

COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

POLICY & PROCEDURE

POLICY NUMBER: CWS 24-09	POLICY TITLE: MISSING OR ABSENT FROM CARE CHILDREN/NONMINOR DEPENDENTS	EFFECTIVE DATE: 04/08/2026
PROGRAM(S): All Programs	REVISION DATES: 04/08/2026; 4/10/2026	REFERENCES: ACIN I-13-17 ; ACL 19-26 ; ACL 24-18 ; ACL No. 25-67 ; P&P 10-01

OVERVIEW

This policy guide specifies the requirements and procedures to assist in the expedient return of children/Non-Minor Dependents who are missing or absent from foster care. CWS believes, commits to, and expects collaboration with the child/Non-Minor Dependent’s identified Tribe.

POLICY

Child/Non-Minor Dependent (NMD) is missing or is absent from foster care

When a child/NMD is missing or is absent from foster care, the case carrying social worker must make all diligent efforts described in this policy and procedure to locate the child/NMD on an ongoing basis until the child’s/NMD is located or the court jurisdiction is terminated. When it is determined that youth is enrolled or eligible for enrollment in a federally recognized tribe, the SW will adhere to the CWS Tribal Collaboration policy and procedure (P&P 18-11). A child’s/NMD’s dependency status must be maintained even though they may refuse to cooperate with the department, elopes from their identified foster care placement, or their whereabouts are unknown for extended periods of time. The decision to terminate jurisdiction is solely the court’s decision and the Department is not to make a recommendation to terminate jurisdiction based on the child/NMD missing or absent from care status. Exceptions to this are when the young person is not in compliance with the Extended Foster Care program, has reached the age of 21, or is determined to be deceased.

“Missing from foster care” means when the whereabouts of a child subject to an order of foster care placement are unknown to the county child welfare agency or probation department, or when the county child welfare agency or probation department has located a child subject to an order of foster care placement in a location not approved by the court that may pose a risk to the child, taking into account the age, intelligence, mental functioning, and physical condition of the child.

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This shall only apply to a nonminor dependent if, based on the totality of the circumstances, the county child welfare agency or probation department suspects that the nonminor dependent did not voluntarily leave foster care or is at risk of substantial harm.

Case carrying social workers must show the court that diligent efforts have been made to find the child or NMD whose whereabouts have become unknown.

The personal property of a missing child or NMD must be stored for a minimum of one year in compliance with P&P 10-01. If the child or NMD's location remains unknown after that time, the Department may seek a court order authorizing disposal of the child or NMD's personal property.

Interstate Compact on Juveniles

The findings and purpose of the Interstate Compact on Juveniles (ICJ) states in part that Juveniles who are not under proper supervision and control, or who have absconded, or are missing/Absent from Care, are likely to endanger their own health and welfare, as well as the health and welfare of others. The cooperation of the States participating in this compact is therefore necessary to provide for the welfare and protection of juveniles and of the public with respect to:

1. The return, from one state to another, of non-delinquent juveniles who have elope from home; and
2. Additional measures for the protection of juveniles and of the public, which any two or more of the party states may find desirable to undertake cooperatively.

In carrying out the provisions of this compact the participating States must be guided by the non-criminal reformatory and protective policies which guide their laws concerning delinquent neglected, or dependent juveniles generally. It must be the policy of the States participating in this compact to cooperate and observe their respective responsibilities for the prompt return and acceptance of juveniles and delinquent juveniles who become subject to the provisions of this compact.

PROCEDURE

1. Child/Nonminor Dependent is Missing or Absent from foster care *or from the home of a Parent*

1.1. Case-Carrying Social Worker Responsibilities*

- 1.1.1. Direct the caregiver* to immediately and/or as appropriate make a Missing Person Report to Law Enforcement/Tribal Law Enforcement. Under no circumstance should contact with Law enforcement/Tribal Law enforcement be delayed more than twenty-four (24) hours. Direct the caregiver to obtain the report number from the agency to which the report was made.

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- 1.1.1.1. If the youth is an NMD in a Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) and, if the circumstances of their disappearance warrant such action, the Social Worker is to file a Missing Person's Report with law enforcement, obtain the report number and document the information in CWS/CMS as a contact. Circumstances warrant this if the NMD has been reasonably determined to be in fact missing from care, there are competency issues, or there is a reasonable suspicion that the NMD is a victim of harm or foul play.
- 1.1.1.2. Direct the caregiver to inquire among neighbors, peers, school, etc. If the youth is an NMD in an SILP with roommates, ask the roommate(s) if they know the whereabouts of the NMD. Ask the caregiver to immediately report any information obtained about the missing child/NMD to the assigned Social Worker and Law enforcement/Tribal Law enforcement if appropriate.
- 1.1.2. Upon being notified that a youth is missing or absent from home, the Social Worker will **immediately and no later than twenty-four (24) hours** notify the tribe, if applicable. See tribal contact form on how to notify tribe. When a youth/NMD is a member, or suggested member, of a tribe, make active efforts to include and engage with the tribe throughout the process per ACL 24-18.
- 1.1.3. **Immediately and no later than twenty-four (24) hours** Inform the child's parent, if available, or legal guardian that the child has eloped or is missing and inquire if they know the whereabouts of the child. For an NMD, the parent is only notified if they are still receiving family reunification services. If the child falls under ICWA, whenever possible notification to the parent or legal guardian will be made jointly with the tribe. Do not contact the parent or legal guardian if there is an order or other facts showing the parent or legal guardian should not be contacted (i.e. termination of parental rights, no contact order, etc.).
 - 1.1.3.1. If the parent's or legal guardian's whereabouts are unknown and the parent or legal guardian has no phone, make a home visit as soon as possible but no later than the next business day from the date of learning the child has eloped or is missing.
 - 1.1.3.2. Ask the parent or legal guardian to contact the department immediately if they receive any information about the child's whereabouts.
 - 1.1.3.3. Ask the parent or legal guardian for a phone number where they can be reached.
- 1.1.4. Contact the caregiver, if applicable by the next business day and confirm the Missing Person Report was filed with law enforcement. Obtain the report number. Contact the tribe and

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provide any updated information, including the report number. Document in CWS/CMS as a contact.

- 1.1.5. The assigned Social Worker will ensure the Missing Person Report is filed within twenty-four (24) hours of notification. A Missing Person Report can be filed at any police station, per Penal Code 14211. The report does not have to be taken at the police station closest to where the child went missing.
 - 1.1.5.1. To report a Non-Minor Dependent as missing, the social worker must reasonably determine that the nonminor is in fact missing in order for the reporting and noticing requirements to apply. That is, there must be competency issues or a reasonable suspicion the NMD is a victim of harm or foul play.
- 1.1.6. If law enforcement/tribal law enforcement refuses to accept a Missing Person Report:
 - 1.1.6.1. Enter a contact in CWS/CMS indicating the date the attempted report was made, the name and badge number of the law enforcement/tribal law enforcement personnel refusing/unwilling to accept the Missing Person Report.
 - 1.1.6.2. Immediately notify your supervisor about law enforcement's refusal to accept the report.
 - 1.1.6.3. Social Worker Supervisors should inform the appropriate law enforcement/tribal law enforcement Liaison for the jurisdiction the attempted report was refused.
- 1.1.7. **Immediately and no later than twenty-four (24) hours**, notify the child's/NMD's attorney as well as the attorneys for the parents, legal guardians, or Indian custodians that the child/NMD has eloped or is missing.
- 1.1.8. Any known sibling of the child or NMD who is 10 years of age or older and adjudged to be a dependent child of the juvenile court, if such notice would not be contrary to the safety and well-being of that sibling. Notice to siblings shall be provided in a trauma-informed manner.
- 1.1.9. **Immediately and no later than twenty-four (24) hours**, if applicable, notify the child's/NMD's Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) of the child's/NMD's missing or away from foster care status and inquire if they know the whereabouts of the child. Request that CASA notifies the assigned SW/SWS if they have contact with missing youth.
- 1.1.10. Within twenty-four (24) hours of learning that the child/NMD has eloped:
 - 1.1.10.1. For children age 17 and under, complete the Protective Custody Runaway Warrant Request and forward to your supervisor for review. Notice to the court of jurisdiction of a minor or NMD missing from foster care will occur within 24 hours. This may occur through the Protective Custody Runaway Warrant process or by Ex parte communication with the assistance of County Counsel.

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- 1.1.11. If the child is involved with Juvenile Probation, notify the Juvenile Probation Department within twenty-four (24) hours.
- 1.1.12. Placement may be kept open and payment continued for up to fourteen (14) consecutive calendar days from the date the child/NMD eloped from placement if:
 - 1.1.12.1. The caregiver articulates a willingness to have the child/NMD return to their home; and
 - 1.1.12.2. The assigned social worker and tribe agree that it would be suitable and safe for the child/NMD to do so.
 - 1.1.12.3. If the Social Worker and tribe agree to keep the placement open, the bed hold authorization must be in writing.
 - 1.1.12.4. The social worker will submit a *New/Change of Placement Form (A-14-38)* within three days, and no later than seven days, indicating change of placement reason as AWOL/Runaway to accurately document child is not currently residing in placement.
- 1.1.13. If it is immediately determined that the placement episode will be terminated, in collaboration with the tribe, notify the substitute care provider of the payment termination date in writing, in person, or by telephone. Document the date and manner by which the notices was provide in a CWS/CMS contact.
 - 1.1.13.1. The social worker will submit a *New/Change of Placement Form (A-14-38)* indicating change of placement reason as AWOL/Runaway to accurately document child is not currently residing in placement.
- 1.1.14. If the placement is terminated, as soon as possible, but no later than 14 business days upon notification the child/NMD has eloped or is missing from the placement, ensure the following:
 - 1.1.14.1. Secure all of their clothing and belongings from the placement by having either the caregiver deliver the child’s/NMD’s possessions to the office or the CWS designee pick up the child’s/NMD’s possessions from the caregiver.
 - 1.1.14.2. Store the child’s/NMD’s belongings in the appointed location as outlined in the *Storage of Youth’s Belongings Policy and Procedure (CWS P&P 10-01)*.
 - 1.1.14.3. Keep the child’s/NMD’s clothing and belongings for a minimum of one year, or until the child/NMD is found, or the court directs the Department how and when to dispose of the child’s/NMD’s belongings.
 - 1.1.14.4. When the child/NMD is a member of a tribe, consult with the tribe prior to disposing of the belongings.
- 1.1.15. Thoroughly document all efforts to locate the child/NMD, informing an NMD of options in EFC, and details supporting suspicion an NMD is a victim of harm or foul play in CWS/CMS and include the information in the next status review report, including information that a missing person’s report is on file in the DOJ Missing and Unidentified Persons System.

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- 1.1.16. In collaboration with the tribe, complete/update the Commercial Sexually Exploited Identification Tool (CSE-IT) for all children ages 10-18.
 - 1.1.16.1. Update CMS client notebook to reflect updated CSE-IT score/Commercial Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) status.
 - 1.1.16.2. Notify Department CSEC Liaisons via CSEC email for all youth identified as “clear concern” for CSEC.
- 1.1.17. Report the Missing/Absent from Care child’s information to the National Center of Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) 1-800-843-5678 within 24 hours. Online Reports may be made at <https://cmfc.missingkids.org/reportit/Account/LogOn>
 - 1.1.17.1. The following information is required by NCMEC to generate a report:
 - 1.1.17.1.1. Child’s full name.
 - 1.1.17.1.2. Child’s date of birth.
 - 1.1.17.1.3. Photo of child, if one is provided by caregiver or natural supports/tribe/CASA, etc.
 - 1.1.17.1.4. Date child went missing.
 - 1.1.17.1.5. City and State from where the child went missing.
 - 1.1.17.1.6. Guardian information including agency name and telephone.
 - 1.1.17.1.7. Law enforcement/Tribal Law enforcement information including agency name, telephone, and police report number.
 - 1.1.17.2. The following information is requested by NCMEC, if available:
 - 1.1.17.2.1. Physical descriptive information (e.g. height, weight, sex, ethnicity, race, hair and eye color, clothing worn.)
 - 1.1.17.2.2. Any risks or endangerments to the child including CSEC status, pregnancy status, prescription medications, suicidal tendencies, vulnerability to being sex trafficked, and other health or risk factors, to the extent such information is released in compliance with applicable laws.
 - 1.1.17.2.3. Circumstances surrounding the incident, including the names of any known persons recently in contact with the child/NMD.
 - 1.1.17.2.4. Description of any person who may be with the child.
 - 1.1.17.2.5. Possible locations of the youth and previous recent locations.
 - 1.1.17.2.6. Information about whether the child or youth is or may be an Indian child, as defined in WIC 224.1, including the name of the child’s Tribe.
 - 1.1.17.2.7. Names of persons recently in contact with the child or youth.
 - 1.1.17.2.8. Existing and New social media handles of the child or youth or recently uploaded information.

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- 1.1.17.2.9. Any new photos obtained from persons in contact with the child or youth or from social media.
- 1.1.18. On a monthly basis the social worker, in collaboration with the tribe, should make the following attempts:
 - 1.1.18.1. Text or call the youth using their current or last known phone numbers.
 - 1.1.18.2. Conduct social media site searches in partnership with the Placement Unit Family Finder
 - 1.1.18.3. Actively search case records for possible leads to locations for the child's/NMD's whereabouts.
 - 1.1.18.4. Conduct a CWS/CMS database search for any new reports involving this child throughout the state.
 - 1.1.18.5. If the youth is deemed clear concern for CSEC, consult with the CSEC Liaison to reach out to other county's CSEC partners to notify them that the youth may be in their jurisdiction.
 - 1.1.18.6. If it is believed that the youth is located in another state, contact the Child Welfare System in the state and local law enforcement/tribal law enforcement if the jurisdiction is known.
- 1.1.19. Conduct a thorough search to attempt to locate the child/NMD, as information is provided, but no less frequent than on a monthly basis. Searches should include, but not be limited to, the following efforts:
 - 1.1.19.1. Efforts to locate and make contact with parties involved with or potentially aware of the location of the child/NMD:
 - 1.1.19.1.1. Tribe.
 - 1.1.19.1.2. Parents.
 - 1.1.19.1.3. Legal guardians.
 - 1.1.19.1.4. Non-relative extended family members.
 - 1.1.19.1.5. Siblings.
 - 1.1.19.1.6. Former out of home caregivers.
 - 1.1.19.1.7. Relatives.
 - 1.1.19.1.8. Law enforcement.
 - 1.1.19.1.9. School personnel.
 - 1.1.19.1.10. Legal Council.
 - 1.1.19.1.11. Any other person who might have knowledge about the child's whereabouts.

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- 1.1.19.2. Ask the caregiver and/or parent/legal guardian to make inquiries to the above individuals and that contact be made with the department immediately if any information about the child's/NMD's whereabouts is obtained.
- 1.1.19.3. Physically check locations the child/NMD is likely to be.
- 1.1.19.4. When authorized, search Social Media websites for activity with child's/NMD's known handle(s).
- 1.1.20. Document all contacts and efforts made on a monthly basis to find the child/NMD in the CWS/CMS contact.

1.2. A Missing/Absent from Care Child/NMD is Found or Returns

- 1.2.1. Within 24 hours of being notified the child/NMD has returned or has been found:
 - 1.2.1.1. When a child/NMD is a member, or suggested member, of a tribe, make active efforts to include and engage with the tribe throughout the process per ACL 24-18
 - 1.2.1.2. Contact the law enforcement/tribal law enforcement agency where the Missing Person's Report was filed to ask that the Missing Person's Report be withdrawn. Follow up with Law enforcement/Tribal Law enforcement to ensure the report has been withdrawn.
 - 1.2.1.3. If the parent or legal guardian has been told of the Missing/Absent from Care episode, notify them of the return.
 - 1.2.1.4. Immediately notify the child's tribal social worker of the youth's return and location.
 - 1.2.1.5. In instances where the child is picked up by Law enforcement/Tribal Law enforcement and delivered to CWS only to have the child elope again within minutes or hours, the social worker will have to file a new report because Law enforcement/Tribal Law enforcement would have removed the child from the database when the child was recovered and returned to CWS custody. The new missing or absent from care episode would be considered a new incident and would require a new report. Nevertheless, the runaway warrant does not need to be altered. The existing Runaway Warrant can remain.
 - 1.2.1.6. In collaboration with the tribe, debrief with the child/NMD in a private and comfortable area as soon as possible but no later than three business days after the child/NMD returns to care.
 - 1.2.1.7. The debrief interview should ideally be conducted by a Social Worker, including a Tribal Social Worker. The debrief interview can be conducted by an adult of the youth's choosing, or group of adults in a Child Family Team. When the debrief interview is held

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without the Social Worker and/or Tribal Social Worker present, all information obtained should be shared with the Social Worker/Tribal Social Worker, to ensure that information collected is consistent with the guidance provided in [ACIN I-13-17](#).

- 1.2.1.7.1. Respond to the factors identified above in the subsequent placements, to the extent possible.
 - 1.2.1.7.1.1. The child/NMD returns to the same placement, team with the child/NMD, the caregiver, and the Tribe to identify underlying or unmet needs and possible services or supports to meet those needs and prevent recurring behavior.
 - 1.2.1.7.1.2. Develop a plan to prevent the child/NMD from running away or being absent from care in the future. Use Harm Reduction Approach strategies to holistically address the child's/NMD's needs while not blaming when the child/NMD returns to unsafe situations. The child/NMD's child and family team (CFT) and/or CSEC MDT members must be aware of the totality of the child/NMD's needs and develop placement preservation strategies to meet the child's needs and stabilize placement. Focusing on short-term incremental gains which can lead to long term stability and safety.
 - 1.2.1.7.1.3. Address immediate needs including whether the child/NMD has any medical problems, is on any medication, or should be medically examined.
 - 1.2.1.7.1.4. Determine the primary factors that contributed to the child/NMD running away or being absent from care.
 - 1.2.1.7.1.5. Determine the child's/NMD's experiences while absent from care, assess and address any additional trauma that occurred while missing from care, including but not limited to CSEC concerns. (i.e. where did they stay, with whom, how did they provide for their needs, as well as experiences with drug use, sexual activity, abuse, etc.)
 - 1.2.1.7.1.6. Determine whether the child is a possible victim of Commercial Sexual Exploitation. Complete the CSE-IT, document the outcome in CWS/CMS and notify the CSEC liaisons. If clear concern for CSEC as a result of the CSE-IT or a victim of CSEC based on disclosure, document in the client notebook CSEC table as appropriate. If appropriate establish a CSEC MDT. If there is reasonable suspicion that the child has been a victim of Commercial Sexual Exploitation while absent form care, contact the Child Abuse Hotline to report the child abuse.

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- 1.2.1.7.1.7. If a child is identified as at risk of having been a victim of CSEC, initiate CSEC MDT process.
- 1.2.1.7.1.8. If the youth experienced any new or additional trauma or their needs have increased while away from care, the caseworker must updated the Integrated Practice Child Adolescent Needs and Strengths within 30 calendar days of determining that a changed condition exists.
- 1.2.2. Within one business day of learning the child/NMD has returned or has been found:
 - 1.2.2.1. Recall the Runaway Warrant. Note that the Runaway Warrant should be immediately recalled upon the child's 18th birthday even if the youth has not returned or been found.
 - 1.2.2.2. For an NMD whose case is still open, submit an Ex Parte Application and Order letting the Court know the NMD has returned.
 - 1.2.2.3. If the child is a cross-over youth and has active probation involvement, notify the probation officer of the child's return and work with them to clear any outstanding 602 warrants.
 - 1.2.2.4. When the child/NMD is a member of a Tribe, notify the Tribal Social Worker/Tribal representative.
- 1.2.3. **Immediately and no later than twenty-four (24) hours**, notify the child's/NMD's attorney as well as the attorneys for the parents, legal guardians, Indian custodians, CASA, and any siblings that have been previously notified that the child/NMD has been found or returned.
- 1.2.4. For an NMD, notify them that leaving their placement without communication with the assigned Social Worker could result in being terminated from the Extended Foster Care program. Document this conversation thoroughly in CWS/CMS contact.
- 1.2.5. Complete updated *New/Change of Placement Form (A-14-38)* to re-initiate the placement episode if applicable.
- 1.2.6. If the youth is an NMD and is in an SILP, reassess NMD's readiness for an SILP at this time.
- 1.2.7. As soon as possible convene the Child and Family Team to explore the child's/NMD's underlying needs and the necessary services and support to meet those needs.
- 1.2.8. If the child/NMD cannot return to his or her previous placement, explore with the child/NMD the possibility of placing him or her with a suitable relative, NREFM, licensed foster family home, or other licensed facility that would best meet the child/NMD needs. This new placement should take into account the unmet needs surfaced during the "Debrief Interview."
 - 1.2.8.1. When the is child is a member of a Tribe, work with the Tribe to adhere to Tribal placement preferences.

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- 1.2.9. If the child/NMD is located but unwilling to immediately return to care, the caseworker should hold a Child and Family Team meeting to discuss ways to support the youth during their absence and create a plan for return when the youth is ready.
 - 1.2.9.1. The caseworker should consistently attempt to have a face-to-face contact with the youth to ensure they are physically safe, and to continue to support their needs.
 - 1.2.10. Contact the Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) case manager assigned to the case to notify them that the child/NMD has been returned or found. Be prepared to share information surrounding the circumstances of the child's/NMD's return or location.
- 1.3. **Child is in Missing/Absent from Care and is Located in Another State and a Runaway Warrant has been Issued**
- 1.3.1. Warrants issued by the juvenile court are not enforceable outside the State of California. However, law enforcement/tribal law enforcement and Child Welfare Services in the other state will typically cooperate in returning the child to Humboldt County.
 - 1.3.2. Within twenty-four (24) hours, contact the law enforcement/tribal law enforcement agency in the other state to discuss the circumstances of the child's Missing/Absent from Care status and resulting warrant.
 - 1.3.3. If law enforcement/tribal law enforcement in the other state agrees to honor the warrant:
 - 1.3.3.1. Provide the signed Runaway Warrant via fax or email to the out of state law enforcement/tribal law enforcement agency
 - 1.3.4. Arrange transportation for the child's return to California and for an attendant to accompany the child if appropriate.
 - 1.3.5. If law enforcement/tribal law enforcement in the other state refuses to honor the warrant, collaborate with the law enforcement/tribal law enforcement agency the Missing Person's Report was made to for law enforcement/tribal law enforcement agency-to-agency communication.
- 1.4. **Returning a Missing/Absent from Care Child From Another State or County Who Is NOT Under Child Welfare/ Juvenile Court Supervision**
- 1.4.1. If Child Welfare Services is the responding agency, debrief with the child regarding the missing/absent from care incident, including whether the child should be medically examined.
 - 1.4.2. Determine if the child is or may be a member of a Tribe.
 - 1.4.3. Determine the primary factors that contributed to the child running away or being absent from care, including where and from whom they ran away.

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- 1.4.4. Determine the child’s experiences while way from care (i.e. where did they stay, with whom, how did they provide for their needs, as well as experiences with drug use, sexual activity, abuse, etc.)
- 1.4.5. Determine if the child is a possible victim of Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE). If it is determined that the child is a victim of CSE contact the appropriate jurisdiction’s Child Protection Hotline.

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