

	<p><b>Division of Family and Children Services</b> <b>Child Welfare Manual</b></p>	<p><b>Chapter: 1011: Needs of the Child</b> <b>Effective Date: April 1, 2012</b> <b>Previous Policy #: N/A</b></p>
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**POLICY TITLE: Youth Who Are Absent Without Permission (AWOP) From Care**

**POLICY NUMBER: 1011.16.1**

#### **CODES**

#### **REQUIREMENT**

The Division of Family & Children Services (DFCS), the caregiver and/or the placement provider shall initiate the following tasks when a youth, age 14 and older, in the custody of DFCS is determined to be absent without permission:

1. Make efforts to ascertain the youth's whereabouts;
2. Assess whether or not there are present or impending danger/safety threats to the youth; and,
3. Determine whether immediate law enforcement intervention is needed, or if the matter will be successfully resolved without law enforcement involvement, i.e. the youth returns or is located.

**NOTE:** If at any time there is reason to believe the youth may be in danger, or may have run away; law enforcement must be contacted immediately. Refer to the [Runaway Child/Youth](#) policy (Foster Care Section 1011.16) for requirements and procedures.)

#### **Youth Absent without Permission (AWOP)**

Youth classified as "absent without permission" are youth in the custody of DFCS, age of 14 and older, who purposely break curfew, or who are habitually late returning to their placement, but whose whereabouts are known or thought to be known by the caregiver, placement provider and/or DFCS.

#### **PROCEDURE**

When a youth is absent from his or her placement without permission, the caregiver or placement provider shall:

1. Make efforts to ascertain the youth's whereabouts (see Practice Guidance).
2. Assess if the youth is safe or unsafe.
  - a. Is the caregiver or placement provider aware if the youth is in any

danger based on the following:

- i. The youth's location;
  - ii. Person (s) the youth is or may be with;
  - iii. Information the youth/others may have shared, or the caregiver/provider suspects regarding potential dangers to self or from others.
- b. If at any time there is reason to believe the youth is in danger, or has run away:
- i. Immediately contact the law enforcement agency,
  - ii. Immediately notify the DFCS SSCM.

**NOTE:** Refer to the Runaway Child/Youth policy for requirements and procedures.

3. Contact the DFCS SSCM by telephone and email, for assistance locating the youth, if the youth is absent without permission for more than three (3) hours.

**NOTE:** Always contact the DFCS Supervisor/other designee, if the SSCM is cannot be reached.

Upon notification that the youth is absent without permission, the DFCS SSCM, in conjunction with the caregiver and/or RBWO provider will continue efforts to ascertain the youth's whereabouts by conducting a comprehensive search for the youth, which may include all or some of the following:

1. Determine where the youth was last known to be located and whom the youth was with.
2. Seek information regarding the youth's state of mind when they were last seen (i.e. what did the youth say or do? What was the youth's mood? Did they talk about wanting to go somewhere, do something?)
3. Contact the youth via their cell phone, text messaging, social media (as agency policies permits). Utilize voicemail, text messaging and other messaging to communicate to the youth the need to return or to a safe place (police station, fire department, hospital, government building, and homeless shelter.)
4. Determine if other children at the placement are aware of the youth's plans, friends and their contact information.
5. Contact the youth's friends to determine if they are aware of the youth's whereabouts and/or of their plans.
6. Contact the youth's parent(s), extended family members and other adults who work with the youth to gather information that may be of assistance in locating them. Assure that they understand their legal responsibility to notify DFCS should the youth contact them.
7. Visit locations where the youth is known to frequent.

If the youth is **not** located or has not returned after conducting a comprehensive search for three (3) hours, or if at any time there is reason to believe the youth may



be in danger or may have run away, law enforcement must be contacted immediately. (Refer to the [Runaway Child/Youth](#) policy (Section 1011.16).

If the youth is located or returns to the placement:

- a. The caregiver and/or RBWO provide must notify the DFCS SSCM immediately by telephone or email.
- b. The DFCS SSCM or the CPA/CCI staff shall document a thorough follow-up interview with the youth within 72 hours of their return; (See Practice Guidance for sample interview questions)  
**NOTE:** While an interview/discussion shall be conducted with youth returning from an AWOP episode, it should be noted that the interview/discussion should be guided by the frequency and nature of such absences to ensure that the information obtained from the youth can be helpful in ameliorating the presenting and underlying issues.
- c. Notify the parent that the youth has been located (if they were contacted during the search for the youth).
- d. Assist the youth in making a contingency plan for situations that might lead to a recurrence of the AWOP episode.
- e. Consider whether the treatment plan/safety plan needs to be updated.
- f. If a Graduated Independence Plan is in place, review and make needed modifications or additions. If a Graduated Independence Plan has not been established, consider developing one at this time.

## **PRACTICE GUIDANCE**

### **Present Danger Indicators**

These are conditions or behaviors that, in conjunction with their absence from an environment known to be safe, severely compromise the youth's safety. Present danger may include one or more of the following:

1. The youth has been or is believed to have been abducted.
2. The youth has one or more health/mental health conditions that places them in serious harm without required treatment.
3. The youth is pregnant and/ or parenting and the infant/child is believed to be with him or her.
4. The youth has a physical or developmental disability/delay that impairs the ability for self care.
5. The youth has a substance abuse problem.
6. The youth was previously the victim of human trafficking or sexual exploitation
7. The youth is in a potentially life threatening situation
8. The youth is believed to be with persons who could endanger their welfare.

### **Verifying Youth's Whereabouts (Examples)**

1. Contact the youth via cell phone, or other phone based on their last known location, i.e. school, community center, etc.)



2. If the youth failed to return home from an event or location, contact the event sponsor (ex: Scout leader) or location manager (ex: School principal) to determine if the youth is still at the event/location or was delayed in departing.
3. If the youth was authorized to visit with friends, contact the household being visited to determine if their departure was delayed.
4. If the youth's whereabouts is unknown and the youth failed to keep curfew, contact the youth's known associates, including other children residing in the household/facility in an effort to locate and encourage the youth's return.

### **Interview with Youth Returning from AWOP**

The SSCM/CPA/CCI staff must explore the following questions with the AWOP child:

1. Why did you leave your placement and/or not return as expected? (Explore what they expected to accomplish)
2. What lead up to the decision?
3. Were you encouraged to stay away, if so, by whom?
4. Where did you go? (list all the places)
5. What were all the places you visited while away?
6. Who were some of the people you visited while away?
7. What is your relationship with them?
8. Did you engage in any risky behaviors while away? (i.e. sexual activity, substance abuse, shoplifting or other petty crime, etc.)
9. Were you the victim of a crime while away? If so, is a referral to law enforcement needed?
10. What was the best thing about being away?
11. What were some of the reasons you returned?
12. What would prevent you from making this decision in the future?
13. What can the caregiver/placement resource or DFCS do to prevent you from making this decision in the future?
14. What advice would you give another child thinking of making this decision?

### **Interview with the DFCS or CPA Foster Parent, CCI Staff**

The SSCM must explore with the placement provider the following issues:

1. Has the child ever done this before? How many times?
2. Are the placement provider and child adhering to the established Graduated Independence Plan? Is there a need for a Graduated Independence Plan to be developed (regardless of age)?
3. Whom is the child permitted to visit? Where (neighborhood, home, school)? Are the parents of the child's friends known by the placement provider?
4. Have plans been made for substitute supervision in the event the placement provider is in such need? Have all substitute supervision providers been approved by DFCS?
5. What are the rules of the residence concerning allowable areas for the child to be without first securing caregiver permission? Has the child been informed

of these?

6. Are there issues being experienced by the placement provider that may have contributed to the child's AWOP?
7. Who are the child's friends? Is their contact information known to the placement provider?
8. What steps can be taken to avoid future occurrences of AWOP?

<b>REFERENCES</b>
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