



## Tennessee Department of Children's Services Protocol for Social Services Runaway Children/Youth

### Supplemental to: DCS Policy 31.2 Responsibilities Regarding Runaways and Escapees

#### **Assessment**

Family Service Workers (FSWs) are responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of children and youth in custody. Preventing runaway behavior is critical to ensuring the safety of children and youth. Some children or youth may come into custody with a history of runaway behavior; others may begin to run away while in placement. FSWs, resource parents and residential caregivers must share observations of how children or youth are adjusting to their settings. In regular contacts with the child/youth and caregiver(s), the FSW should assess the youth's adjustment and note any signals that the youth may be at risk of running away. Part of this assessment should take place privately with the youth so he or she can speak freely. The FSW should routinely inquire about:

1. How the adjustment to placement is going, both from the caregivers' and child's or youth's perspective
2. Whether the child/youth expresses any dissatisfaction or discomfort in the home/setting
3. How the caregiver(s) and child/youth work out differences when they arise
4. Whether family contacts and visits are taking place and how those are affecting the child or youth
5. Any significant changes in the child/youth's behavior
6. How the child/youth is getting along in school, whether any problems have been reported by the school or indicated by the child/youth
7. Any verbal comments suggesting a desire to leave the placement
8. How the child/youth is feeling in the placement, away from familiar friends and settings
9. Any recent news or information the child/youth received that may be upsetting
10. Any indication that the youth is feeling threatened, intimidated or unwelcome in the placement
11. Any suspicion of abuse or neglect occurring in the placement
12. How engaged the youth is in the home, setting and the community; whether he or she is involved in activities that he/she enjoys
13. Whether the child/youth has routines, is included in family/group activities, has assigned chores, or he or she isolated in the environment

Any concern that a runaway episode may occur requires the FSW to intervene, assess the appropriateness of the placement and ensure the safety and well-being of the child/youth. FSWs should be sure the youth and the caregiver(s) are aware that they can request a Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) any time there are issues that could jeopardize the placement or lead to a runaway episode.

Revised: 10/13

Supplemental to: DCS Policy: 31.2 Responsibilities Regarding Runaways and Escapees  
RDA SW05

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In the event a child or youth does run away from the resource home or placement, the following steps must be completed:

### **Notifications and Documentation**

1. Upon determining that a youth in custody has run away from a placement (including running away while on a Trial Home Visit), the FSW, resource parent, or provider/contract agency staff must ***immediately*** contact the local Law Enforcement Agency and report the child as a "Missing Person". Law Enforcement is responsible for entering the child into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and the Missing Children of Tennessee (MCOT) databases. The reporter must obtain the NCIC number for the FSW and provide it to the FSW within one business day. If Law Enforcement (LE) cannot immediately provide the number, the FSW must be diligent to obtain it as soon as possible.
2. Complete Part A of form [\*\*CS-0705, Absconder-Runaway-Escapee-Recovery Checklist\*\*](#) and email it to designated recipients on the Instruction page of the form.

Note: The NCIC number must be included on the form prior to faxing it to the FSW.

- 3.. Once the FSW is notified of the runaway, within one business day the FSW must:
  - a) Call the Regional Absconder Recovery Program Representative (RARPR), Team Leader (TL) or Team Coordinator (TC) and provide a preliminary report regarding the child/youth. If unable to contact any of these persons, contact the Program Coordinator or the Deputy Regional Administrator.
  - b) Notify the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) by telephone.
  - c) Complete a Serious Incident Report in the Incident Reporting Module of TFACTS. If the internet is not accessible, complete form [\*\*CS-0496, Serious Incident Report\*\*](#) and send to all appropriate staff to be notified (see [\*\*DCS Policy, 1.4, Incident Reporting\*\*](#) for additional information).
  - d) Ensure a runaway petition on the child/youth is filed in the court of the county where the child was committed and with the court in the county where the child was placed, if different from the county of commitment. If the resource home is located outside of the child's home county, contact regional staff in that county to assist resource parents with filing petitions with the court. If barriers arise when filing these petitions, please contact local DCS counsel as needed.
  - e) Request a copy of the petition to be faxed to the FSW within one business day of availability from the court. If this court refuses filing of the petition, contact the Regional General Counsel for assistance.
4. Within 3 business days of the runaway, the FSW (TL or TC if FSW is absent) will ensure that all supporting documentation for the Absconder, Runaway, Escapee Recovery Checklist (CS-0705) is obtained/completed:
  - Penalty letter for Harboring
  - Juvenile Court commitment/ adjudicatory order
  - Current Juvenile Court notification to include either runaway petition, attachment, or arrest order, etc.
  - TBI Missing/Wanted Person Report with NCIC number

**Procedures for Return of Runaways, Absconders, and Escapees from Another State**

When a FSW is notified that a runaway child/youth has been located in another state, s/he will notify the applicable Deputy Compact Administrator (DCA) for Interstate Compact - Juveniles (ICJ) in Central Office immediately, but no later than the next business day, via telephone. The DCA will coordinate the return of the custodial child/youth.

Please refer to the [ICJ Practices and Procedures Manual](#), **Section: Procedures for Return of Runaways, Absconders and Escapees** for more information regarding procedures for the return of Runaways, Absconders, and Escapees.

**Investigation and Case Management:**

1. Upon notification that a child or youth has run away, the FSW must conduct a thorough investigation of the child's/youth's last known whereabouts. This investigation must include, but is not limited to, contacting:
  - a) Contract agency staffs, parents, resource parents, or other caregivers;
  - b) Child's friends, school personnel, police, hospitals, clinics, post offices, Utilities Companies, Telephone Companies, Department of Human Services Child Support Offices; and,
  - c) Other individuals/agencies with which the child/caregiver/family may have had contact.
2. The FSW must follow-up with staff/resource parents where the child was placed to ensure the youth has been reported to Law Enforcement. The FSW has the ultimate responsibility for ensuring all notification and documentation is completed as described above.
3. Resource Parent Support staff should work closely with resource parents who have had a history of repeat runaways from their homes to understand precipitating factors and develop preventive plans to discourage children or youth from running away.
4. Whenever the FSW, TL, or TC receives a tip on the whereabouts of a child/youth that has run away, she or he will coordinate with Law Enforcement for assistance in locating and returning the child to custody. DCS staff who attempt to locate and return runaway youth should never place themselves at risk of harm and take safety precautions at all times.
5. Efforts to locate runaway youth must be ongoing. The FSW (TL or TC when the FSW is not available) will document those efforts within five (5) business days in TFACTS case recordings.

**Case Work Requirements** include:

- a) Make one (1) unannounced home visit weekly for the first thirty (30) days and monthly thereafter. At the first contact with the parent(s)/legal guardian(s), inform them of the laws and consequences for harboring a child on runaway and obtain their signatures on the [Penalty Letter for Harboring, \(CS-0749\)](#). File a copy in the youth's case file within three (3) business days. If the youth is located at the parents' or guardians' home and does not willingly return to custody, notify Law Enforcement immediately.
- b) Place at least two (2) phone calls to the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) each month. If they do not live in the same residence, contact each one separately.

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- c) If the family has moved, conduct a diligent search according to DCS Policy [16.48, Conducting a Diligent Search](#). All diligent search activities should be documented in the Diligent Search Module of TFACTS.
  - d) Every two weeks, the TL or TC will conduct conferences with the FSW and discuss strategies to locate and regain custody of any outstanding runaways. The FSW (TL or TC if the FSW is absent) will enter those strategies into TFACTS case recordings within five (5) business days.
  - e) Be sure to document all efforts to search for and locate the child/youth in TFACTS case recordings.
6. **Once a child or youth has been located and returned to custody**, the FSW will:
- a) Complete Part B of form [CS-0705, Absconder/Runaway/Escapee Recovery Checklist](#) within one (1) business day of the child/youth's return and e-mail/fax form to:
    - The Law Enforcement Agency that entered the child into the NCIC and MCOT.
  - b) Notify the parents/legal guardians that the youth has been located.
  - c) Convene a CFTM prior to placement, whenever possible, to determine how to best meet the child's/youth's needs and to discourage future runaway episodes. If it is not possible prior to placement, a CFTM must take place as soon as possible after the child is returned to placement.
  - d) A Transition Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment (CANS) should be completed to identify the youth's current needs and support an appropriate placement (see [CANS Protocol](#)).
  - e) If a CFTM is not conducted prior to placement, within five (5) business days of the placement the FSW (TL or TC if the FSW is absent) must enter the reason(s) why it could not occur prior to placement in TFACTS case recordings.
  - f) Notify DCS staff responsible for updating the Placement Module in TFACTS no later than the next business day. It must be updated within three (3) business days of notification.
  - g) Notify all courts where a runaway petition/attachment was filed the next business day.
7. A Social Services youth transitions to adulthood at age 18; a Juvenile Justice youth can transition at the age of 18 or 19, depending upon their legal status. A youth supervised in Tennessee from another state will transition to adulthood per the sending state's age of majority. When a child transitions to adulthood or the court discharges a youth during a runaway episode, the FSW will:
- a) Notify all courts where a petition/attachment was filed the next business day.
  - b) Complete Part B of form [CS-0705, Absconder/Runaway/Escapee Recovery Checklist](#) no later than the next business day of the child/youth's transition to adulthood and e-mail or fax the form to:
    - The Law Enforcement Agency that entered the child/youth into the NCIC and MCOT.
  - c) Within three (3) business days, the FSW (TL or TC if the FSW is absent) will take the necessary actions to end the placement in TFACTS and reflect the child/youth's exit from custody.