

Section Four: Stabilization of Missing Children

The information contained in this section outlines requirements/responsibilities of the case manager or designated worker related to stabilizing a child upon his/her return. This section also contains effective practices, as suggested from the field along with national research.

1. How do I stabilize a child once they are located?

See the child as quickly as possible to assess safety and well-being:

- Make sure basic/immediate needs are met.
- Obtain any needed services.
- Interview/Debrief the child.
- Conduct staffings to discuss needed services.
- Identify and provide any additional training or support to caregivers.

Important Note:

Florida Administrative Code 65C-30.019 states that the child is to be interviewed by the services worker or CPI within 24 hours of the child's return to determine the child's need for further services and/or change in placement.

2. What are some effective practices for stabilizing children upon their return?

A team approach (worker, placement, mental health/substance abuse/education) in managing children who run from care.

Positive and supportive caregiver interaction with children.

Specialized case management for children who run away.

Monthly meetings to staff children/youth, coordinate efforts and share best practices.

Be creative: start with identifying the needs of the youth, then be creative in meeting them.

3. What does national research suggest regarding the stabilization of children?

There is little research or published information on this subject. However, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) has published *Location and Reunification of Missing Children: A Team Approach*, which describes different stages a child will go through, depending upon who has abducted the child. The following are examples of what the child may experience:

- Non-Family Abductions
 - Brief Euphoria
 - Hyperarousal
 - Hypervigilant Recall
 - Compliance/Resistance
 - Denial and Help-Seeking
- Family Abductions

- Lack of Control
- Belief Confusion
- Fear
- Role and Identity Confusion
- Divided Loyalties
- Guilt and Shame
- Abandonment

If the child was abducted by a parent, the parent may have told the child lies or made negative statements about the other parent and/or about the Department/child welfare agency. Statements made by the parent to the child prior to his/her return may negatively impact the child once he/she is located and placed.

Children most often will feel a lack of control in these situations. The child should be assessed and receive counseling regarding the abduction.