7.12 When Children Abscond or are Missing

Last Amended: 4/16/2013 11:00

Policy

Purpose
To guide child protection workers when responding to situations where a child goes missing or absconds from care.

Legislative Authority
Children and Community Services Act 2004 - Section 65 (parent or guardian being child's parent or other person with parental responsibility.

Standards
Better Care, Better Services - Standards for Children and Young People in Protection and Care.

Practice Requirements
- Where a child in the CEJ's care has absconded or is missing, every effort must be made by departmental officers to locate the child.
- The child protection worker should make an assessment of the circumstances surrounding the child's disappearance or absconding and inform judgments about the level of risk to the child.
- The child's parent(s) should be informed that the child is missing or has absconded and an alert should be placed in the database.
- An Amber Alert Report is made to the WA Police Missing Persons Bureau within 24 hours if the child cannot be located. If there are circumstances of high risk, a report should be made immediately. In all circumstances, it is the child protection worker's responsibility to ensure that the report is made.

Process Map
Not applicable.

Procedures
1. A child absconds or goes missing
2. High risk cases
3. Where a child absconds from a Residential Care Unit

Procedures - 7.12 When Children Abscond or are Missing

1. A child absconds or goes missing

When a child absconds or goes missing, the child protection worker needs to ensure the following occurs:
- Advise and consult with the team leader/social worker
- Make attempts to locate the child
- Allow the child's parent(s)
- Notify the child's parent(s)
- Enter an alert in the system and record the movement to a placement type 'unknown'
- Notify a report to the WA Police Missing Persons Bureau

2. High risk cases

In circumstances of high risk, the child protection worker needs to ensure a report with the WA Police Missing Persons Bureau immediately. High risk factors include:
- the child may be on or suicidal or has a history of self-harming behavior
- the child is highly distressed
- the child is sick, injured or on medication
- the child has stated intent to harm others
- the child has stated intent to commit a crime, cause damage or harm
- the child is young or otherwise particularly vulnerable.

3. Where a child absconds from a Residential Care Unit

Residential care staff must:
- conduct an initial search
- notify the unit manager
- complete a notification on the WA Police (refer to related resource Material - note: in high risk cases notification must occur within 20 minutes of the child's departure)
- notify the Police District Incident Management Unit (DIM) by email and telephone in high risk cases
- record the child's absence in the log book, including the time the absence was noted, circumstances surrounding the absence, all attempts, people notified, any follow-up required, and the priority given to the notification by Police
- inform the child's child protection worker of the child's absence and, if after hours, the Crisis Care Unit
- after 12 hours, where the child has been classified as high risk, telephone the WA Police to inform them of the child's continued absence
- issue a police complaint, and particularly if the child's whereabouts are unknown, attempt to locate the child
- upon the child's return, record in the log book the time of their return and any other information on their condition and absence
- notify WA and Crisis Care Unit via telephone and email, the child protection worker immediately of the child's return
- ensure all information is recorded.

For further information please refer to the Residential Care Practice Manual Chapter 5 Absent Without Permission.


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