate a child involved with DCS who is missing and/or who have run away.

[Back to Top](#)

PROCEDURE

DCS will make on-going, diligent attempts to promptly locate any missing child involved with DCS via:

1. An open assessment;
2. An Informal Adjustment/Prevention Plan (IA);
3. An out-of-home placement (including a residential facility);
4. An in-home Child in Need of Services (CHINS); or
5. A Trial Home Visit (THV).

DCS will continue to make foster care maintenance payments (FCMPs) to the resource parent for a maximum of five (5) calendar days when a child in out-of-home placement is missing or runs away if the intent is for the child to return to the same resource home. If the child does not return to the placement within five (5) calendar days of absence, then the placement and per diem will be terminated for the child, unless otherwise approved by the DCS Regional Manager (RM).

Note: When a request for continued placement and per diem for a child missing over five (5) days is received from a Licensed Child Placing Agency (LCPA), the Deputy Director of Field Operations will review and, if approved, provide a written statement approving the request.

DCS will ensure the parent, resource parent, or residential provider contact the following **immediately** if the child is missing or runs away:

1. The Local Law Enforcement Agency (LEA) in the area the child went missing, and
2. The Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline (Hotline) at 1-800-800-5556 or DCSHotlineReports@dcs.in.gov

Note: The Hotline will complete an Information and Referral (I&R) then send the I&R to the local DCS office to ensure the Family Case Manager (FCM) Supervisor enters the child's information in the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) within 24 hours.

If at any point there is an indication of Human Trafficking (HT) (see Definitions), the HT Regional Field Leads or the DCS Focused Needs team may be contacted for assistance during any absence of a missing or runaway child. See the Human Trafficking Response System on the Focused Needs and International and Cultural Affairs (ICA) SharePoint site for more information.

Immediately Upon Learning of a Missing or Runaway Child

The FCM will **complete within 24 hours** of being notified of the missing/runaway child to ensure that the child's information is entered into NCMEC:

1. Inform the parent, guardian, or custodian (unless TPR is finalized) of the child's runaway or missing status, if not aware of current status, and inquire about the child's whereabouts and any recent contact with the child;
2. Gather pertinent information from the child's caregiver and other household members regarding:
 - a. When and where the child was last seen,
 - b. The child's last known state of mind,
 - c. Any unusual events prior to the child's disappearance, and
 - d. Whether any of the child's possessions are missing.
3. Confirm the child has been reported as missing to the Indiana State Police (ISP) via the Indiana Data and Communications System (IDACS) (317-232-8294);
 - a. Ensure the child is entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database, if not already done,
 - b. Request ISP and local LEA reports, and
 - c. Maintain regular contact with ISP, LEA, and NCMEC until the child is located.

The FCM Supervisor will:

1. Enter the missing/runaway child's information in the NCMEC Portal **within 24 hours** (see the Standardization of Process: Reporting Missing /Runaway Child to NCMEC). The completion of the NCMEC form (via the portal) includes:
 - a. A physical description of the child (i.e., height, weight, sex, ethnicity, race, hair and eye color), and
 - b. Relevant information in the Child Endangerment section which includes:
 - i. Pregnancy status;
 - ii. Prescription medications;
 - iii. Suicidal tendencies;
 - iv. Vulnerability to Human Trafficking (see Missing and Runaway Flowchart); and
 - v. Any other health or risk factors.
2. Update the placement in the case management system, reflecting the missing or runaway status; and
3. Assist the FCM and ensure appropriate documentation, including any deviation from best practice, is entered into the case management system.

While the Child is in Missing/Runaway Status

The following will be completed by the FCM after completing the above steps:

1. Notify the following of the child's runaway or missing status:
 - a. The DCS Staff Attorney,
 - b. The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) or Guardian ad Litem (GAL), and
 - c. The Child and Family Team (CFT) members.

2. Attempt to contact the child on the child's cell phone (if applicable);
3. Visit locations the child frequents (e.g., school, work, relatives home, park);
4. Contact the child's family, friends, school staff, employer, and other individuals who have a close relationship to the child to inquire about the child's whereabouts and any recent contact with the child;

Note: The FCM should make regular attempts to contact the child, visit locations the child frequents, and maintain contact with all parties involved in the search for the child throughout the child's absence from care.

5. Report new relevant information to ISP, local LEA, and NCMEC, if applicable;
6. Complete a referral to the DCS Investigators (see Definitions) and/or the Focused Needs team for assistance with locating the child including through social media (see Forms and Tools);
7. Document the following information in the case management system:
 - a. The runaway/missing person episode,
 - b. Corresponding documents,
 - c. Information gathered, and
 - d. Efforts to locate the child.
8. Staff with the FCM Supervisor, as necessary, to provide updates on locating the child.

The DCS Staff Attorney will file a notice with the court of the child's missing or runaway status no later than the **next business day** after notification is received from the FCM when there is an open CHINS or IA case.

Note: Notice should advise the court of any information regarding the ongoing efforts to locate the child.

The DCS Hotline Intake Specialist (IS) will:

1. Complete an I&R; and
2. Send the I&R to the local DCS Office.

Once the Child is Located

When the child is located, the FCM will:

1. Ensure the FCM Supervisor is aware the child has been located;
2. Notify the parent, guardian, or custodian (unless TPR is finalized), ISP, local LEA, NCMEC, the DCS Staff Attorney, and all other parties previously contacted to assist in the search for the child that the child has been located;

Note: If the child is located out of state, the DCS may need to work with the local juvenile probation authorities in the locating state to facilitate the child's return, subject to the rules of the Interstate Commission for Juveniles (ICJ). These rules dictate voluntary and non-voluntary returns of runaways, including timelines and procedural steps.

3. Interview the child as soon as possible (**within 48 hours**). The interview should include a discussion of the reasons the child ran away, where the child went, and with whom the child was residing;

Note: Children may run away from placement for different reasons, including but not limited to missing family, friends, feeling unsafe or unwanted in their current placement, or wanting more freedom. Children who are missing or run away are at a higher risk of being sexually or physically abused, becoming involved in criminal behavior, and/or becoming victims of HT.

4. Complete the Human Trafficking Screening Tool in the case management system (see policy 4.47 Human Trafficking [HT]);

Note: A new placement should not be entered into the case management system for a child until the Human Trafficking Screening Tool has been completed.

5. Make a report to the Hotline upon indication by the Human Trafficking Screening Tool or if the child discloses HT (see policy 4.47 Human Trafficking);
6. Discuss case and assessment details, and the results of the Human Trafficking Screening Tool with the FCM Supervisor to determine next steps regarding (see policy 4.47 Human Trafficking [HT]):
 - a. Safety needs,
 - b. Placement,
 - c. Service referrals,
 - d. Involvement of LEA, and
 - e. Need for a HT forensic interview.
7. Notify the CFT members and convene a CFT Meeting within **five (5) business days of the child's return**. During the CFT Meeting, discuss and develop a plan to meet the child's needs with a focus on ensuring the child's safety and meeting the needs of the child's caregiver (see policy 5.07 Child and Family Team Meetings);
8. Update the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment (see policy 5.19 Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths [CANS] Assessment); and
9. Document results of the Human Trafficking Screening Tool and all decisions and actions taken in the case management system.

When the child is located, the FCM Supervisor will:

1. Discuss the case and assessment, and results of the Human Trafficking Screening Tool and the Human Trafficking Comprehensive Screening Tool with the FCM; and
2. Assist and guide the FCM, as needed, and ensure appropriate documentation, including any deviation from best practice, is entered into the case management system.

When the child is located, the DCS Staff Attorney will file a notice with the court of the child's found status no later than the **next business day** after notification is received from the FCM when there is an open CHINS or IA case.

Note: Notice should advise the court of any relevant information regarding the child's missing or runaway episode.

[Back to Top](#)

RELEVANT INFORMATION

Definitions

Department of Child Services (DCS) Investigators

DCS Investigators are employees of DCS who are responsible for assisting FCMs in locating absent parents, relatives, and/or other identified persons of interest in the case and/or assessment.

Human Trafficking (HT)

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 defines HT as:

1. Sex trafficking – the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act where the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or the person being induced to perform such act is under 18 years of age.
2. Labor trafficking – the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

Forms and Tools

- [DCS Focused Needs and International and Cultural Affairs \(ICA\) SharePoint](#)
- [DCS Investigation Services](#) – available via the DCS Community SharePoint
- [Human Trafficking Response System](#) – available on the [Focused Needs and International and Cultural Affairs \(ICA\) SharePoint](#) site
- Human Trafficking Screening Tool – available in the case management system
- Indiana Clearinghouse for Information on Missing Children and Missing Endangered Adults phone number: 1-800-831-8953
- [Indiana Data and Communications System \(IDACS\) website](#)
- IDACS phone number: 317-232-8294
- [Interstate Commission for Juveniles \(ICJ\) Website](#)
- NCMEC phone number: 1-800-843-5678 (1-800-THE-LOST)
- NCMEC website: <https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/missingfromcare>
- [National Runaway Safeline website](#)
- [Release for Use of Photographs \(SF 54968\)](#)
- [Standardization of Process: Reporting Missing /Runaway Child to NCMEC](#)

Related Policies

- [4.47 Human Trafficking \(HT\)](#)
- [5.07 Child and Family Team \(CFT\) Meetings](#)
- [5.19 Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths \(CANS\) Assessment](#)

[Back to Top](#)

LEGAL REFERENCES

- [IC 10-13-5-4: "Missing Child"](#)
- [IC 10-13-5-4.4: "Missing endangered child"](#)
- [IC 31-33-18-2 \(25\): Disclosure of unredacted material to certain persons](#)
- [IC 31-34-1-3.5: Victim of human or sexual trafficking](#)
- [IC 31-34-1-8: Missing child](#)
- [IC 31-37-23: Interstate Compact on Juveniles](#)
- [34 USC 11201-11281: Runaway and Homeless Youth](#)
- [34 USC 11291-11298: Missing Children](#)
- [Interstate Commission for Juveniles \(ICJ\) Rules \(2024\)](#)

[Back to Top](#)

PRACTICE GUIDANCE- DCS POLICY 5.22

Practice Guidance is designed to assist DCS staff with thoughtful and practical direction on how to effectively integrate tools and social work practice into daily case management in an effort to achieve positive family and child outcomes. Practice Guidance is separate from Policy.

N/A

[Back to Top](#)