


QM-006 Policy and Procedure  
Missing Children

<b>DEPARTMENT NAME:</b> Quality Management		
<b>SUBJECT:</b> Prevention, Reporting and Services To Missing Children		<b>POLICY NUMBER:</b> QM-006
<b>APPROVAL:</b> 	<b>EFFECTIVE DATE:</b> 12/22/2020	<b>REPLACES:</b> QM-006 Revised 07/14/2014

- I. **PURPOSE:** This operating procedure describes uniform policy for ensuring that prompt and comprehensive actions are taken when children are missing for any reason. This operating procedure identifies the steps to be taken in order to prevent runaways, locate missing child(ren), prevent further incidents and provide needed services.
- II. **REVIEW HISTORY:** QM-006 revised 07/01/05, 10/20/05, 9/18/07 and 7/14/14.
- III. **CONTACT:** Quality Management Department
- IV. **PERSONS AFFECTED:** Children’s Network staff, contracted Case Management Organizations and contract specialty providers.
- V. **POLICY:** This operating procedure is applicable to Children’s Network staff, contracted Case Management Organization providers and Residential care providers who work with children under court ordered supervision, in both out of home care and in-home care.
- VI. **RATIONALE:** This policy clarifies of the procedures to follow when a child is deemed to be missing.
- VII. **CROSS REFERENCES:** 65C-30.019 F.A.C.: Department of Children and Families operating procedure CFOP 175-85.
- VIII. **DEFINITIONS:** For purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:
  - a) **Abducted:** an individual who does not have care and custody of a child under the jurisdiction of a dependency court has taken the child and left the jurisdiction of the court or in some manner is avoiding the supervision ordered by the dependency court.
  - b) **Absconded:** an individual who has care and custody of a child under the jurisdiction of a dependency court has taken the child and left the jurisdiction of the court or in some manner is avoiding the supervision ordered by the dependency court.
  - c) **Child:** any unmarried person under the age of 18 years who has not been emancipated by order of the court.



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- d) Commercial Sexual Exploitation of a child (CSEC): The use of any person under the age of 18 for sexual purposes in exchange for money, goods or services or the promise of money, goods or services. Children that engage in these acts are considered victims, even if there is no adult or other minor receiving financial benefits or if initiated by the youth. Survival sex will be considered under this term.
- e) Community Based Lead Agency: a contracted community-based care provider whose staff perform the functions previously performed by the department. In this policy it is the Children's Network of Southwest Florida.
- f) Case Management Organization: a contracted provider which provides case management services to the Children's Network of Southwest Florida.
- g) Exigent Circumstances: situations that require immediate actions, such as the child is under the age of thirteen, believed to be out of the zone of safety for their age and development, mentally incapacitated, in a life threatening situation, in the company of others who could endanger their welfare or is absent under circumstance inconsistent with established behaviors.
- h) MEPIC: Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse
- i) Missing Child: a child who is under the age of 18, location not known. who is EITHER: already in the custody of the State OR a child not in the custody of the state (i.e. all investigations or in-home cases, including both judicial and non-judicial) who we have or are petitioning for a pickup order.
- j) NCMEC: National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
- k) Runaway: a child who has left a relative placement, non-relative placement, shelter home, foster home, residential group home, any other placement alternative or the in home placement without permission of the caregiver and who is determined to be missing. A child who has run away three or more times for the purposes of this policy is considered a "Habitual Runaway".
- l) Child Welfare Case Manager: a Child Protection Professional or contracted provider staff with responsibility for providing supervision and/or case management services to children and families.
- m) Children's Network Missing Child Specialist: a Children's Network professional position responsible for maintaining communications between CMO's units and the State in order to ensure concerted efforts to locate the missing child.
- n) Regional Child Location Specialist: DCF agent responsible for enhancing the coordination and communication on missing children issues within the state's criminal justice system in concert with Florida's community-based care providers
- o) FCIC/NCIC: Florida Crime Information Center / National Crime Information Center

## **IX. PROCEDURES:**

### **A. General Requirements.**

1. The Child Welfare Case Manager must be alert to changes in the child's behavior, emotional, and physical status, such as school problems, drug usage, depression, withdrawal and agitation. The Child Welfare Case Manager must be prepared to act quickly when a child runs away or whose location is otherwise undetermined and must know the procedures to report a child as missing. The Children's Network staff and contracted Case Management Organization providers must ensure that all caregivers are made aware of how to detect behaviors that may precipitate a child running away, as well as the procedure to follow if a child runs away or is otherwise missing.
2. The Case Management Organization providers will identify and support foster homes and other licensed facilities which have good skills and specific training in providing care for teenagers. The Case Management Organization providers will ensure that staff with placement responsibility has all current placement information available to them, including information on licensed homes and facilities that may not be appropriate for runaways.
3. The Child Welfare Case Manager will ensure that all caregivers are informed of potential warning signs and understand the reporting activities expected when children run away or are determined to be missing.
4. If age appropriate, immediately upon placement of every child in out of home care, the Child Welfare Case Manager, jointly with the relative or non-relative caregiver, foster parent, or a staff member if placement is in a group home, will inform the child that his/her safety and well-being is a major concern. All children will be given the Florida Abuse Hotline number (1-800-962-2873) to call if they have concerns about their safety. In addition, they shall be informed of their rights and responsibilities and provided with the contact number of their Child Welfare Case Manager and their Guardian ad Litem.

### **B. Initial Response by a Caregiver to a Child Who Is Believed to be a Missing Child (abducted, absconded or on runaway status).**

Child welfare case managers must instruct caregivers to immediately do the following, as applicable, and document their attempts upon discovering a child under their care is missing:

1. **If exigent circumstances exist** ( See definition "g" ) that require immediate actions, such as the child is under the age of thirteen, believed to be out of the zone of safety for their age and development, mentally incapacitated, in a life threatening situation, in the company of others who could endanger their welfare or is absent under circumstance inconsistent with established behaviors. The caregiver will call local law enforcement as soon as the determination is made that the child is missing and ask the officer to:

- (a) Take a **“missing child report”**.
- (b) Assign a case number and provide the number back to the caregiver or person reporting the child missing.
- (c) Provide a copy of the law enforcement case report, when it is available.
- (d) If the responding law enforcement officer refuses to take a missing child report, for any reason, the caregiver will request to speak to the appropriate Watch Commander and document the officer’s name and specific local law enforcement agency name. If the Watch Commander refuses to take a missing child report, the caregiver will immediately contact the Child Welfare Case Manager or on-call staff to report this information. The Child Welfare Case Manager will report this information to the Children’s Network missing child specialist who will contact the Department’s Regional Child Location Specialist to request assistance in obtaining the missing child report.
- (e) The caregiver will notify the child’s Child Welfare Case Manager or the emergency on-call staff and share all pertinent information listed above with emphasis on providing the law enforcement agency name, case number and if available a copy of the law enforcement report. The Child Welfare Case Manager or the on- call Case Manager will follow the procedures outlined in paragraph **IX. C** of this policy.

2. **If exigent circumstances do not exist**, ( See definition “g” ) and it is not believed that the child is in immediate danger then the caregiver or child welfare professional, or designee can take up to four (4) hours to actively search for and make reasonable efforts to locate the child prior to contacting local law enforcement. Examples of reasonable efforts may include:

- (a) Searching the child’s belongings.
- (b) Call the following persons as appropriate to ascertain if the child has been seen, or has given any indications that may explain the child’s missing status:
  - 1. Calling/texting the child’s cell phone;
  - 2. School/child’s teachers and school resource officer;
  - 3. The child’s relatives/parents, both local and non-local, if appropriate and the caregiver has the means for such contact;
  - 4. Any friends, places or persons that the child is known to frequent , the local runaway shelter (if there is one in the community);
  - 5. The child’s employer, if applicable; and

6. The following providers (if applicable): GAL, Probation Officer and any other contacts relevant to the child.
  - (c) Checking the child's computer, social media accounts, or other online accounts. (if such information is known and in accordance with the agency's policies on use of social media)
  - (d) Write down any information gathered that might help locate the child.
  - (e) Provide telephone numbers and ask for the individuals above to call back and share information if they have further information or see the child.
  - (f) Write down what the child was wearing the last time the child was seen and obtain a recent photo.
  - (g) If within 4 hours, the child's whereabouts remain unknown, the caregiver will notify local law enforcement, etc.
  - (h) Notify the child's Child Welfare Case Manager or emergency on-call staff and share all pertinent information listed above with emphasis on providing the law enforcement agency name and case number if available. The person reporting the child missing will gather the information outlined to complete the missing child report to law enforcement. The exhibit "Law enforcement checklist" will be used as a guide to report the missing child.
3. If at any time **new information** is obtained on the child's location, all law enforcement agencies and other agencies notified that the child was missing must be contacted immediately and update with appropriate efforts taken to return the child to the caregiver's home. If at any time the child returns to the caregiver home, all law enforcement agencies and other agencies notified that the child was missing must be contacted immediately.

**C. Child Welfare Case Manager Response.**

1. See **IX. B. Initial Response by a Caregiver to a Child Who Is Believed to be a Missing Child (abducted, absconded or on runaway status).** If the caregiver did not complete this process the Child Welfare Case Manager will complete **IX. B. (1-3).**
2. If a child who is the subject of an in-home case (including both judicial and non-judicial) is determined to be missing, the CWCM will immediately staff with their supervisor to see if present or impending danger exists. If it does exist, they will then staff with CLS within 24hrs of determining that the child is missing to obtain a pickup order if one or more of the following exist:
  - i. Law enforcement will not initiate efforts to locate the child without a court order

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- ii. The caregiver or legal guardian of a child in an active child protective investigation or receiving judicial or non-judicial in-home services is refusing to cooperate with efforts to locate the child, including:
  - iii. Has not reported the child as missing to local law enforcement within the required timeframes and continues to refuse to do so after being informed of the need to do so.
  - iv. There is reason to believe the child's whereabouts are known by the caregiver or legal guardian and the lack of cooperation is for the purpose of denying the child welfare professional access to the child, or the family has or is about to flee to avoid further agency intervention
  - v. If an investigations/in-home case (including both judicial and non-judicial cases) meets those qualifications and a pickup order is in process by CLS, the full missing child process will be followed, as the child then meets the definition of a missing child. If the pickup order is later denied by the court, the MCR should be closed out using the Judicial recovery type.
3. If the child's photo is not available in FSFN then follow this process: The Child Welfare Case Manager will provide a photograph of the child to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Missing Children Information Clearinghouse (FDLE/MEPIC). The child's photo needs to be electronically available in FSFN Person's management profile.—The photos should only include the missing child identified, including the child's head, neck and shoulders only. Also, the photo must be of good quality as FDLE/MEPIC determines whether or not a child's photo will be used on its website.
4. The Child Welfare Case Manager will attempt to locate the child by checking with Economic Services, Medicaid and other information sources and systems available to the department or its designee. The following information outlined on the Law Enforcement Checklist (Exhibit B) will be gathered in preparation for the reporting of a child as a Missing Child
5. The child's electronic copy case file will be maintained in the local office in a centralized location and available at all times for review by local law enforcement and for the provision of updated information.
6. The child's Child Welfare Case Manager will notify, as applicable, the following persons (if the caregiver has not already done so) once it has been determined that the child is missing, so long as the child remains missing.
  - (a) The child's parents, legal custodian, relatives or foster parent.
  - (b) The child's Guardian ad Litem.
  - (c) The DCF's Child Legal Service Attorney



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- (d) Attorney Ad Litem
  - (e) Primary Child Welfare Case Manager (if Courtesy case) even if the child has been located / has returned.
  - (f) The Regional Criminal Justice Coordinator. (To be completed by Q.M.)
  - (g) The child's therapist.
  - (h) The child's Juvenile Probation Officer, if the child has an open case with the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)
  - (i) The Region Compact Specialist, if the child is placed out-of-state in accordance with the Interstate Compact on Placement of Children (ICPC) or if a child missing from Florida is known or believed to be out of the state.
  - (j) United States Customs and Border Protection and the Department of State, if the child is known or believed to be out of the country. (To be completed by Q.M.)
  - (k) Any other person the Child Welfare Case Manager deems essential.
7. In addition to notifying local law enforcement, the process for reporting a missing child is:
- (a) The Child Welfare Case Manager or the on-call Case Manager must complete the electronic version of the Missing Child Report (MCR) on the appropriate State's approved SACWIS as soon as possible, but no later than 24 hours of determining that a child is required to be reported as missing. An instruction for the completion of this form can be found using the FSFN user guide ([http://fsfn.dcf.state.fl.us/SystemDocs/User\\_Guides/Missing\\_Child\\_Report\\_User\\_Guide.pdf](http://fsfn.dcf.state.fl.us/SystemDocs/User_Guides/Missing_Child_Report_User_Guide.pdf)).
  - 1. Completion of the FSFN MCR will initiate notification of the child as missing to FDLE /MEPIC and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). All actions must be clearly documented in the child's FSFN chronological notes.
  - 2. The MCR shall be entered in FSFN within 24 hours. The narrative shall include, but is not limited to:
    - a. Demographic information and characteristics related to the child that has been reported missing.

- b. Name and contact information of the primary child welfare professional.
  - c. The narrative shall contain the following information, at minimum:
    - i. Information on where the child was last seen;
    - ii. The child's direction of travel;
    - iii. What the child was last seen wearing;
    - iv. The child's possible destination, if known;
    - v. Prior recovery locations from earlier missing child episodes, if applicable, or areas in which the child is known to frequent;
    - vi. Personal belongings that the child took with them, if applicable; 7. Any other information that might be helpful in the recovery of the child.
    - vii. Information regarding any suspected companions.
  - (b) If exigent circumstances exist, the DCF Statewide Missing Child Specialist can be contacted directly to assist in initiating emergency procedures with law enforcement and/or FDLE (To be completed by Q.M.)
  - (c) When a child welfare professional is informed that a child under supervision is missing, the Child Welfare Case Manager must document the missing child event within FSFN chronological notes and the efforts to locate the child. All FSFN notes related to Missing Children must be input no later than 2 business days.
8. If the missing child is residing in another state or nation the following actions must be taken:
- (a) For children placed pursuant to the conditions of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC), the Child Welfare Case Manager will immediately contact the social service worker providing supervision to request their assistance in the reporting of the child as missing to law enforcement in the jurisdiction where the child was residing. For children not placed pursuant to ICPC, the Child Welfare Case Manager will contact the caregiver with whom the child was residing and request their assistance in reporting the child as missing. The Child Welfare Case





Manager providing courtesy within the State of Florida will be responsible for:

1. Reporting the child missing to Law Enforcement
2. Create the Missing Child Report ( MCR in FSFN)
  - (b) The Child Welfare Case Manager will contact any parents and/or relatives who reside locally to see if they have any information on the location of the child. This information should be shared with the social service worker providing supervision or caregiver to assist law enforcement in the jurisdiction where the child was residing.
  - (c) When the Child Welfare Case Manager is notified by the social service worker providing supervision or the caregiver that the child has been reported as missing, the electronic MCR will be completed immediately indicating that the child was residing out of the state of Florida and has been reported as missing in the jurisdiction where he was located.
  - (d) All information and actions taken must be clearly documented in the child's FSFN chronological notes.
  - (e) The Child Welfare Case Manager will notify the ICPC Office as soon as possible that the child has been reported as missing and of the efforts to locate the child.
9. As soon as possible, the child's Child Welfare Case Manager shall, with the assistance of Child Welfare Legal Services, file notice with the court in the form of a letter that the child has been reported as a missing child.
10. An Incident Report must be completed by the provider and/or Case Manager immediately upon notification that the child is missing and distributed via email or fax to all appropriate parties within 8 hours for all children missing age 12 and older who are not believed to be in immediate danger. If the child is age 12 or younger or age 12 and older and believed to be in immediate danger then an incident report must be transmitted immediately. The incident report should be forwarded to the Children's Network of Southwest Florida, Quality Management department, and to the designee for the Department of Children and Families, District 8/Circuit 20. If the Child Welfare Case Manager does not generate the incident report, the originator must copy the case manager.
11. The Child Welfare Case Manager will update FSFN with specific child information for children who are on runaway status or whose location is unknown. A complete data records check will be conducted immediately by the child's Child Welfare Case Manager to locate any service providers that may be active with the child. Should there be an active service provider, the Child Welfare Case Manager shall contact the service provider immediately regarding the last time the child was seen and to notify the

service provider the child is missing. District/region data will be updated monthly by the child welfare case manager.

12. The child's Child Welfare Case Manager or caregivers will ensure that every effort is made to encourage a child to return if they are contacted by the missing child.
13. If at any time **new information** is obtained on the child's location, all agencies notified that the child was missing must be contacted immediately and appropriate efforts taken to return the child to the caregivers home. If at any time the child returns to the caregivers home, all agencies notified that the child was missing must be contacted immediately.
14. The child's Child Welfare Case Manager will offer and arrange safe transportation for the child's return if the child makes contacts. If the child is out-of-state or in another district/region, transportation arrangements with adult traveling supervision will be made.

**D . Case Management Services While a Child is Missing.**

1. For children reported missing while the family is involved in ongoing judicial or non-judicial case management services, the case manager or designee shall make efforts to locate the child at a minimum of once every seven calendar days for the first 90 days from the time that the child is reported missing to law enforcement and at least once every 30 days thereafter, unless information supports a more frequent check (e.g., severe maltreatment is alleged, or there are credible reports that a child has been frequenting a certain location, etc.)
2. For Judicial cases, the Judicial Review report shall include a list of the efforts completed to locate the missing child.
3. For the period of time that the child remains missing, all actions taken to locate the child will be documented in FSFN selecting the case note type "Missing Child – Attempt to locate" and reviewed at the missing child staffings coordinated by the Children's Network Missing Children's Specialist every 30 days.
4. The Case Management Organization shall invite the following individuals and entities:
  - a. Child welfare professional;
  - b. Child welfare professional's supervisor;
  - c. Law enforcement;
  - d. Children's Legal Services or the contracted legal provider;

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- e. Regional Criminal Justice Coordinator;
  - f. Guardian ad Litem;
  - g. Attorney ad Litem;
  - h. Juvenile Probation Officer; and,
  - i. Victim Advocate.
  - j. Any additional attendees at the staffing not specifically allowed per s. 39.00145, F.S., must be approved by General Counsel and/or the Court.
5. If a child turns eighteen years old while reported as missing, all agencies notified that the child was missing will be contacted and notified that the child has become eighteen years old within 24 hours of the birthday. THE MCR SHOULD BE CLOSED AND LAW ENFORCEMENT SHOULD BE NOTIFIED THAT THE MCR IS BEING CLOSED, BUT THE YOUNG ADULT IS STILL MISSING.

E. Response to Interventions for Children Who Return.

1. Upon 24 hours of learning the child is located or has returned, the Child Welfare Case Manager shall immediately notify the child's parents or legal custodian, caregivers, the Guardian ad Litem, law enforcement, CLS, as well as any other agency or people who were contacted. Law enforcement should immediately be notified if they were not the ones to recover the child so they can then remove the child from FCIC/NCIC.
2. Upon recovery, the child's Child Welfare Case Manager will explore placement options in the child's best interest.
3. If age appropriate, the child will be interviewed privately by the Child Welfare Case Manager immediately, and in no case later than 24 hours, upon learning that a missing child has been located to determine the child's need for further services and/or change in placement and explore CSEC activities. See [QM-045 Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of a Child](#).
4. The interview will be documented in FSFN selecting the case note type "Missing Child-Debriefing". Additionally, the Child Welfare Case Manager will work with the child to try to determine the circumstances surrounding the episode.
5. If the child is a habitual runaway who is not already engaged in mental / behavioral health services, the Child Welfare Case Manager will complete a referral for an evaluation or submit a referral for a CBHA if the last one was conducted more than a year ago. Recommendations by the assessor will be incorporated in a plan that addresses runaway prevention strategies. Services will be implemented contingent upon the child's willingness and the provider's availability.



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6. When the child returns, the child must hear and see statements of concern regarding the child's safety and well being from the adults who have significant relations with the child.
7. Relatives, non-relatives, foster parents and other caregivers shall be instructed to take care of the child's immediate needs upon return, such as food, bathing, medical attention, rest, etc. In cases when children return from runaway status, appropriate discipline or consequences can be delayed until after the immediate needs, including psychotherapeutic and behavioral interventions, of the child are met and the caregiver and the child are ready to calmly discuss the incident and clarification of behavioral expectations.
8. When the child is located and/or returned, the Child Welfare Case Manager will close the MCR in FSFN.
9. The Child Welfare Case Manager will consult with a supervisor and the caregiver to determine the need for a staffing, to discuss service needs, the need for a case plan update, placement changes, etc. for the child. The staffing should include caregivers, Child Legal Services, clinical staff, the Guardian ad Litem and teachers, if applicable. If the child is a habitual runaway then the Children's Network missing child specialist will need to be included in the staffing.
10. Should a child returning from runaway status express a desire to live with a person or family member who wishes to be considered as a placement for the child, a home study and background check shall be conducted to determine if the home is an appropriate option and the child shall be notified of the status of the home study process.
11. The child's Child Welfare Case Manager will review the child's case plan each time a child returns and will update the case plan, if necessary, and submit the update to the court (review the case plan to ensure that it includes appropriate services). The plan will include appropriate services and tasks. The caregiver will be included in the case plan update.
12. Additional training or consultation to caregivers will be identified and provided, if necessary, to assist them to provide appropriate care to the child who has returned.
13. All intervention actions taken when a child has returned will be documented in the FSFN chronological notes.

**IX.** Exhibits

- A. Missing Child Tracking Flow Chart
- B. Law Enforcement Check

EXHIBIT A

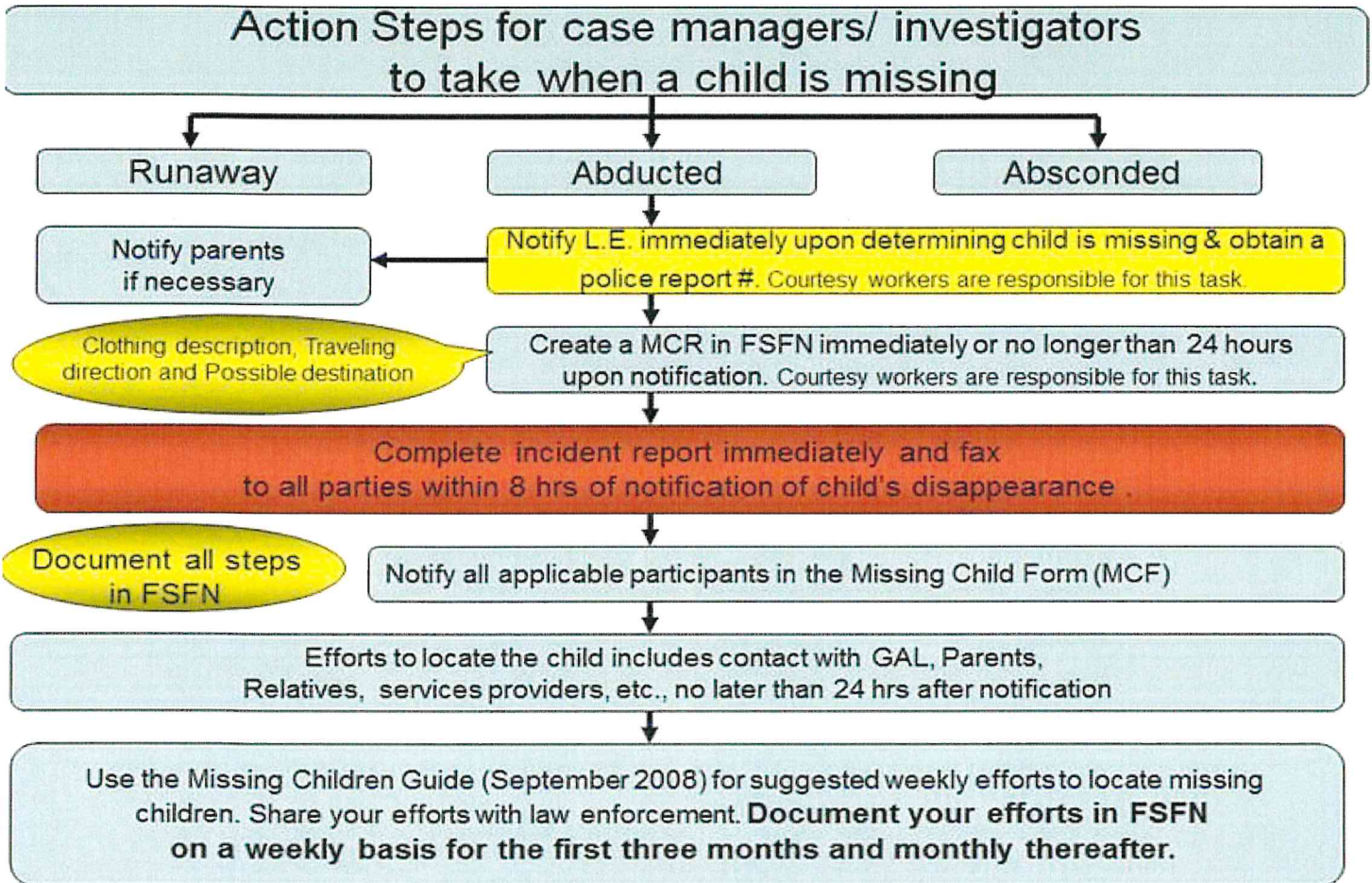




Exhibit B  
Law Enforcement Checklist

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

- 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	Hair color	Skin complexion
Weight	Eye color	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
- Direction of traveling
- Possible destination
- 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)
- Information on whether the child has been receiving or making/sending any unusual phone calls or emails
- The last known location of the child
- 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
- 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. (Primary case manager's task)
- A recent photo of the child (Primary case manager's task)
- The name and contact information of the child's primary case worker and On-Call Case manager phone #.

Case manager On Call phone #s

(These #s will be available after working hours)

**LSF**

Port Charlotte- 941.268.7855

Lee-239.989.2927

Placement unit-239-822-3392

**Pathways**

Naples: 239-464-0128

Immokalee: 239.940.6417

LaBelle: 863.398.8303

**Law enforcement Agencies:**

<b>Collier County Sheriff</b>	239.252.9300
<b>Hendry County Sheriff</b>	Clewiston (863) 805-5000
	Labelle (863) 674-5600
<b>Glades County Sheriff</b>	(863) 675-1144
<b>Charlotte County sheriff</b>	(941) 639-2101
<b>Lee County</b>	FMPD (239) 321-7700
	LCSO (239) 477-1000
	CCPD (239) 574-3223

Report to law enforcement must be made **no later** than 4 hours from **Date & Time** of the missing child event. IF there are exigent circumstances (younger than 13 Y.O, Over 13 with mental health concerns, abduction, medical issues, CSEC victim, Etc.) law enforcement must be contacted immediately. If none of these circumstances apply you can wait up to 4 hours to notify Law Enforcement while completing efforts to locate the child. **When contacting Law Enforcement, be prepared to share what efforts were completed to locate the child. These efforts need to be shared with the CWCM.**

Examples: 1. Searching the child's belongings, 2. Calling/texting the child's cell phone. 3. Checking the child's computer, social media accounts, or other online accounts. 4. Contacting the child's friends, relatives, or known associates. 5. Searching areas that the child is known to frequent. 6. Contacting the child's school. 7. Contacting the child's employer.