

Absent and Missing Children

This manual section applies to children in care of a child and family services agency who are absent from a placement resource. It covers planned and unplanned absences. Unplanned absences include children who are missing (whereabouts unknown) and children who run (abscond) from placement.

Other manual sections directly relevant to this section are Section 1.3.5, [Child Sexual Exploitation](#); Section 1.3.7, [Working with Law Enforcement](#); Section 1.4.8, [Interference with Child in Care](#); and Section 1.5.3, [Foster Home Placements](#).

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Children in Need of Protection

[Section 17](#) of *The Child and Family Services Act* defines a child in need of protection. The list of illustrations or examples in subsection (2) includes a child who is beyond the control of a person who has the care, custody, control or charge of the child or is likely to suffer harm or injury due to the behaviour, condition, domestic environment or associations of the child or of a person having care, custody, control or charge of the child.

[Section 21](#) gives agencies and the police the power to apprehend a child in need of protection. Subsection (2) provides for apprehending without a warrant and subsection (3) for obtaining a warrant to enter, by force if necessary, a building or other place specified in the warrant and search for the child. Subsection (5) requires the police to assist in apprehending a child when requested to do so by an agency.

[Section 22](#) provides for agencies and the police to apprehend a child in care and a court to find that child in need of protection.

[Section 53](#) provides for apprehending a child who absconds from a child placement resource or leaves a place without permission.

Information Sharing

[Subsection 76\(3\)](#) of *The Child and Family Services Act* prohibits disclosing or communicating a record made under the Act with certain exceptions. Clause (g) allows for disclosure for purposes of the Act.

Section 19 of the [Foster Homes Licensing Regulation](#) and section 26 of the [Child Care Facilities \(Other than Foster Homes\) Licensing Regulation](#) prescribes what information licensees must keep regarding a child placed in the resource.

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Absences

Absences may be planned or unplanned. Routine absences as part of daily activity, home visits, special events and summer camp are examples of planned absences.

Unplanned absences include children and youth who are running (absconding) from placement and/or who are missing (whereabouts unknown).

Planning for Absences

Planning for absences must occur prior to or at the time of admission to a placement resource or, for emergency placements, as part of the subsequent planning process. Absence planning is discussed and agreed to by the child's worker and care provider and is included in the documented care plan for the child (see [Standard 7](#) in Section 1.1.3, Planning). Absence planning is also reviewed regularly as part of the ongoing planning process to ensure the plan is appropriate to the child's needs.

Absence planning must include when the worker is to be notified, when police are to be called, and who should advise parents if appropriate. When indicated, placing workers are

also encouraged to explain the requirements of this manual section to the care provider and provide them with a copy of the section or excerpts from it.

Identifying High Risk Indicators

Placing workers have the initial and primary responsibility for sharing information about the child with the care provider at the time of placement and on an ongoing basis. This includes information on high risk indicators. The following table lists examples of high risk indicators to be explained to and discussed with a child's care provider:

High Risk Indicators Examples

Category	Indicator
Physical and Mental Health	Life threatening medical condition
	Developmental issues requiring a high level of care and supervision
	Suicidal ideation or pattern
	Drug or alcohol use consistent with harmful or dependent substance abuse pattern
Behavioural Patterns	Evidence of chronic missing person reports and/or absconding from home or placement within last six months
	Pattern or history of assaultive or violent behaviour
	Gang involvement or association
	Involvement in criminal activity
Victimization	Suffered severe and/or chronic abuse (physical, sexual, emotional)
	Sexually exploited including pornography
	Exposure to domestic violence
	Exposure to physical or sexual assault in the community

Missing Children

This part applies to children in care who are absent from placement and their whereabouts are unknown.

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Care Provider and Agency Worker Responses

Losing Contact with a Child – The primary and immediate care provider initiates an immediate, brief search upon losing contact with a child while on an outing. This may include a local search by car or on foot, and should include enlisting the assistance of the police if there is any question of danger to the child.

Child Not Returning from School or Day Program – Depending on the child and the circumstances, an immediate search may be required when a child does not return from school or arrive at a planned destination. The assistance of the police should be sought if the situation is perceived as dangerous.

Adhering to the Care Plan – Care providers and agency workers should adhere to the care plan for unplanned absences unless special circumstances dictate more immediate action.

Concern About a Child's Whereabouts – A care provider should report a missing child to the police and the supervising agency as soon as there is concern for the child's whereabouts regardless of the time of day or night. This applies when there is no plan in place for whatever reason, the care provider has reason to believe a plan is out-of-date, or specific circumstances suggest a need to depart from the plan.

Required Information – On advising the police and the supervising agency of the child's absence, care providers or agency workers, as the case may be, should be prepared to provide information required by the police (see [Reporting to Law Enforcement](#) in this manual section).

Child Discharged While Missing – If a child is discharged from a placement while still missing, the agency worker should advise the police of the changes in circumstances and request that on being found returned to the agency and worker (see [Reporting Located Children](#) in this manual section).

Continuing Agency Involvement – Care providers and agency workers have ongoing responsibilities after reporting a missing child to police including continuing to search for the child and updating the police with new information on a child's possible whereabouts.

Determining Immediate Risk

Should an unplanned absence pose an immediate risk to the safety and health of the child, the care provider or agency worker must call local law enforcement immediately and provide relevant information to assist in establishing the case as a priority for police action. Factors to be considered by the care provider or agency worker in deciding immediate risk include dangerous environment such as open water, severe weather, nightfall, appropriateness of dress for prevailing weather conditions, and any high risk indicators (see [Identifying High Risk Indicators](#) in this manual section).

Note: It is not necessary to wait 24 hours before reporting a missing child to law enforcement.

Reporting to Law Enforcement

In Winnipeg, missing children are reported to the [Missing Persons Unit](#), Winnipeg Police Service and in other areas to the local police force. Information on the Missing Persons Unit is available online at www.winnipeg.ca/police/div_41/missing_persons.stm.

The following information is required by the police to assist in establishing the case as a priority for police action:

- name, date of birth, age and gender of the child,
- personal identity and contact information of the person reporting including who to call in the event the reporting person is not available,
- a digital photo of the child or youth taken within the past year for identification purposes (see [Standard 6](#) in Section 1.7.1, Service Records),
- the time and place where the missing child was last seen and by whom,
- if applicable, information regarding the possibility that the child may have left Manitoba and, if so, possible destinations,
- if applicable, the names, addresses and phone numbers of friends and whether they have been contacted,
- if applicable, the name of the child's school and teacher and whether the school has been contacted or checked, and

- factors posing an immediate risk to the child's safety (see [Determining Immediate Risk](#) in this manual section).

Note: Reporting a missing child to the police does not relieve care providers and agency workers of their responsibilities to continue searching for the child and updating the police with new information on a child's possible whereabouts.

Issuing Child Protection Alerts

Agencies may issue alerts for missing children through the Child Protection Branch. Alerts are issued to designated intake agencies. They may also be issued to hospitals in Manitoba when the missing child is also an expectant mother. Canada-wide alerts may be issued when it is believed the missing child has left the province. Alerts must be issued for missing children who are at [high risk](#) and considered for children who are at medium risk.

To issue a child protection alert an agency completes and faxes either an alert or birth alert form to the Interprovincial Desk (see [Provincial/Territorial Protocol](#) in Section 1.3.1, Child Protection Services).

Publicizing Information on Missing Children

Publicizing information and pictures of children through posters, the Internet and the media is often indicated for children who are missing and whose health, safety and well-being are seriously endangered. Recently taken quality portrait shots of the missing child are essential for this purpose.

Potential Impact on Child and Siblings – Consideration should be given to the potential negative impact on the child and/or the child's siblings when making a decision to publicize. If publicizing is clearly indicated due to concern about serious harm to the child, consideration should be given to helping the child's family understand the reasons for doing so.

Confidentiality – [Clause 3 76\(3\)\(g\)](#) of *The Child and Family Services Act* allows information in a record under the Act to be disclosed where required for purposes of the Act. This provision permits an agency to share identifying information and photographs with law enforcement, [Child Find Canada](#) and collateral organizations.

Signed Written Consents – Signed written consents must be signed before identifying information and photographs of a child can be released to the public. The department is in

the process of revising the consent form currently available on CFSIS for children in care through a voluntary placement agreement.

Posting on the Internet – As a general rule, law enforcement agencies make the decision to post identifying information and photographs on a police website or through [Child Find Canada](#). Child and family services agencies may contact Child Find for children not considered in the high-risk category at the Manitoba office toll free at 1-800-532-9135 or the national office at 1-800-387-7962.

Involving Other Service Organizations

In addition to reporting to law enforcement, issuing alerts, and publicizing identifying information and photographs when indicated, agencies are required to actively search for a missing child in care. In many instances this expectation is most effectively done through collaboration with other service organizations such as participation in the StreetReach initiative requesting the assistance of community groups and agencies dedicated to searching for missing persons.

Reporting Located Children

It is of utmost importance agencies report to the police and others involved when a missing child is found or returns on his or her own. This process begins with the care provider or agency worker immediately notifying the other of the situation. It is the responsibility of the agency worker to ensure that the police and others involved are notified when a child is located or returns. When applicable, the worker is also responsible for notifying the child's family.

Absconding Children

This part deals with children who are absent from their placements without permission. If the child's whereabouts are unknown, all the actions required for [missing children](#) in this manual section apply until the child is found. If a child is coerced or lured into leaving, Section 1.4.8, [Interfering with a Child in Care](#) may also apply.

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Stabilizing Placements

An agency must make every reasonable effort to ensure the safety and well-being of children who are repeatedly running from their placements. This responsibility can often be very challenging. It requires:

- ongoing assessment of a child's needs (see [Assessment Process](#) in Section 1.1.2, Assessment),
- revising a child's care plan when necessary with the goal of preventing or reducing unplanned absences (see [Planning Process](#) in Section 1.1.3, Planning), and
- mobilizing required services and resources to carry out the plan.

Accessing Other Services and Resources

Services and resources particularly relevant to children and youth who are repeatedly absconding from placement include:

Youth Drug Stabilization Services – *The Youth Drug Stabilization (Support for Parents) Act* provides a way to access involuntary detention and short-term stabilization for children and youth. It provides for [apprehension](#) and [stabilization](#) orders with respect to youth who are abusing one or more drugs severely and persistently and, as a result, are likely to deteriorate substantially, either physically or psychologically.

The four child and family services authorities and the Child Protection Branch jointly approved guidelines for child and family services agencies when providing services to children and youth with severe and persistent substance abuse problems. The guidelines are explained under [Youth Drug Stabilization Services](#) in Section 1.3.7, Working with Law Enforcement.

Mental Health Services – Agencies are expected to access appropriate mental health services and resources for children who require them. Information on the range of mental health services is available on the [Manitoba Healthy Living](#) website.

Referral to the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre (MATC) should be explored for children and youth with severe and persistent mental health issues unless, for children living outside of the Winnipeg area, there is an appropriate service available. An agency may find it necessary to seek an involuntary assessment and admission to a mental health

facility under [Part 3](#) of *The Mental Health Act*, as a last resort. [Sections 12](#) gives peace officers the power to take a person believed to be suffering a mental disorder into custody for purposes of examination.

Public Safety Investigations – *The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act* provides for investigations of [complaints](#) and [orders](#) with respect to a community or neighbourhood being adversely affected by activities on or near a property. This resource is explained in detail under [Other Services and Resources](#) in Section 1.3.5, Child Sexual Exploitation.

Repatriation Services – Schedule A of the [Provincial/Territorial Protocol on Children and Families Moving between Provinces and Territories](#) pertains to child protection alerts, child protection requests and referrals, and repatriation services. The Interprovincial Desk at the Child Protection Branch is responsible for assisting agencies in arranging for repatriation of children to Manitoba from other Canadian jurisdictions (see [Provincial/Territorial Protocol](#) in Section 1.3.1, Child Protection Services). The Desk will also assist agencies in identifying child welfare authorities in other countries.

Repatriation of Trafficked Children – Repatriation of children who are trafficked outside of Canada (see [Sex Trafficking](#) in Section 1.3.5, Child Sexual Exploitation), requires the involvement of law enforcement. An agency contacts the local police department to initiate this process. Ultimately, the RCMP Trafficking Response Team (Prairie Region) based in Calgary is engaged. For children from Winnipeg, an agency contacts:

Human Trafficking Response Team
Winnipeg Police Service
Tel: (204) 986-7003

Standards

- 1. Planning for Absences from Placement** – Planning for absences occurs prior to or at the time of admission to a placement resource in accordance with the policy requirements in this manual section (see [Absences](#) in this manual section). Plans are developed and revised in consultation with the child’s care provider and recorded on the child in care (CIC) file (see [Case Categories](#) in Section 1.7.1, Service Records) within one month from the date the child is placed or a plan is updated.

2. **Reporting Missing Children** – A missing child is immediately reported to the police when the child is deemed to be at immediate risk (see [Determining Immediate Risk](#) in this manual section). The care provider and placing or supervising agency also comply with other actions noted under [Missing Children](#) in this manual section.
3. **Sending Photograph to Police** – The supervising agency ensures a current photograph (preferably digital) is sent to the police at the time a child is reported missing in a manner that ensures the confidentiality of the record (also see [Standard 6](#) in Section 1.7.1, Service Records). The photograph is a portrait (direct view of the child's face) that is sufficient quality to be useful.
4. **Reporting Located Children to Police** – In all instances when a missing child has been reported to the police, an agency worker or care provider, as the case may be, immediately advises the police when the child has been located (see [Reporting Located Children](#) in this manual section).
5. **Documenting Actions regarding Missing and Absconding Children** – All actions taken by agency workers and care providers regarding missing and absconding children are documented on the child in care file. This includes applications for protection orders and prosecuting persons who interfere with the child (see Section 1.4.8, [Interference with Child in Care](#)). This information is recorded within one month from the date the child first absconds and is updated at regular monthly intervals.