

**Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services
(CCDCFS)
Policy Statement**

Policy Chapter: Substitute Care
Policy Number: 6.06.03
Policy Name: Locating Children who are Absent without Leave (AWOL)

Original Effective Date: 03/01/2016
Revision Date(s):
Current Revision Date:
Approved By: Thomas D. Pristow

PURPOSE: To ensure safety and positive outcomes for all AWOL children. To provide the staff of the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS) with guidance and expectations on reporting children who are AWOL or missing to law enforcement and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, as required by Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) 5101: 2-42-88.

SCOPE: This policy applies to all CCDCFS social services staff.

POLICY

Staff take required actions to ensure that diligent efforts are made to locate children in the custody of CCDCFS who are away from their authorized placements without knowledge or permission of agency staff, and ensure those efforts are appropriately documented in the Statewide Automated Child Welfare System (SACWIS) activity logs. If a child is in an unauthorized placement or is away from their authorized placement, the child is considered to be AWOL. Children who are AWOL are usually identified as children who have been away from placement without permission for any period of time. The worker of record (WOR) reports missing children to the Hotline if another party has not already done so. The WOR refers for a sexual abuse assist if a missing child is suspected of being a victim of human trafficking. The sexual abuse intake worker refers for additional assessment if needed.

PROCEDURES

- I. The WOR completes the following tasks and documents the activities in the activity log immediately upon learning that a child in custody is AWOL from his/her authorized placement:
 - A. Files a missing persons report at the police station (local to the child's last known address) or ensure that the placement provider has filed this report. Requests law enforcement to complete a report with the National Crime Information Center (NCIC). Documents in the activity log the missing person's report number filed with the police and the location that the child went AWOL from, and obtains a copy of the police report for the case record.

- B. Contacts the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) hotline at 800-THE-LOST (800-843-5678) or access the NCMEC reporting website at <https://cmfc.missingkids.org>. If the missing person is between the ages of 18-20 but still in agency custody, and law enforcement refuses to take a missing persons report, the agency must still contact NCMEC to make a report.
 - 1. Note: NCMEC requires/requests detailed information regarding the child, such as, age, race, height, weight, hair color, clothes were they last seen in, scars/tattoos, level of functioning, eye glasses, braces, history of going missing, circumstances that led to the AWOL/missing youth, if the agency suspect a family member took the youth, if found in the past, what were the circumstances that led to them being found, any social media accounts, do they have a cell phone, recent picture, any thoughts on where they may be, etc.
 - C. The WOR documents in SACWIS the following information:
 - 1. the date, time and name of the law enforcement agency contacted;
 - 2. the date and time NCMEC was contacted;
 - 3. the last known location of the child;
 - 4. the length of time the child has been AWOL leading up to the report;
 - 5. anyone the children may have been with prior to or during AWOL;
 - 6. efforts and resources used to attempt to locate the child;
 - 7. notification of Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) and Assistant Prosecuting Attorney.
 - D. Makes monthly reasonable efforts to identify child's whereabouts until the child is found. Efforts include, but are not limited to, reviewing case file and attempting face to face contact with potential leads such as family, friends, school, prior placements as deemed appropriate by WOR and Supervisor.
 - E. Amends the case plan to reflect the AWOL status.
 - F. Picks up the child's belongings from placement. Makes every effort to locate a parent or someone involved with the child in the past to have him or her take the child's belongings for storage. Stores the belongings in accordance with CCDCFS protocol if there is no one to claim the items.
 - G. If aware of the child's physical location, visits the location for regular monthly face-to-face contacts. Discusses next steps with supervisor, which could include assessing the home for appropriateness and completing caregiver approval process.
- II. Upon the child's return from AWOL, WOR completes the following tasks and documents the activities in the SACWIS activity logs;
- A. Contacts law enforcement and NCMEC to inform them of the child's return.
 - B. Interviews the child and documents the following information in SACWIS:
 - 1. The circumstances that contributed to the child running away or being absent from care. When possible, these factors are considered when determining subsequent placements.

2. The events or experiences that took place while the child was AWOL, including if the child is found to be a sex trafficking victim. Documents any allegations of abuse or neglect in the form of a referral.
- C. If a child is age 12 years or older and has been AWOL for four months, discuss child's AWOL status with the service team and decide whether a recommendation of termination of custody is appropriate. If service team deems termination to be appropriate, submit the "Request to Terminate AWOL Child from Custody" form to the Deputy Director, within the chain of command, for approval, before holding the termination staffing. When considering termination of an AWOL youth, the following items must be discussed:
1. Age (child must be 12 or older);
 2. duration of AWOL status (child must be AWOL at least 4 months);
 3. child's cognitive/developmental capacity;
 4. child's mental health status;
 5. whether the child is pregnant, or currently parenting a child;
 6. other serious risk factors (i.e. vulnerability to human trafficking, gang involvement, lack of support system, etc...)
 7. independent living preparation the child received prior to going AWOL;
 8. whether the child and/or family members are aware of how to contact agency for services in the future, and;
 9. specific efforts to locate the child and whether those efforts have been exhausted.
- D. A staffing must be held when a child returns from AWOL status and has been gone for more than 3 days; the child must be present during the staffing. If an AWOL child returns after hours for emergency placement, a staffing must be held the next business day and the child must be present during the staffing.

SEE ALSO:

Ohio Administrative Code:

Section: 5101:2-42-88

Requirements when a Child in Substitute Care Disrupts from Placement or is Absent without Leave (AWOL)

Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services Policies and Procedures Manual

Policy 5.01.02 – Case Plan/Family Service Plan

Policy 5.02.01 – TDM/Staffings Policy

FORMS:

Cuyahoga County Prosecutor for Filing Unruly for AWOL Cases

AWOL Checklist

Request to Terminate AWOL Children from Custody