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Service Stream	Families and Young People	Category	Foster and Kinship Care
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Sometimes children and young people do not arrive back home when expected or choose to leave their placement for a variety of reasons – such as making last minute plans with peers or running away when they feel overwhelmed. The Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (the Department), foster and kinship care agencies and carers (and sometimes the Queensland Police Service) need to work together to locate children and young people and make sure they are safe. In these instances, children and young people are considered as either “absent from placement” or “missing from placement”. This document explains the difference between each of these circumstances and who is responsible for doing what.

As a carer, you are required to respond as a reasonable parent would to quickly establish the child's location and their safe return.

As a carer you must report any worries you have to MC immediately. A Foster and Kinship Care Practitioner can provide support to you, liaise with the department and all work together to locate the child or young person as quickly as possible.

What if I think a Child or Young Person has been Abducted?

If you know or believe a child or young person has been abducted call 000 immediately and then inform Mercy Community or the Department.

When is a Child or Young Person Considered to Be Absent from Placement?

A child or young person is considered to be absent when they have been away their placement for a short amount of time without permission and their whereabouts are known or can be quickly established.

Example: Following multiple attempts at some homework 10-year-old Joanna runs out the front door, down the street and out of sight. Joanna's best friend Sarah lives three streets away so Joanna's carer calls Sarah's family to inform them Joanna may be on her way to their home. Sarah's father calls back to confirm Joanna has arrived and arrangements are made to for Joanna's carer to collect her in an hour.

If you don't know where a child or young person in your care is, you need to immediately try to locate them. This could include:

- Searching the house and outdoor areas
- Alerting the child's friends and networks that you are looking for the child and seeking their assistance to find the child, where this is appropriate to do so
- Contacting the child's school
- Checking places where the child likes to spend time, such as a shopping centre, food venues or other places special to the child
- Contacting other members of the child's care team, including children's relatives if appropriate.

When is a Child or Young Person Considered Missing?

A missing child or young person is any child whose location is unknown (after attempts to locate the child/young person) and there are fears for their safety or concern for their welfare.

Example: 14-year-old Simon catches the bus home from school and always arrives home at approximately 3:45pm each day. It is now 4:45pm and Simon has not arrived home. Simon

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cannot be reached on his mobile phone and none of his friends know where he is. Nobody is answering the phone at Simon's school and his carer has also driven to the places Simon likes to hang out and has not been able to locate him.

What to do if a Child or Young Person is Missing

If after following the steps above, you believe a child or young person is missing you are required to immediately make a missing person's report with the Queensland Police Service. You can do this by attending your local police station.

Police require some detailed information about the child/young person and may require a recent photo. It is helpful to complete the Department's Missing Child Checklist. Mercy Community or the Department can assist to complete this form. MC can provide you with a copy of this form.

When you make a missing person's report it is important to take note of the following information so you can provide it to the Department or Mercy Community:

- The date and time the missing person report was made;
- The name of the police officer who received the missing person report; and
- The QPRIME number, obtained from the police officer taking the information.

If a child or young person is considered missing, a carer is permitted to publish a photo to social media as long as the child or young person is not identified as being in care.

- It is **OK** for a carer to publish a photo on Facebook to say "Johnny Smith a member of my son's football team is missing. Here is a photo of him" – as this does not or is not likely to identify him as a child in care, nor does it identify another person.
- It is **not OK** for a carer to post the same photo on Facebook and add the commentary "Here is a photo of Johnny Smith, a foster child that I am caring for who is missing" – as this identifies him as a child in care.

In addition to supporting carers, Mercy Community has responsibility to inform the Department about missing children, to complete an Incident Report and can also undertake actions to help locate the young person.

The Department will liaise with the Queensland Police Service, can make further attempts to locate the child or young person and will communicate with the media if required. Only the Department can communication with the media.

What if a Child or Young person Frequently Goes Missing?

If a child or young person is frequently missing, the Child Safety Officer can partner with the child/young person and other members of the care team to reduce the likelihood of future recurrences and to minimise the risk of harm to the child/young person when they choose to stay away from your home for a period of time. Sometimes a Safety and Support Plan may be developed for the child or young person.

Remember, you are not alone. Mercy Community and the Department are part of the care team and available to provide guidance and support 24 hours per day. If you are unsure whether a child is absent or missing, or you need help to follow any of these steps please firstly contact your local MC office or MC afterhours on-call and then the child's CSSC during business hours or Child Safety After Hours Service Centre outside of business hours.

Further information is available at: <https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/resources/dcsyw/child-family/foster-kinship-care/reporting-missing-childrens-guidelines.pdf>.

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