

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) Referral Protocol

1-800-843-5678

As the national clearinghouse for missing and exploited children issues, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) is uniquely positioned to provide significant and continuous support to state agencies that are searching for children missing from their care. NCMEC provides an array of resources, including case management, poster distribution, law enforcement technical assistance, and analytical support. Every report of a missing child receives a prompt response from NCMEC's case management staff who coordinate directly with all case workers, social workers and/or law enforcement agencies involved to provide resources to help safely locate the missing child.

In order to make a referral to NCMEC youth must meet the federal definition of a missing child.

Missing Child: A person younger than age 18 whose whereabouts are unknown to their legal guardian.

Missing Young Adult (MYA): A person between the ages of 18-20 years old* who remains under ongoing guardianship of a state or county welfare agency.

*Although no longer considered a child under U.S. federal law, NCMEC can assist with cases of missing young adults and accept a report from the legal guardian if the young adult remains under ongoing guardianship of a state or county welfare agency.

When a youth has been reported missing

- 1 Make an immediate and reasonable initial effort to locate the child. At a minimum, contact the school, parents, relatives, friends, and other contacts or locations identified as likely places the child may be.
- 2 Identify and contact any other individuals who the child may have contacted for assistance while on the run. Encourage them to help locate the child or return the child to foster care.
- 3 Report immediately, and in no case later than 24 hours, after receiving information regarding missing or abducted youth to local law enforcement agency.
- 4 Make a report to NCMEC and be prepared to provide:
 - The child's first and last name
 - The child's date of birth, height, weight, sex, ethnicity, race, hair color, and eye color
 - A high quality photo of the child (if available)
 - Date, city and state where child went missing
 - The circumstances surrounding the child's disappearance
 - Any endangerments pertaining to the child (youth's pregnancy status, prescription medications, suicidal tendencies, vulnerability to being sex trafficked, and other health or risk factors)
 - Name and contact information for child's guardian
 - Law enforcement agency name, contact number, and report number in the location where the child went missing





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- 5 Contact the child's parents and inform them the child is missing or abducted. Gather any information from the parents that may be helpful in the search for the child.
- 6 Notify the juvenile court.
- 7 Search diligently and regularly for the child at places the child has frequently known to go.

After a case is reported

 After a case is reported to NCMEC, a Case Manager is assigned. As the primary point of contact, the Case Manager helps manage communication between all parties involved and works across multiple NCMEC divisions to coordinate the application of specialized resources to help locate the child.

 As an agency we are responsible for maintaining regular communication with law enforcement agencies and NCMEC in efforts to provide a safe recovery of a missing child or abducted youth.

 At a minimum, maintain weekly contact with law enforcement agencies and NCMEC until the child or youth is located.

When the child is located

- Make arrangements for the child's return to placement.
- You may negotiate with a runaway child as to when the child is willing to return. The safety and well-being of the child should be the first consideration in negotiation. The agreed-upon return time should be always be within 48 hours of the contact.
- Identify the factors that contributed to the child or youth's absence from their placement and determine what their experiences were while absent, including screening the child to determine if the child is a possible victim of sex trafficking.



For a complete overview of requirements for HHS staff to take in the event a youth is missing, refer to Case Management Manual 18-C(2).

RESOURCES:

[Children Missing from Care](#)

[Case Worker Quick Reference Guide: Missing Child Reports to NCMEC](#)

[Case Resources](#)

[Case Resource Flyer](#)

[When Your Child Is Missing: A Family Survival Guide](#)

[NCMEC Connect](#)

[Micro modules for child welfare professionals](#)