

Section Three: Location of a Missing Child

The information contained in this section outlines requirements/responsibilities of the case manager/designated worker in regards to locating a missing child.

The case manager/designated worker is required to:

1. Provide law enforcement with relevant information.
2. Conduct and document efforts to locate the child.
3. Review the FDLE Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse Website.
4. Prepare for the return of the child.
5. Resolve the missing child episode.

Step One: Communicating with Law Enforcement

1. What information does law enforcement need to assist in the location of a missing child?

A. The following information needs to be provided to law enforcement immediately:

1. A recent photo of the child (see Missing Child – Photos Handout).
2. Any leads regarding the possible location of the child.
3. Documentation of any efforts to locate the child.
4. A list of locations the child frequents and any possible destinations.
5. A list of the child's relatives and friends.
6. Information on any companions.
7. Information related to any prior missing episodes (location information, etc.).
8. Contact information for the case manager/designated worker as well as contact information for the individual responsible for picking up the child or where the child should be taken if/when located by law enforcement.
9. Information on problems at school or at home.
10. Child's email, screen names and access to computers.

Tip:

School records, yearbooks, driver's licenses, state identification cards, juvenile probation officers, and past placements can be excellent resources for finding recent photos for children when no photo is on file or the only available photo is considered to be out-of-date.

B. The following information needs to be provided to law enforcement within the first 30 days of the investigation:

1. Copy of the child's fingerprints.
2. Copy of the child's dental records.
3. Copy of the child's case file (when requested by law enforcement).

Tip:

Meeting with local law enforcement to go over a missing child's case file within the first week of the missing child episode is a valuable location tool for local law enforcement, as it provides them with the opportunity to generate potential leads as to the child's whereabouts and gives them insight into child's past and state of mind. In fact, during Operation SafeKids, the FDLE/MEPIC found that over 40% of all social services missing child cases could be resolved quickly by specific information that was contained within a missing child's case file.

C. The following information needs to be provided to law enforcement on an ongoing basis:

1. Any changes or updates related to the missing child's case status (i.e. case manager/designated worker changes, changes in legal status).
2. Results of any efforts to locate the missing child that were undertaken by the case manager/designated worker.

D. The following information needs to be provided to law enforcement as soon as the child is located (this is especially important if law enforcement did not assist in locating the child):

1. Address where the child was located (including street address, city, state and zip code).
2. Physical condition of the child when the child was located.
3. General circumstances regarding the location (who, what, where, when and how).

Important Note:

The law enforcement agency that initiated the Missing Child report enters the child into FCIC/NCIC and as such is the only agency that can remove the child from the system. In other words, it is critical that they are notified of the location to ensure that the child's FCIC/NCIC entry is removed from the system. The child's episode will remain open in FSFN and with FDLE until the child is removed from FCIC/NCIC.

Step Two: Efforts to Locate

1. What is an effort to locate a missing child?

An effort is any activity that is directly undertaken by the case manager/designated worker in an effort to identify the physical location of a child that has gone missing from care.

2. What would be considered an effort to locate?

The following list offers suggestions and does not include every example of an effort to locate. Remember to be creative and use your imagination.

1. Contact friends, relatives, parents, caregivers, school personnel, employers, Guardian ad litem, therapist, counselor, service provider and other significant individuals to see if they can offer any leads.
 - *Effective Practice:* Make notifications count as efforts to locate! After advising the required individuals that the child is missing, follow up with questions, such as:
 - Have you seen the child?
 - Do you know where the child might be?
 - Do you know who the child might be with?
 - Did the child mention running away?
 - If the child contacts you, can you contact me?
2. Contact other programs and services for help locating the child. For example:
 - ◆ -ESS Checks
 - Search for benefit activity and/or new addresses for the missing child or individuals associated with the missing child after the date child went missing from care.
 - ◆ -Medicaid Billing

- Search for benefit activity and/or new addresses for the missing child or individuals associated with the missing child post the missing from date.
- ◆ -Child Support
 - Search for benefit activity and/or new addresses for the missing child or individuals associated with the missing child after the date child went missing from care.
- ◆ -School Records
 - Review attendance records in an effort to ascertain if the missing child has been attending school post the missing from date.
 - Attempt to discover if requests have been made to provide transcripts information for the missing child to new/different schools after the date child went missing from care.
- ◆ -Vital Statistics
 - Attempt to determine if requests have been made regarding vital statistic records post the missing from date.
- ◆ Driver's License
 - Attempt to ascertain if new/updated driver's licenses or state identifications have been issued to the missing child or individuals that may be associated with the missing child after the date child went missing from care.
- ◆ Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)
 - Contact DJJ facilities to see if the missing child has been or is currently being held in a DJJ facility post the missing from date.
 - Contact DJJ case manager to see if they have had any contact with the missing child after the date child went missing or any information on the whereabouts of the missing child.
- ◆ Clerk of Court
 - Attempt to identify if the child or individuals that may be associated with the missing child have attended court hearings or are scheduled to appear in court in the near future (note: these proceedings may or may not be related to dependency court proceedings).
- ◆ SSN and SSI Benefits
 - Search for benefit activity and/or new addresses for the missing child or individuals associated with the missing child post the missing from date.
- ◆ Immigration and Customs
 - Attempt to have passports flagged in those cases where the missing child or individuals that might be associated with the missing child may attempt to leave the country.
 - Attempt to have the missing child or individuals that maybe associated with the missing child flagged so that they may be identified if and when they attempt to re-enter the country.
- ◆ United States Department of State
 - Attempt to work with embassies and consulates in possible destination countries in an effort to locate the missing child or individuals that may be associated with the missing child.
- ◆ Public Records Checks
 - Accurint/AutoTrack.

- Attempt to identify address information for the missing child or individuals that may be associated with the missing child post the missing from date.
- ◆ Out of State Social Service Agencies
 - Attempt to ascertain if the missing child or individuals associated with the missing child have had contact with an out-of-state social service agency after the date child went missing from care.

3. Make home and field visits to places familiar to the child, such as malls, schools, playgrounds, neighborhood where the child currently resides, past neighborhoods and neighborhoods of friends and family. Also, visit runaway shelters, DJJ facilities, hospitals, transportation hubs and areas where children and teens congregate.

- Effective Practice: when checking physical locations for a missing child, make sure to bring missing child flyers for posting and distribution.

Important Note:

Contact law enforcement to exchange new information and obtain updates. This practice will help eliminate any duplication of efforts.

3. Where would I document efforts to locate?

Efforts to locate must be documented in FSFN:

- Efforts to locate missing children are required to be entered into FSFN within 48 hours or in a timeframe that is consistent with your agency’s internal policy.
- Efforts should contain who, what, where, when and how narratives.
- Make sure to choose the “Missing Child Attempt to Locate” case note type when entering any efforts in FSFN.

4. How often do I need to conduct and document efforts to locate?

At a minimum, efforts should be made and documented once a week for the first three months and monthly thereafter. No more than 30 days should go by without an effort to locate a missing child.

Important Note:

This is the Department’s policy. If you work for a CBC provider, make sure to check their policy as some agencies require that additional efforts be made. For example, some agencies require efforts be made three times a week for the first two weeks, weekly thereafter for the first 90 days and monthly for each month after the initial 90 days.

Step Three: The FDLE Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse (MEPIC)

1. What is the FDLE/MEPIC?

The MEPIC is located within the FDLE Division of Criminal Justice Information Services and is a central repository of information regarding missing endangered persons. The information is collected and disseminated to assist law enforcement agencies, public and private organizations and the citizens of Florida in locating missing endangered persons. The MEPIC is utilized as a resource center and information exchange service and compliments the state and federal computerized missing person’s files.

2. What does FDLE do with the DCF missing child information once it is submitted to them?

Once the information is reported to law enforcement, they accept a missing child report, enter the child as missing in FCIC/NCIC and a Missing Child Report is electronically submitted, FDLE (Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse) opens a case on the child. MEPIC provides analytical and investigative assistance to law enforcement agencies. Some of the services they provide are:

1. Posting the child's picture and information on their website. The website is accessible to the public and missing child flyers can be printed directly from the site
2. Conducting both public and private database searches
3. Flagging birth records and school records

3. Why do I need to access FDLE's Missing Endangered Persons website?

The case manager/designated worker needs to access the website to ensure the child is posted, all of the information associated with the event is correctly documented and the child's photo is properly displayed. Also, you can print missing child flyers directly from the website.

4. How Do I access FDLE's Missing Endangered Persons website and print flyers?

1. The website is: www.fdle.state.fl.us. Once at the site, click on the Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse link on the right side of the page.
2. To print flyers: click on the search tab at the top of the page, type in the child's last name and/or first name, and click submit. Click on the child's picture and the flyer will come up. Click printable flyer under the child's picture. You may then print the flyer.
 - Make sure the page is set to landscape.
 - Make sure to use a color copier as the picture will be in color as long as the picture that was provided was in color.
 - Flyers can be distributed to service providers, schools and may be posted in the community.

Important Note:

If there is no available picture of the child, it will limit the need to print flyers. Submitting updated, quality photos can play a crucial role in the location of a missing child.

Step Four: Preparing for the child's return

Tip:

You need to plan for the child's return before the child returns.

How do I secure placement for the child?

- Interview the current caregiver to determine whether or not the child will be placed there when he/she is located.

- If the current caregiver is not willing to take the child back or the child has expressed a strong aversion to returning to the placement, explore other placement options.
- Check to see if there is a more appropriate placement.

Important Note:

If/when the child returns and expresses a desire to live with a relative or non-relative, the case manager will follow all necessary procedures to assist in the placement (background checks, notifying the court for approval, etc.).

Step Five: Locating the Missing Child

1. What steps need to be taken once a child is located?

When a child is located, the following steps should be followed:

- See the child as quickly as possible to assess safety and well-being.
- Make sure basic/immediate needs are met and obtain any needed medical care, counseling and/or other services.
- Immediately notify law enforcement. This is especially important if law enforcement did not assist in locating the child.
 - Contacting law enforcement will ensure that the missing child entry is removed from FCIC/NCIC.
 - **A child is not considered located until the child is seen by law enforcement or a child welfare professional.**
- Notify the child's parents, legal custodian, relatives, substitute caregivers, Guardian ad litem, and the court of the child's location.
- Document the location in FSFN. Also, remember to end date the runaway, abducted or absconded status in Other Placement in FSFN once the child is located.
- Complete the Recovery Form on the MCR in FSFN.
- Florida Administrative Code 65C-30.019 requires that the services worker or CPI shall interview the child within 24 hours of the child's return to determine the child's need for further services and/or change in placement. Debriefing tools and effective practice information can be obtained by contacting the DCF Child Location Unit in Tallahassee (see resources section).

Important Note:

If the child turns 18 years old while reported as missing, all agencies notified that the child was missing must be contacted by the case manager. The case manager will inform the court and request the case to be closed. If requested, information from the case file will be given to the local law enforcement agency for their continuing efforts to locate the missing person. **When notifying law enforcement, make certain that they understand that the child was never recovered.**

Tip:

Many times, children will run away to a location where they were previously found. Keeping detailed information on past locations may help locate a child who frequently runs away from care.

2. How do I complete a Recovery Form in FSFN?

- A. To complete and submit a Recovery Form, follow the steps below:
1. Log onto FSFN.
 2. Open the case file and click on the Missing Child Report Symbol.

3. Click on the Open MCR.
4. Enter all of the information requested and click “save” at the bottom of the screen.
5. There are two types of recoveries, rapid and standard. A rapid recovery occurs when a child is reported and recovered before it is submitted to FDLE/MEPIC. A standard recovery occurs when FDLE/MEPIC has opened a case on the missing child. The MCR should default to whatever recovery is needed.
6. Once you complete the recovery form, click “Options” and then “Approval.” Make sure you approve the recovery form to your Regional/District MCR Approver.
7. The Regional/District MCR Approver will review the recovery form and approve it to MCR HQ.

Important Note:

In order to submit a recovery form, you must be assigned to the child’s case in FSFN.

B. To complete the narrative section, use the following guidelines:

- The section must include one of the following headings:
 1. Child returned to placement on his/her own.
 2. Child was located by DCF/CBC (name worker).
 3. Child was located by Law Enforcement (name the agency).
 4. Child aged out without being located.
 5. Court removed jurisdiction without the child being located.
 6. Child found deceased.
- A brief description of the child's condition is very important to include in the narrative section as is a general description of the circumstances involving the location.

C. To complete the address section, use the following guidelines:

- Make sure to fill out the street address, city, state and zip code where the child was located.
- Many times, children will run to the same location where they were previously located and this information is vital in locating children that are habitual runaways.
- If the information is not included, the point of contact or the case worker may be contacted for this information as FDLE may request the location address for their records.

Important Note:

The completed recovery form is sent electronically to Headquarters for review and closure with the FDLE/MEPIC. Incomplete information may result in the local Children Location Point of Contact or the Regional Criminal Justice Coordinator being contacted by local law enforcement, the FDLE/MEPIC or the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) for detailed information related to the resolution of a missing child investigation.