



December 5, 2018

Child Welfare Services Manual Transmittal No. 2018-13

To: County Departments of Family and Children Services
DFCS District Directors
DFCS Regional Directors
State Office Staff

From: Tom C. Rawlings, Interim Director
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "T. Rawlings", written over the "From:" line.

Re: Child Welfare Policy Manual: **Missing Children**

Purpose

The purpose of this Child Welfare Services Manual Transmittal (CWSMT) is to announce policy updates to 19.22 Case Management: Missing Children and other related policies in the Child Welfare Policy Manual, incorporating provisions to support efforts to prevent children from running away and to locate children missing from care.

Discussion

DFCS is responsible for ensuring the safety, permanency and wellbeing of children served. Missing children/youth are at great risk of victimization and exploitation. Unfortunately, children usually do not perceive the inherent risks of running away or see themselves as potential victims. When children in foster care are missing, DFCS maintains responsibility to conduct a comprehensive search to locate the children and ensure their safety and well-being. Because of the potential dangers to missing children, it is critical that DFCS address the risk factors to prevent a child from running away and ensure that each runaway/missing child episode is considered a major event that requires intensive intervention and safety planning. The following policies were updated to support these efforts:

19.22 Case Management: Missing Children

1. Adds a citation from the United States Code (U.S.C.) regarding State requirements for reporting missing children;
2. Requires the Revenue Maximization Specialist (RMS) be notified anytime a child in foster care enters runaway/missing status and when they are located;
3. Requires face-to-face contact with a previously missing child within 24 hours of the child being located;

4. Requires adherence to the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and other confidentiality laws during the search for missing children;
5. Clarifies procedures for collaborating with law enforcement agencies, including following up with local law enforcement within 24 hours of filing a missing person report to confirm that the missing child has been added to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database of the FBI;
6. Requires the State Office to be notified immediately, but no later than 24 hours after a child is determined to be missing;
NOTE: This is accomplished when the Social Services Supervisor approves the Placement page in Georgia SHINES, updated with the runaway information.
7. Requires developing a Runaway Prevention Plan with children, their caregivers, and others to address situations that might lead to the recurrence of runaway behavior within seven calendar days of initial placement, placement changes or when a child returns from a runaway episode;
8. Clarifies that though the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) may be informed that a missing child is in foster care, the NCMEC must be advised not to identify the child as being in foster care during any of its activities;
9. Emphasizes that staff must encourage a missing child to return each time there is any contact made with the missing child;
10. Enhances practice guidance on missing children, law enforcement reporting of missing children, the NCMEC, runaway prevention plans, and searching for missing children.

10.1 Foster Care: Placement of a Child

1. Requires obtaining a current photograph of the child upon initial entry into foster care and every six months thereafter while the child is in foster care.
2. Requires development of a Runaway Prevention Plan within seven calendar days of a child's placement, if the child is at-risk of running away, including a history of running away.
3. Adds procedures and practice guidance for obtaining photographs of children in foster care.

10.3 Changes in Placement

1. Requires development or modification of a Runaway Prevention Plan within seven calendar days of a placement change, if the child is at-risk of running away, including a history of running away.

Implementation

This policy update is effective upon the release of this manual transmittal and is available on the Online Directives Information System (ODIS) at <http://odis.dhs.ga.gov/>.

Regional and County Leadership shall provide opportunities for staff to review and discuss the updated policy to ensure implementation. Please refer to policy [1.3 Administration Access, Distribution and Review of Child Welfare Policies](#) for the applicable requirements and procedures for policy review.

Please direct questions regarding this policy release to your regional Field Program Specialist (FPS). The FPS shall submit questions to the Policy and Regulations Unit at PPPDUnit@dhs.ga.gov.