

Section I: Reporting Children Missing

This section is for use by individuals responsible for determining if a child is missing from the care of the Department, taking initial steps to locate the child and reporting the child missing to local law enforcement and other relevant individuals within required time-frames.

Step One: Determine if the child is missing

1. When should a child be considered missing from the Department's care?

A child should be considered missing when the child's whereabouts are unknown and:

1. The child has been adjudicated dependent and placed in out-of-home or in-home care; and/or
2. The child is the subject of an active protective supervision case; and/or
3. The child is the subject of an active or emergency shelter order; and/or
4. The child is the subject of an active abuse investigation, there is a preponderance of evidence to support the abuse, neglect or abandonment allegations, a Take into Custody Order will be sought for the child and:
 - the parent or legal custodian has been notified of the requirement to report a change in residence or location of the child to the protective investigator and the parent causes the child to move,
 - or allows the child to be moved, to a different residence or location,
 - or the child leaves the residence on his or her own accord and the parent or legal custodian does not notify the protective investigator of the move within 2 business days.

2. When should a child not be considered missing from the care of the department?

A child should not be considered missing when:

1. The child is receiving Voluntary Protective Services (VPS); or
2. The child is the subject of an active abuse investigation in which no contact has been made with the family and there is insufficient probable cause to petition the court for a Take Into Custody Order (65-29.013, F.A.C.); or
3. The child's whereabouts are known and a social service provider or law enforcement agency has physically confirmed the child's whereabouts; or
4. A child, age 12 or older, states they are going to a location unsupervised and no effort is made to confirm the child is at that location, or any other location where the child might have gone; or
5. The child returns to their placement within four (4) hours and a Law Enforcement report number has not yet been initiated. **Important: Once a Law Enforcement report number has been issued, regardless of time frame and/or recovery, a Missing Child Report (MCR) must be completed.**

Tip:

- Not all children who have contact with the Department, or other social service agencies, can be considered missing from care.

- For questions on how to determine if a child is missing, please refer to FAC 65-29.013, 65-30.019 or F.S. Chapter 39.
- For questions regarding how to report a child missing, please contact your local Child Location Point of Contact, your Regional Criminal Justice Coordinator or the DCF Child Location Unit located at Headquarters in Tallahassee.

Step Two: Report the child missing

1. A child is missing, now what?

Once it has been determined that a child meets the criteria for reporting a child as missing, be sure to follow the steps below:

- A. For children age eleven (11) or younger:** contact local law enforcement immediately to report the child missing
 - B. For children of any age who are believed to be at a high risk:** for example, the child is believed to be with someone who may harm them, may be a risk to themselves, or has a known medical condition or disability, contact local law enforcement immediately to report the child missing
 - C. For children age twelve (12) or older who willingly left care, but are not at high risk** make immediate efforts to locate the child prior to contacting local law enforcement
- Valid efforts to locate a child prior to contacting local law enforcement include all those that apply to the child, but are not limited to the following:
 - Contact friends
 - Contact neighbors
 - Contact school
 - Check locations the child is known to frequent
 - Contact relatives
 - Contact employers/co-workers
 - Contact former placements
 - Contact DJJ case managers
 - Contact former DCF/CBC case managers
 - Contact local hospitals
 - Check local transportation terminals

Important Note:

Efforts to locate the child prior to contacting local law enforcement should not exceed four (4) hours from the time it was learned the child went missing from care. If after four (4) hours the child's location remains unknown, contact local law enforcement to report the child missing. Please be advised that you must be conducting efforts to locate the child during the four hour period.

2. What information must be provided to local law enforcement when reporting a child missing?

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

- 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.
- 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
 - Weight
 - Eye color
 - Hair color
 - Skin complexion
 - 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
- The last known location of the child
- A recent photo of the child
- 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)
- 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
- The name and contact information of the child's primary case worker
- Information on whether the child has been receiving or making/sending any unusual phone calls or emails

3. What if local law enforcement refuses to take a missing child report?

If the law enforcement agency refuses to accept a missing person's report, the following steps should be taken:

A. Caregivers should:

1. Ask the responding officer to explain why they will not take a missing child report, and

2. Contact the child's case manager and explain the situation to them

B. Case managers should:

1. Contact the local law enforcement agency that refused to take the missing person's report and attempt to report the child as missing, and

2. If the officer still refuses to take the report, the case manager should contact the shift supervisor and attempt to resolve the issue preventing the agency from accepting the missing child report, and

3. If the local law enforcement agency still refuses to take a missing child report, the case manager should contact their local child location point of contact for assistance

4. If the local child location point of contact requires further assistance in getting a child reported as missing to local law enforcement they should contact their Regional Criminal Justice Coordinator or the DCF Child Location Unit in Tallahassee.

Important Note:

Effective July 1, 2008, House Bill 7077 went into effect which gives law enforcement the ability to accept and investigate a missing child report from the Department or its contracted providers or from a Sheriff's Office that conducts child protective investigative services for the Department. This amends Florida Statute 937.021.

4. What are Pick-Up Orders and how should they be used?

What is a Pick-Up Order?

- A pick-up order is a court order that notifies local law enforcement that they (local law enforcement) are required to deliver a child to the care/supervision of the Department upon the child being taken into custody.
- Once the court has issued a pick-up order that order is transferred to the local sheriff's department. There is no state or federal requirement that a pick-up order be assigned as an active case to any unit or deputy within the sheriff's department nor is there any requirement that the pick-up order be entered into any local, state, or federal data information system.

Important Note:

It is for the reasons stated above that the seeking of, or granting of, a pick-up order should never be considered to meet any requirement associated with reporting a child as missing to local law enforcement.

When should a pick-up order be sought for a child that is considered to be missing?

- **For a missing child that has already been adjudicated dependent and placed in out-of-home care, there is no reason to seek a pick-up order.**
 - **The only exceptions to this are:**
 1. **if the court orders that a pick-up order be issued or**
 2. **local law enforcement refuses to take a missing child report absent a pick-up order or**
 3. **there is an active abuse investigation with a preponderance of evidence to support the allegations.**

Step Three: Notify the child's primary case worker**1. A child has been identified and reported as missing to local law enforcement, what next?**

Make sure that the child's case manager is immediately informed that the child is missing so that they can enter a Missing Child Report in the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) which must be completed within one working day of notification.