



Ministry of
Children and Family
Development

Interim Practice Guideline: When a Child or Youth in Care is Missing

October 30, 2023

The Ministry of Children and Family Development, with staff working throughout the province, would like to acknowledge that we are living and working with gratitude and respect on the traditional territories of the First Nations peoples of British Columbia. We also acknowledge the Métis and Inuit people living on these beautiful territories.

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This practice guideline has been developed in collaboration and/or consultation with and Indigenous Child and Family Services Agency, Service Delivery Division, Operational Child Welfare Policy Division, Child Welfare Branch (RC Team), Aboriginal Services Branch, the Youth Advisory Committee and Provincial Practice Branch.

Introduction:

A review of the literature on children and youth who are missing from care confirms the importance of treating children and youth in care (CYIC) with respect by listening to them and hearing their concerns and views including their perspectives on their placement. Preferred practice is to involve CYIC in planning in a way that supports meaningful, two-way communication. Other positive approaches identified in literature include allowing flexibility and freedom when age appropriate and safe to do so, as well as responding to youth in non-punitive, caring, and solution-focused ways when they have been found. Literature related to youth missing from care also confirms the importance of continued connection to family, friends, and community of origin, quality relationship with their worker and good matches with supportive caregivers.

For CYIC who have experienced trauma (including cumulative harm), going missing, being away from their placement or refusing to return can be one way of communicating their feelings or needs, particularly in situations where they feel that they have limited influence in the things that are happening to them or when they are looking for belonging. We want to ensure that they do not think that is the only way to express their feelings or needs by supporting them to communicate in safe and appropriate ways.

When CYIC go missing, are away from their placement or refuse to return, there is an increased risk to their safety and wellbeing, and in some cases, when a youth is involved with Youth Justice for instance, there may also be an increased risk that they may harm others. Research has identified that children and youth missing from care are often exposed to situations that can put them at risk of harm -- such as alcohol use, illicit drug use, or gang involvement -- or experience trauma such as physical assault, sexual assault, or sexual exploitation (Bowden & Lambie, 2015; Courtney et al, 2005).

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/> has established Indigenous female, two-spirited and gender diverse children/youth are at increased risk of harm while they are missing and disproportionately represented throughout Canada. This information and the effects of

intergenerational trauma and colonization must be considered when determining the response to be taken by the child/youth's caregiver, worker and the PCS worker.

To support the director in exercising their guardianship responsibilities with children and youth in care, these practice guidelines have been created to ensure appropriate action is taken to locate a missing child/youth, whether missing for the first time or if there is a pattern, and to safeguard them from harm or the threat of harm. They apply to children/youth in care by agreement, court order and placed in foster homes, contracted resources or SHSS homes.

Definitions:

CYIC: children and youth in care of the director under the Child, Family and Community Service Act

ICFSA: Indigenous Child and Family Services Agency

Indigenous child means a child or youth who is First Nation, Métis or Inuit.

A **missing child/youth** is any child/youth in care, including respite care, who is:

- unreasonably late;
- whose whereabouts are unknown, and,
- who cannot be found after taking the same actions as a prudent and responsible parent.

PCS: Provincial Centralized Screening.

Prudent and Responsible Parent: The prudent and responsible parent makes careful and sensible parental decisions that are intended to maintain the child/youth's health, safety and best interest.

SHSS: Specialized Homes and Support Services

Vulnerable child/youth: a child/youth in need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability, risk of abuse or neglect, addiction, mental health concerns, trauma or involvement in high-risk activities.

Unreasonably late: A child/youth in care, including respite care, is unreasonably late when they have not arrived at their resource or another location (e.g. school, a friend's house) as expected and an amount of time has passed that causes concern, based on the child/youth's age, developmental capacity and vulnerability.

YES: Youth Emergency Shelter

Policy, Guidelines and Protocols:

Child and Youth in Care Policy

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/download/42EE3666F59743D993E22B6166CA6127>

5.4 Working in Collaboration with Caregiver Highlights:

The caregiver is included as a vital and respected professional member of the Care Circle and is included in planning and sharing of information.

5.12 When a Child/Youth is Missing Highlights (see policy for full details):

Steps are taken to locate a child/youth-

- Before contacting PCS, the caregiver is expected to take the same actions as a prudent and responsible parent to try and locate the child/youth with consideration of the child/youth's age, developmental and/or support needs, circumstances around their disappearance and other contextual factors;
- If there is reason to believe that the child/youth health or safety is in immediate danger, a missing person report is made to police immediately and contact the child/youth's worker or PCS to inform them the police have been contacted;
- Caregiver should be aware of and follow any plan created with the child/youth's worker;
- Ensure all parties searching for a child are provided information and updated;
- Communicate with the parent(s)/guardian of the missing child/youth;
- Complete a Reportable Circumstance Report if there isn't one open due to the child/youth being missing.

When a child/youth has been located-

- Notify all parties;
- Attend to any physical or emotional injuries.
- If injuries meet the criteria make a further Reportable Circumstances Report.

Planning after a missing child/youth is no longer missing -

- Work with child/youth, caregiver, and others to understand reasons they go missing;
- Address identified issues and offer resources and services to prevent them from going missing again.
- Create a plan to address what actions the caregiver should take if the child/youth goes missing again and how to strengthen the child/youth's relationship with the caregiver and their feeling of safety and belonging in the home.

Aboriginal Operational and Practice Standards and Indicators 2005

[Aboriginal Operational & Practice Standards and Indicators - iConnect | Ministry of Children & Family Development \(gov.bc.ca\)](#)

A-40 When a Child in voluntary Care is Missing, Lost or Runaway

The child/youth's worker, in collaborations with the parents, will:

- Ensure that the police have been notified;
- Provide a current picture to the police;
- Provide a list of known associates to the police;
- Check with the police regarding their efforts to locate the child/youth;
- Place an Alert on the common database;
- Inform the Director, CFCSA if the child/youth is at high risk or harm;
- Notify any persons significantly involved with the child/youth who may be able to locate them;
- Actively seek out possible friends who may know the child/youth's whereabouts;
- Identify/check possible persons or places where the child/youth may be located;
- Actively and regularly coordinate search activities until the child/youth is found;
- Maintain and intensify search efforts for as long as it takes to locate the child/youth;
- Arrange a case conference with significant persons in the child/youth's life to ensure all possible options are considered to find them and to ensure their safety;
- Consider media assistance when a review of the circumstances justifies releasing confidential information to ensure the child/youth's safety.

B-23 When a Child/Youth is Missing, Lost or Runaway

The child/youth's worker will:

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- Provide a current picture to the police;
- Provide a list of known associates to the police;
- Check with the police regarding their efforts to locate the child/youth;

- Place an Alert in the common database;
- Inform the Director, CFCSA if the child/youth is at high risk of harm;
- Notify the child/youth's family and any persons significantly involved with the child/youth who may be able to locate them;
- Actively seek out possible friends who may know the child/youth's whereabouts;
- Identify/check possible persons or places where the child/youth may be located;
- Actively and regularly coordinate search activities until the child/youth is found;
- Maintain and intensify search efforts for as long as it takes to locate the child/youth;
- Arrange a case conference with significant persons in the child/youth's life to ensure all possible options are considered to find them and to ensure their safety;
- Consider media assistance when a review of the circumstances justifies releasing confidential information to ensure the child/youth's safety.

Protocol Agreement Regarding Missing Children and Youth

<https://intranet.gov.bc.ca/assets/download/B932FF522A494035980EA82B126FF4E8>

Roles and responsibilities are defined to facilitate missing person investigations involving CYIC. See Appendix 1.

Reportable Circumstances Policy

<https://intranet.gov.bc.ca/mcfd/content?id=448949E44F8E4EB5BC6A18CFA2F86D80>

When a CYIC is missing and has not been located following a preliminary search of the home and attempts to contact the child/youth and their known acquaintances as per the Practice Guideline, a Serious Incident Reportable Circumstances should be completed.

Upon return, if there are any physical/emotional injuries that meet the definition of a critical injury as per policy, a Critical Injury Reportable Circumstances should be completed. These Serious Incident reports will remain active for support and tracking purposes until a) the child/youth has returned to their place of care for at least 24 hours or b) have been confirmed to have begun to reside at another address, and c) their absence and related concerns have been discussed with them.

Reportable Circumstances Practice Guideline

<https://intranet.gov.bc.ca/mcfd/content?id=41C5525FED654718AA1F49ABE08954E9>

Standards for Foster Homes Appendix 1

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/family-and-social-supports/foster-parenting/standards_foster_homes.pdf

Policy 1.1 Working with Indigenous Children, Youth, Families and Communities under the CFCSA

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/download/97A37E992BCB45D7AC4015F5E40A589E>

As per the policy sections below, if the missing CYIC is Indigenous, include the Indigenous community as per any s.92.1 Community Agreement. Consult and cooperate with the Indigenous community, even in the absence of an agreement.

Providing CFCSA services to Indigenous children/youth and families when an Indigenous law does not apply

- (a) Adhere to any CFCSA section 92.1 agreement with the child/youth's Indigenous community.*
- (b) Consult and cooperate with the child/youth's Indigenous community, disclosing information either with parental consent or with authority under section 74(2)(e)(v.1) or 79 of the CFCSA.*

Policy 1.1 Restorative Practice Guide

<https://intranet.gov.bc.ca/assets/download/05D1A2613FD842649D52606624889DEC>

Use the Restorative Practice Guide when working with Indigenous communities, considering the Federal Act Best Interests of Indigenous Child, planning services through significant measures, and considering an ongoing reassessment of placement.

Social Media Policy for Foster Parents

<https://intranet.gov.bc.ca/mcfd/resources-supports/policy-updates/policy-updates-july-2018/social-media-policy-for-foster-parents>

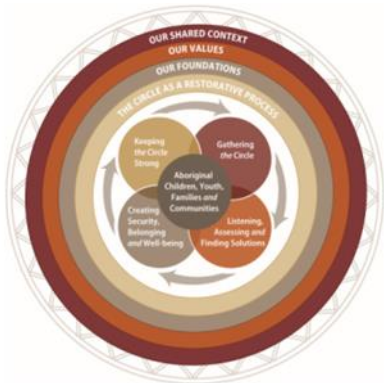
A CYIC is not obligated to add a foster parent to their Social Media accounts or give their passwords to the foster parent, both can be done by choice.

Operational use of Social Media

https://intranet.gov.bc.ca/assets/intranet/mcfd/our-ministry/divisions/f-cs/pdf/media_qa_practitioner.pdf

With supervisor approval and a valid business reason, a worker with guardianship responsibilities can use social media to try and locate a child/youth who is missing. The safety and wellbeing of a child/youth would be considered a valid business reason.

When a child/youth comes into care or changes placement:



Creating security, belonging and well-being recognizes the central significance and importance of cultural connection and identity to a child/youth's well-being, and the need for this to be nurtured and maintained. When a child/youth comes into care, their sense of belonging is interrupted, and it is important for this to be recognized and all efforts made to support their ongoing connection to family and culture.

The quality of the engagement, information sharing and planning at the initial placement is key to the child/youth's adjustment to being placed out of their home or changing placements, as well as the development of the relationship with the caregiver and success of the placement. To ensure the best outcome, the child/youth's worker should spend as much time as possible at the time of placement supporting this transition. Empower the child/youth to say what they want or need, express their opinions, have choices, and make decisions for themselves whenever possible. Together with the caregiver, you can create an environment for the CYIC to thrive.

For consideration during initial placement-

- Review s.70 Rights of Children in Care with the CYIC and caregiver and ensure everyone has the same understanding of the rights and what to do if there is concern that their rights are not being upheld;
- Share the strengths and needs of the CYIC and how best to meet their needs;
- Share who is in the CYIC family and other important people in their lives and how these connections will be maintained;
- Emphasize the importance of cultural connections, how these will be maintained and how cultural traditions can be incorporated into their care;
- Have the CYIC talk about their food likes and dislikes, any hobbies or activities they prefer or sports they are involved in;
- Ensure the CYIC has a good overview of how the home functions, roles and responsibilities, expectations, consequences, activities, ability to have friends/family

over, use of the bathroom and other common spaces, food/snack availability, how to add to the grocery list, clothing, and allowance etc;

- Review any situations where there could be flexibility and choice for the child/youth for example curfew;
- Determine the child/youth's usual problem-solving strategies and history of going missing/being away from home;
- When there is a history of going missing/being away from home, negotiate with the child/youth preventative and alternative solutions to going missing or being away from the home and how they will stay in contact if they are missing or away from the home
- Explore de-escalation and crisis management strategies that may assist to prevent the child/youth from going missing;
- Ensure the caregiver has a plan to follow if the CYIC goes missing as per the information in the next few sections of the practice guideline;
- Provide a tour of the home, see their room, and discuss how they can make the space their own.

Within 7 days of placement, see the child/youth in person and assess how they are adjusting to the placement, if they have any questions or unmet needs. Follow up with the caregiver on anything identified. Take reports of abuse/bullying in the care environment very seriously. Involvement of the caregiver in further discussion with the child/youth should be assessed for safety for the child/youth.

Caregiver efforts to locate a child/youth in care when they are unreasonably late and whose whereabouts are unknown:

Caregiver should use critical thinking to determine the urgency of the situation and contact the police accordingly (e.g. young child is missing, youth with support needs or mental wellness challenges would require a call to police as soon as they cannot be located on the property or the surrounding area).

The child/youth's worker ensures the caregiver is aware of their responsibilities as a 'prudent and responsible parent' and has a plan to respond when a child/youth is missing. The plan is followed whether the child/youth goes missing for the first time or if there is a pattern. If the caregiver is unable to fulfill the expectations, the worker advises the Resource Worker for the caregiver who will work with the caregiver to find an alternative way they can fulfil their

responsibility. For SHSS homes, the plan should be included in the SHSS Service Plan created by the Service Provider.

Recommended plan includes but is not limited to the following:

- Search the entire home including closets, basements and attics and the child/youth's personal space, and the property including garage, grounds, and surrounding area, to ensure the child/youth is nowhere in the home or on the property (*s.70 provides children and youth in care with a reasonable measure of privacy. Decisions made on privacy should be based on best interests, safety, and well-being. When a child or youth is missing, concerns about their safety and well-being should be considered reasonable grounds for searching their personal space for them and for any indication of where they may be*);
- Calling and leaving messages on the child/youth's cell phone;
- Check the child/youth's social media for indication of where they may be and/or who they may be with (*locating a missing child/youth is a valid business reason for looking at their social media*);
- Contact friends, person the child/youth may be in an intimate relationship with, friends' parents, and the child/youth's family to ask if they have seen the child/youth and to call if they learn of their whereabouts;
- Contact anyone else who may have information (i.e. coaches, teachers, member of the Indigenous Community, other community partners/service providers working with the child/youth etc);
- Ask the other children/youth in the home if they have any information or are in contact;
- Contact local hospital to see if the child/youth is there;
- Contact the child/youth's school if it is open;
- Identify and check places where the child/youth may be located including community locations the child/youth frequent;
- Attend any homes it is believe the youth may be at, when deemed safe to do so;
- Utilize outreach support workers if the caregiver has this available to them.

When the child/youth is located using these 'prudent and responsible parent' measures, the caregiver notifies the child/youth's worker of what occurred.

A youth on probation must be governed by the conditions of their bail/probation with regards to their time away from a resource, curfew and/or required check-ins. If there has been a breach of

their probation, the Youth Probation Officer should be notified by either the caregiver or the child/youth's worker.

When a caregiver, after having exhausted their plan for conducting their prudent and responsible parent actions, is unable to conduct a search in the community and there are safety concerns or circumstances that require a search, the caregiver should consult with the child/youth's worker or a PCS worker to consider if a local Response Team, Call Out Worker, or community partner if there is no delegated worker available in the community should be utilized. Consider where it is most likely to locate the child/youth to determine who should be called to assist in the search.

When all reasonable attempts to locate the child/youth are unsuccessful, the child/youth is considered missing, and the caregiver should follow the plan devised with the child/youth's worker. If no plan exists, call the child/youth's worker or a PCS worker to discuss next steps.

When a child/youth in care cannot be located:

It is best if the person with the most knowledge and information about the child/youth and their current situation reports the child/youth missing to the local police, in most situations, this will be the caregiver.

Information to provide to police includes but is not limited to:

- Detailed physical description including birth marks or tattoos, last known clothing child/youth was wearing and any items in their possession;
- A current picture;
- Any information related to concerns that the child/youth is or may be sexually exploited or involved with/affiliated with gang activity;
- Any history of mental health concerns (diagnosed or not) or suicidal ideation;
- Any known substance use, what drugs and how they use;
- Cognitive delays or support needs;
- Any medical issues;
- List of friends/associates including addresses and phone numbers;
- CYIC's mobile phone number and any social media sites and names used by the youth on those sites;
- CYIC's school;
- Any locations frequented by the CYIC;
- Modes of transportation used by the CYIC;
- Last know communication with the CYIC and last person seen with the CYIC;

- Any information pertaining to the possible whereabouts of the child/youth;

A plan for communication of the ongoing efforts to locate the child/youth and updates should be made with the police. The police must be advised that it must not be publicly communicated that the child/youth is in care.

The caregiver should advise the child/youth's worker or PCS worker that the child/youth is missing, their efforts to locate the child/youth and the police file number for the missing person report. A plan should be made as to who will contact the family and others in the child/youth's circle to share the information. If the CYIC is in care by agreement, the parents should be notified as soon as possible unless the agreement states otherwise.

The child/youth's worker/PCS worker should enquire about the child/youth's level of vulnerability, their psychological/emotional state, their current circumstances, past experiences and behavior, medical vulnerabilities and any other information that is needed to assess the level of risk. The child/youth's worker must also complete a Reportable Circumstance Report about the missing child/youth if no Reportable Circumstance report is currently open about the child/youth being missing.

The caregiver and child/youth's worker continue regularly with all efforts to locate the child/youth even after the police have been notified.

In consultation with Team Leader, consider the following actions-

- Identify a team who will be trying to locate the child/youth including the police, Indigenous community, community partners;
- Consultation and involvement of the Director of Practice;
- Consultation and involvement of the Office of the Provincial Director of Child Welfare & Aboriginal Services (Reportable Circumstance Team or Issue Management Team) should be considered in consultation with the Director of Operations and Executive Director of Service;
- Bring the circle of people trying to locate the child/youth together regularly to provide updates, coordinate and plan search efforts and ensure collaboration with police;
- Circle gathering frequency to be determined by the team;
- Consider using a collaborative practice facilitator to coordinate, chair and provide minutes of the meeting;

- Bring together the significant people in the child/youth's life to ensure all possible options are considered to find the child or youth and to share information;
- Actively and regularly coordinate search activities until the child/youth is found;
- Coordinate a search and poster campaign to put up missing person posters that do not identify the child/youth as being in care and canvas people in the areas searched;
- Involve caregivers, youth workers/outreach workers, ROOTs workers, Elders, Cultural Connection Workers and any other available staff both in MCFD/ICFSA as well as community agencies in the search efforts;
- Maintain search efforts for as long as it takes to locate the child/youth;
- If it is possible that the child/youth is in another area of province, coordinate staff and police involvement to locate the child/youth;
- Consider sending a provincial missing person notification email with a photo of the child/youth through the EDS to all MCFD/ICFSA offices;
- Contact the school administration to advise that the child/youth is missing, gather any useful information or contacts they may be aware of and determine how they can assist;
- Ensure any high risk/outreach youth tables and services are aware of the missing child/youth, have their description, photo and know who to contact if they locate the child/youth;
- Contact youth shelters/YES and low barrier facilities, provide a description, photo and who to contact if they have contact with the child/youth;
- Continue in person visits to locations the child/youth may be;
- In collaboration with police, consider media assistance, use of crime stoppers, missing children's websites, social media, and donated billboard space when a review of the circumstances justifies releasing confidential information to ensure the child/youth's safety;
- In consultation with local leadership, Director of Practice and the Office of the Provincial Director of Child Welfare & Aboriginal Services (Reportable Circumstance Team or Issue Management Team), consider a Canada wide child welfare alert;
- Ensure Designated Director/Executive Director of Service, Deputy Director of Child Welfare, Practice Manager/Executive Director and Director of Operations are kept up to date of the search efforts;
- When the child/youth is Indigenous, consult with Elders and the Indigenous community about any ceremony that should occur to honor the missing child/youth.

It is important the care team formulates a plan for when the child/youth is located to ensure their needs are assessed and met and that the plan is communicated to all involved in locating the child.

Ensure pertinent information is documented in an Info Memo on the CS Case in ICM including a description of the child/youth, where a photo is located on the file, what the search efforts are, who to contact if located, police contact information/file number and the plan for when the child/youth is located.

When Child/Youth is located but doesn't return to their placement:

The caregiver reports to the child/youth's worker that the child/youth was absent, their efforts to locate them, where they were located and any information about the reasons for not returning to their placement.

If there is an immediate safety concern (i.e. sexual exploitation, sexual predator, medical condition requiring treatment, home is frequently used for substance use, dangerous or violent people in the home) due to the location of the child/youth, the caregiver should notify the child/youth's worker/office or a worker at PCS if the office is not open. The child/youth's worker or PCS worker will notify police where the child/youth is and the specifics about the immediate safety concern at the location the child/youth is and request assistance to address the immediate safety concern.

Discussion with the police about the status of the missing person report should occur.

The child/youth's worker makes efforts to see the child/youth and meaningfully engage with them to understand and assess their situation.

This should include but is not limited to:

- Listen without judgement;
- Tell them you are concerned;
- Listen to understand how come they are away from their placement;
- Take reports of abuse/bullying in the care environment very seriously (involvement of the caregiver in further discussion with the child/youth should be assessed for safety for the child/youth);
- Encourage them to return to their placement when safe to do so.

Meaningful conversation recommended to include but not limited to:

- How they are doing;
- The contact information for where they are staying;
- If they are safe;
- What makes them feel they are safe at the location;
- Who can they go to if they don't feel safe? (create a safety plan);
- What is happening at the location they are at;
- Who else is at the location;
- Names and contact details of who is caring for them;
- Are their needs being met and if so, how;
- Is anyone expecting anything from them for staying there;
- Could they leave the place if they wanted to or would anyone prevent them from leaving;
- Explore barriers to returning to their placement;
- Discuss solutions to any barriers identified;
- Ask general questions about their health and pay close attention to the child/youth's appearance, if they are injured, need medical attention, may have experienced an overdose etc. and plan to address any needs;
- If the child/youth is known to use substances, ensure they have Naloxone and discuss their plan for safer use/harm reduction;
- Provide them with resources, phone numbers, information;
- Plan with them for regular contact and visits;

The child/youth's worker or worker who is dealing with the situation outside of core hours, should attempt to have a conversation with the adult whose place the child/youth is staying at to confirm they are aware, they are in support, any concerns they may have or know about, safety plan, what they understand about the reasons the child/youth won't return to their placement, role they can play in supporting the child/youth to return to their placement, willingness to have ongoing contact with you, and who they can call if there are concerns about the child/youth.

The child/youth's worker meets with the child/youth frequently and discusses the above issues until the child/youth has returned to a placement.

Communication and collaboration with the care team and family is ongoing.

When a child/youth in care returns after being missing or away from their placement:

Engaging the child/youth is essential when they return. It is important that they feel welcome, supported, and cared about. Be empathetic, compassionate, and understanding, rather than angry, frustrated, and punitive — when children/youth feel genuinely cared about, they feel less anxious about returning and facing the consequences, and more inclined to talk about what is occurring. Their immediate needs should be met, and attention should be paid to any physical or emotional injury. This may require a Reportable Circumstance if a critical injury has occurred.

We need to understand what led to their being missing or away from their placement. It is only when we understand what is or has been happening for them, their wishes and feelings, the risk factors and their triggers, that we can make changes, put in place supports needed and respond appropriately to their triggers so that they are less likely to go missing in the future. By focusing on solutions and being nurturing we can support them to consider other options. Upon return, a debriefing interview with the child/youth should be conducted and a prevention plan created or if one already exists reviewed and updated.

CYIC need workers and caregivers to:

- Be mindful of the way they engage and talk with them;
- Understand that they will often be feeling scared and worried that they will be blamed for leaving;
- Focus on how they are feeling, and not just the behavior;
- Understand that if they feel that the consequences for being missing or away from the resource are too harsh, they are likely to leave again;
- Understand that sometimes they may react impulsively, but they just need space to clear their head and process their feelings;
- See this is an opportunity to understand if the CYIC has needs that might need to be responded to in a different way;
- Consider making someone else available for them to talk to, someone who can act as an advocate if they feel uncomfortable talking to their worker and/or caregiver, it may be hard to talk to them if they are part of the reason for being missing or away from the placement.

When the child/youth is found, we need to provide the time and space to hear what they have to say so we can understand:

- If they are ok;
- Do they need any support, services, medical attention;
- What led to their absence;
- What was the trigger;
- What were they trying to communicate;
- How we can work together to prevent them from being missing in the future;
- What can we do differently;
- How can we create safety;
- Their relationships and networks.

Some questions to ask may include, but are not limited to:

- Is there anything we can do to make it easier to stay?
- Was there anything that would have changed their mind to keep them from leaving?
- What did they hope would happen when they left?
- Did they have a plan on how to take care of themselves and did it work out?
(This question may help lead to where they were to, what they did, who they contacted, and what happened to them while they were away from their placement.)
- What made them decide to return?

We need to consider working in partnership with someone else in their support network that the CYIC may prefer to talk to. When this information is gathered, we should plan with the CYIC, their family, Indigenous community, caregivers and significant others:

- How to reduce the risk of them being away from the placement in the future;
- How the CYIC can keep themselves as safe as possible;
- How they will keep everyone informed about where they are and how best to contact them.

When the child/youth is Indigenous, discuss with the child/youth and consult with the cultural team/child's circle about any ceremony that could support the child/youth in the home. The child/youth may feel safer in the home following a smudging, cedar brushing or other cultural practices of the child/youth's community.

Assessing and supporting the caregiver:

When a CYIC is missing, away from their placement or won't agree to return to their placement, particularly if they are doing so regularly, the child/youth's worker and the worker for the

caregiver should work together to consider whether the caregiver requires additional support. This might be for capability development to prevent the child/youth from being missing in the future, or support for the emotional impact of the behavior, or both. It is important that the caregiver understands that CYIC need stability and consistency in their lives, and that, if appropriate, they will be welcomed back to their care arrangement.

It is important to give the caregiver an opportunity to share what has been happening in the home from their perspective, so that they can share their views and experiences and what supports they feel are needed. Support may also be needed regarding other CYIC who are being cared for by the caregiver.

Clinical Supervision:

During clinical supervision, the team leader assesses the child/youth circumstance as well as the workers skill and ability in assessing the safety and well-being of the child/youth and supporting the child/youth to return to/remain in their placement.

The team leader assesses, among other things, the workers understanding of:

- Their role and responsibilities when a child/youth is missing;
- The reason the child/youth is missing or away from their placement;
- Any patterns or triggers – change in circumstances, recent events, identified stressors;
- The child/youth's sense of belonging and connection to culture;
- The role trauma may be playing in the child/youth being missing;
- How we can better understand the underlying reasons for them going missing;
- Exceptions to being missing or away from their placement;
- How they are supporting a sense of belonging and connection for the child/youth;
- How they are involving and working with family and the Indigenous community;
- How we could do things differently;
- What supports we could offer;
- The planning they have done with the child/youth and caregiver to prevent future occurrences.

Following the review and case consultation, the worker with guardianship responsibility documents the consultation and action plan in the case notes on ICM.

Appendices: Tip Sheets



Youth at Risk of Being Missing or Absent from their Placement – Information for Staff

What you can do

"Please don't go... I care about you."
"What do you need right now? How can I help?"

It is a combination risk factors and the societal context and/or system response that creates the risk for youth going missing or being absent from their placement.

Research indicates youth with the characteristics below are at a higher risk for being missing or absent from their placement:

- Youth who have previous being missing or absent from their placement (the more, the higher the risk to do again)
High number of removals from parental care
- Has had multiple placements (the higher the number of placements, the higher the risk)
- Placement was a result of neglect/parental ability or willingness to care
- Coming from a single parent household especially where sole caregiver is a mother
- Age 13 - 16
- Female
- Current substance misuse or suicidal ideation
- Disconnected, unable to form positive relationships and/ or YJ involvement
- Group care placements
- Plan is to remain in care long term/until 19

Protective Factors associated with reduced likelihood of being missing or absent:

- Living with a relative or being in the same placement as siblings
- For youth in group care, the presence of supportive staff
- Longer stays in the same placement

Research on youth reasons for being missing or absent from their placement:

Often described in the research as Push/Pull

- Experiencing problems with their placement- abuse, bullying, lack of connection, staff, peers, depressive environment
- Boredom- particularly during evenings, on weekends and during summer holidays, no opportunity for age appropriate activities or time outside
- Restrictive environment- unreasonable curfews, not able to call/visit family and/or friends, unreasonable punishments
- To see family- missing them, worried about them (especially single parent) and often around the holidays
- To maintain connection with pre-existing friends/peers

Missing or Absent from their Placement Prevention – Tips for Staff

What you can do

Engage, encourage, support and listen to the youth in what they want for their future

Take allegations of bullying, abuse and problems with placement very seriously.

Create a Youth Missing or Absent from their placement

Prevention Plan with the youth:

- Identify their strengths
- Brainstorm and list calming activities
- Discuss and create awareness of possible triggers

Discuss with the youth what is needed to help reduce their reasons to be missing or absent from placement:

If the youth is missing or absent from their placement to see friends:

- Work with the caregiver to increase the youth's freedom
- Increase amount of time allowed to spend with friends
- Look into possible placement with friends' family

Ensure child/youth's has a cultural plan:

- Created with the child/youth and includes their goals
- If the child/youth is indigenous, include their community
- Up to date
- Provided to child/youth's caregiver

Review youth's level of engagement in current placement:

- Work with youth and caregiver to alleviate issues
- Look at other placement options
- Explore with youth where they would like to live

Let youth have a voice and choice:

- Empower the youth to:
 - Say what they want or need
 - Learn new things
 - Make decisions for themselves whenever possible
 - Express their opinions
 - Take responsibility

Provide sense of purpose and movement:

- Incorporate the youth's goals in their care plan
 - Break down the goals into time-limited and attainable activities
 - Provide support as needed
 - Help ensure success

Trust and Transparency:

- Build trust and a quality relationship
- Share all appropriate information with youth
- Help youth understand what is going on

Create Transition Plan with the youth that:

- Includes their goals
- Lists what they need to work on
- Identifies who will help them along the way

Safety Plan:

- Create a plan with the youth and caregiver
- Provide youth with contact information for:
 - Youth Emergency Shelters
 - Food resources
 - Drop-in centers
 - Medical providers

Work with caregivers to:

Provide a sense of normalcy:

- Treat all youth in the home the same
- Encourage youth to participate in activities of interest
- Allow youth to hang out with their friends
- Attend school and community events

Support a sense of belonging and safety:

- Incorporate culture and traditions into the home
- Support their involvement in cultural activities
- Include children/youth in care in all family activities
- Have clear house rules and consequences that apply to all youth
- Talk with youth about their feelings

Provide meaningful activities, opportunities and life skills:

- Show they are invested in their life and future
- Possible life skills to teach the youth are:
 - Cooking
 - Grocery shopping
 - Doing laundry
 - Maintaining a car
 - Budgeting
 - Finding resources

Set clear limits:

- Youth need guidance
- Involve them in setting house rules
- Consequences should be related to the behavior
- Be consist
- Be fair

When a Youth Returns – Tips for Staff

What you can do

“I’m so glad you are back. I was worried about you.”

Tell the youth how happy you are that they are back, how worried you were for them while they were gone and then *listen without judgement* to what they have to say.

Social Worker must:

- Ensure that all parties are notified as soon as possible that the child/youth is no longer missing.
- Follow the steps in Chapter 5.12 and the Interim Practice Guideline When a Child/Youth in Care is Missing.

When a youth returns from being missing or absent from their placement

Engaging a youth is essential when they return:

- Listen to them
- Make them feel welcome
- Tell them how you feel about their return
- Ask if they need anything
- Stay solution-focused

Youth go missing or absent from their placement for many reasons:

- Friends and family
- Places where they feel accepted
- What is occurring in their placement

Talk about

- Who are your friends?
- How can I get ahold of your friends?
- Where do you like to hang out?
- What do you do?
- Who is one person you ALWAYS stay in contact with?
- How do you get ahold of them?
- What is their phone number?

Some questions you can ask during debriefing:

- Are you ok?
- Do you need anything?
 - Support?
 - Services?
 - Medical attention?

- What do you need right now to feel safe?
- Do you feel safe in your placement?
- What are the reasons you were missing?
- Is there anything I can do to make it easier to stay?
- Was there anything that would have changed your mind?
- What did you hope would happen when you left?
- Did you have a plan of how to take care of yourself?
- Did it work out? This can help lead to:
 - Where did you go?
 - What did you do?
 - Who did you contact?
 - What happened to you while you gone?
- What made you decide to return?
- What are some things you want to work on?
- What do you want to see happen in the next three months?
- Where do you see yourself in a year?
 - What do we need to work on to get you there?
- It is important to use the information obtained in the debriefing to prevent a future missing or absent event.
- Develop a Youth Missing or Absent from their Placement Prevention Plan
- Give the youth a voice
- Solution-focused
- Based on the information gathered you can help develop targeted interventions. For further details, see the Missing or Absent from their Placement Prevention tip sheet for staff. An example would be:
If a youth is missing or absent from their placement to see biological family, look at current safety issues and, if possible, place with family or increase family visits..



How to Help a Youth Who is at Risk of being Missing or Absent from their Placement – Prevention Tips for Caregivers

What you can do

“How was your day? Did anything good happen? How do you think you did on that test?”

How can I help?

- Engage the youth in everyday activities
- Encourage them to plan for the future
- Support their dreams
- Listen to what they want

Create a Youth Missing or Absent from their placement Prevention Plan with the youth and caseworker:

- Identify their strengths
- Brainstorm and list calming activities
- Discuss and create awareness of possible triggers

Provide a sense of normalcy:

- Treat all youth in the home the same
- Encourage youth to participate in activities of interest
- Allow youth to hang out with their friends
- Attend school and community events

Support a sense of belonging and safety:

- Incorporate culture and tradition into your home
- Include youth in care in all family activities
- Talk with youth about their feelings
- Let them know they are important

Family meals:

- Eating together helps build relationships
- Check in with each other
- Make plans for the weekend

Share ordinary time:

- Day to day tasks create a bond
- Walk the dog
- Chat in the car
- Allow youth space to share
- Listen without judgment

Show up:

- Participate in cultural events that support the youth's cultural plan
- Attend youths school events
- Watch them practice sports
- Help them create a hobby

Stay curious

- Ask questions about their life
- Get to know their friends
- What do they like to do?
- Where do they hang out?

Set clear limits:

- Youth need guidance
- Involve them in setting house rules
- Consequences should be related to the behavior
- Have clear house rules that apply to all youth
- Be consist, be fair

Let the youth have a voice and choice:

Empower the youth to:

- Say what they want or need
- Express their opinions
- Take responsibility
- Learn new things
- Make decisions for themselves whenever possible

Provide meaningful activities, opportunities and life skills:

Show that you are invested in their life and future

Possible life skills you could teach the youth are how to:

- Cook
- Do laundry
- Grocery shop
- Maintain a car
- Find resources

Safety Plan:

Create a plan and provide youth with contact information for:

- Youth Emergency Shelters
- Drop-in centers
- Food resources
- Medical Centers
- Other support services

Your words and actions help youth feel secure. Don't forget to say and show how much you care.



When a Youth is Missing or Absent from their Placement and Returns Prevention – Tips for Caregivers

What you can do

Engage, encourage, support and listen to the youth in what they want for their future and help them get there. Ensure they have a sense of and connected to culture.

Caregivers must follow procedures outlined in Appendix 1 in the Standards for Foster Homes

- Standards for Foster Parents- Appendix 1: When a child or youth is missing

Youth missing or absent from their placement

Youth are often pulled to something or pushed away because of something:

- Friends
 - Do you know their friends?
 - What is their contact information?
 - Where do they like to hang out?
 - What activities do they like to do?
- Family
 - Who are they connected with?
 - Do they talk about specific people?
 - Who do they consider to be family?
- Placement
 - How is it going?
 - Do they feel like they belong?
 - Is there anything that is bothering them?
 - Is there anything that could make it better?
 - Is culture and tradition incorporated into their care?

If the youth contacts you:

- Tell them you are concerned
- Listen without judgment
- Encourage them to return
- Ask them where they are:
 - Are they OK?
 - Safe?
- Provide them with resource information
- Offer to come get them or meet them somewhere
- Provide all information to Social Worker

What to do when a youth returns from being missing or absent from their placement

- Engage the youth
- Make them feel welcome
- Listen to what they say
- Tell them that you were worried
- Let them know you care about them
- Encourage them to talk about why they were missing or absent from their placement
- Think about solutions to prevent further runs

Some questions to ask during your conversation:

- Are you OK?
- Do you need anything?
 - Support?
 - Services?
 - Medical attention?
- What do you need right now to feel safe?
- Who should I contact to let them know you are safe?
- Is there anything I can do to make it easier to stay?
- Was there anything that would have changed your mind?
- What did you hope would happen when you left?
- Did you have a plan of how to take care of yourself?
- Did it work out? This can help lead to:
 - Where did they go?
 - What did they do?
 - Who did they contact?
 - What happened to them while they were gone?
- What made you decide to return?
- What are some things you want to work on?
- What do you want to see happen in the next three months?
- Where do you see yourself in a year?
 - What do we need to work on to get you there?