

7.12 When Children Abscond or are Missing

Last Amended: 4/10/2013 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 66 Warrant \(apprehension\) where child absent or taken without authority](#)

Standards

[Better Care, Better Services - Standards for Children and Young People in Protection and Care](#)

Practice Requirements

- Where a child in the CEO'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 to inform judgements 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 *assist*.
- An *'Absconder Report'* is made to the WA Police Missing Person's Bureau within 24 hours if the child cannot be located. If there are circumstances of high risks, 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](#)

Procedure - 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/district director
- Make attempts to locate the child
- Advise the child's parent(s)
- Enter an alert in *assist* and record the movement to a placement type 'Unknown'
- Make a report to the WA Police Missing Persons Bureau

2. High risk cases

In circumstances of high risks, the child protection worker lodges a report with the WA Police Missing Person's Bureau immediately. High risk factors include:

- the child may be or is suicidal or has a history of recent self-harming behaviour
- 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 the intent to commit a crime, cause damage or arson
- the child is young or otherwise particularly vulnerable.

3. Where a child absconds from a Residential Care Unit

Residential care officer must:

- conduct an initial search
- notify their unit manager
- complete a *'Notification to WA Police'* (refer to related resource Material - note - in high risk cases notification must occur within 30 minutes of the child absconding)
- notify the Police District Incident Management Unit (IMU) by email (and by 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, action taken, 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 low risk, telephone the IMU to inform them of the child's continuing absence
- where practical, and particularly if the child's whereabouts may be known, 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 IMU 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 [section 27 Absent Without Permission](#).