

	GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL			
	Chapter:	Foster Care	Effective Date:	August 2014
	Policy Title:	Youth Absent Without Permission (AWOP)		
	Policy Number:	10.25	Previous Policy #:	1011.16.1

CODES/REFERENCES

N/A

REQUIREMENTS

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 (AWOP):

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). Law enforcement must be contacted immediately any time there is reason to believe a youth may be in danger.

PROCEDURES

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](#).
2. Assess whether the youth is in any danger considering the following:
 - a. The youth's location;
 - b. Person(s) the youth is or may be with;
 - c. Any information the youth or others may have shared regarding potential dangers to self or from others;
 - d. Whether the caregiver/provider suspects the child is in danger.
3. If unable to locate the youth after searching for more than three hours, contact the DFCS Social Services Case Manager (SSCM) by telephone and email for assistance locating the youth. Always contact the DFCS Social Services Supervisor (SSS) if the SSCM cannot be reached.
4. Immediately contact law enforcement and notify the SSCM any time there is reason to believe a youth is in danger or has run away (See [Missing Children](#)).

Upon notification that the youth is AWOP, the DFCS SSCM, will work in conjunction with the caregiver and/or Room, Board, and Watchful Oversight (RBWO) provider to ascertain the youth's whereabouts by conducting a comprehensive search for the child.

1. Determine where and with whom the youth was last known to be located.
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. Attempt to 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 to a safe place (e.g., police station, fire department, hospital, government building, or homeless shelter).
4. Determine if other children at the placement are aware of the youth's plans, friends and/or their contact information.
5. Contact the youth's friends to determine if they are aware of the youth's whereabouts and/or their plans.
6. Contact the youth's parents, extended family members and other adults who work with the youth to gather information that may be of assistance in locating them; ensure 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 located or returns to the placement, the caregiver and/or RBWO provider will:

1. Notify the DFCS SSCM immediately by telephone or email.
2. Interview the youth to obtain information regarding the AWOP episode.
3. Assist the youth in making a contingency plan for situations that might lead to a reoccurrence of the AWOP episode.

Once the youth is located, the SSCM will:

1. Notify the parents that the youth has been located (if they were contacted during the search for the youth).
2. Document a thorough follow-up interview with the youth within 72 hours of their return. This may be done concurrently with the caregiver and/or RBWO provider unless a private conversation with the youth seems more appropriate for the situation (See Practice Guidance for [sample interview questions](#)). The interview/discussion should be guided by the frequency and nature of such absences to ensure the information obtained from the youth is helpful in ameliorating the presenting and underlying issues.
3. Consider whether the treatment plan/safety plan needs to be updated.
4. If a Graduated Independence Plan is in place, review it, and make needed modifications or additions. If a [Graduated Independence Plan](#) has not been established, consider developing one at this time.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Youth Absent without Permission (AWOP)

Youth classified as "absent without permission" are youth in the custody of DFCS, age of 14 and older who fit the following description:

1. Purposely breaks curfew;
2. Habitually returns late to their placement (e.g., arrives late from school); and/or
3. Whereabouts are thought to be known by the placement provider and/or DFCS.

Present Danger Indicators

These are conditions or behaviors that, in conjunction with the youth's absence from an environment where they are expected to be may 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 place him/her 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; and/or
8. The youth is believed to be with persons who could endanger his/her welfare.

Verifying a 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 (e.g., Scout leader) or location manager (e.g., 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 are 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 interview should be conducted in a manner which demonstrates empathy and concern for the youth, while also communicating to the youth that their safety is the primary concern.

The SSCM and placement provider must explore the following questions with the child who was AWOP:

1. Why did you leave your placement and/or not return as expected? (Explore what they expected to accomplish)
2. What led 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? (e.g., 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 Placement Resource Staff

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

1. Has the child ever done this before? How many times? How long was he/she gone? Where did the child go?
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 has such a 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 being 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?

FORMS AND TOOLS

N/A