

Reporting missing children: Guidelines for approved carers and care services

1. Purpose

To support approved foster and kinship carers and staff in care services when responding to situations where a child in out-of-home care is missing from where they live.

The guidelines are also relevant to carers who have been granted long term guardianship of the child under the *Child Protection Act 1999*.

2. Definitions

- A **child** is one who is placed in the custody or guardianship of the Chief Executive or with carers who have been granted long term guardianship of the child under the *Child Protection Act 1999*.
- A **direct carer** is an approved carer, long term guardian or staff member in a care service.
- A **missing child** is any child whose location is unknown **and** there are fears for the safety or concern for the welfare of that child.
- An **absent child** is a child who is absent for a short period without permission, and where the child's location is known or can be quickly established.
- The term **care team** is used to reflect those people engaged in the provision of care and support to the child. This may include direct carer, care services, child safety, police, education, the parents, friends and family of the child.

3. When a child is abducted

If you know or reasonably suspect a child has been abducted, contact police immediately by calling 000. Once police have been advised please contact your care service, the Child Safety Service Centre, or if after hours, the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre.

4. When a child is absent

In some circumstances, children absent themselves from where they should be for a short period and then return. They may be testing the boundaries, or have become side-tracked on their way home. The direct carer should make all reasonable attempts to locate the child and then will have to make a judgement about the seriousness of the situation and respond like any reasonable parent.

In most instances the child's whereabouts are known or can be readily confirmed. It is important the child's direct carer initiates action that a reasonable parent would take, to quickly establish the child's location and their safe return. This could include:

- searching the house and the premises including the garage, grounds and surrounding area
- asking friends or neighbours if they have seen the child
- contacting the child's school to determine if they have information about the child's whereabouts
- checking places where the child frequently attends, such as shops, park, friend's homes or other 'special places' they may go to
- 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
- engaging with other members of the child's care team.

It may also be appropriate to contact the child's parents or family members and enquire if the child is in contact with them. It may be preferable for this action to be undertaken by the child safety officer.

If there is doubt about how to respond, the direct carer should contact their agency or the Child Safety Service Centre for advice.

An absence may be an early indicator that a child is missing. Therefore the child's absence will need to be carefully monitored and escalated if the child becomes 'missing'.

5. When a child is missing

Regardless of the order or care agreement the child is subject to, if a child in out-of-home care is missing, immediate efforts are required to locate them.

As soon as possible after all reasonable attempts to find the child have failed, the child must be reported as missing to the police.

Responding quickly and appropriately when a child is missing is vital, even for short periods. It is important the child's direct carer initiates action that a reasonable parent would take, to secure the safe and timely return of the child.

6. Making a missing person report to police

The police require a 'missing person report' be completed. This is done by attending the local police station in person. Irrespective of how long you have been the child's direct carer, you are usually the best person to make the missing person report at the local police station.

If there are extenuating circumstances that prevent the direct carer from going to the police station, you must contact Queensland Police Service to discuss an alternative process to facilitate lodging the missing person report.

Police must be provided with as much relevant information as soon as possible to assist them in making a risk assessment and locating the missing child. The attached 'missing child checklist' is to be completed by members of the child's care team to assist police. It does not replace the need to make a missing person report. The checklist can be completed online or manually. Where information is not known, it can be added at a later time so there is no delay making the missing person report to police.

- It can be pre-populated and kept in a safe place, particularly where there have been previous incidents.

After making the missing person report to police, you are required to ask for and record the following details:

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

As soon as practical the direct carer must provide these details to the Child Safety Service Centre, if after-hours, to the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre and to their care service.

Child safety will liaise with the police and contribute any other relevant information about the child that the direct carer may not have been aware of at the time of making the missing person report.

7. Providing a photograph of the missing child

Police may request a recent photograph of the missing child to assist their efforts to locate the child. The direct carer should where possible, provide a clear recent photograph of the missing child to police.

In the event police need to release additional information with the photograph that **will identify** the missing child as being subject to any intervention under the *Child Protection Act 1999*, they (the police) **must** seek the written authorisation from the Chief Executive, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.

Regional Directors (Child Safety) and Regional Executive Directors have the statutory delegations to provide written permission in these circumstances.

8. Publishing a photo to social media

A photo of the missing child can be published on social media by any member of the care team and/or Queensland Police Service, where the child is **not identified** as being subject to intervention under the *Child Protection Act 1999*. For example:

- It is **OK** 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 and other person.
- It is **not OK** 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.

9. Involving mainstream media

Police make the decision to release information to mainstream media (including newspapers, television and radio) to help locate the child.

In these instances the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services will lead the development of a media strategy.

10. While the child continues to be missing

During the time a child is missing it will be important the child’s care team continue to work together to regularly exchange information regarding the actions being taken to locate the child.

Actions which Child Safety Services may be undertaking during this time include:

- Supporting the carer and police to identify places where the child frequently attends.
- Contacting the child’s family, friends and networks including previous carers to establish if the child has been located and/or identify other possible locations where the child may have gone.
- Taking other actions to locate the child, such as trying to make telephone contact, leaving messages on the child’s phone and through other social networking sites used by the child.
- Cooperating with police regarding media coverage, such as ‘amber alerts’.
- Developing, as appropriate, a media strategy in consultation with police, the direct carer and where appropriate, the child’s parents.

Actions which the Queensland Police Service may be undertaking during this time are contained in chapter 12 of the *Queensland Police Operational Procedures Manual*. A copy of this manual is publicly available at <https://www.police.qld.gov.au/corporatedocs/OperationalPolicies/opm.htm>

11. When the missing child is located

When a missing child is located or returns to where they live it is important the direct carer or child safety officer **immediately advise the police**. This can be done by contacting **Policelink on 131 444** and providing the Queensland Police reference number (QPRIME number) which was provided when the missing person report was initially made to police. All members of the care team previously aware the child was missing.

The child safety officer will also meet with the child following their return to discuss the reasons why they went missing, explore whether the child experienced harm while missing, and to jointly identify any actions to support the child's ongoing safety and wellbeing and reduce the likelihood of the child going missing in the future. This meeting may be undertaken jointly with police. This should occur within 48 hours of the child being located.

The child safety officer will also arrange a meeting with the child's care team to discuss the reasons why the child went missing, and consider any actions to support the child's ongoing safety and wellbeing and reduce the likelihood of the child going missing in the future.

This may include reviewing the placement agreement, safety and support plan and/or the child's case plan.

12. When a child is frequently missing

If a child is frequently missing, the child's care team will identify strategies to reduce the likelihood of recurrence and the actions required when the child is missing.

The child safety officer will partner with other members of the child's care team and the child to review the placement agreement, safety and support plan and/or child's case plan.

A missing child checklist can also be pre-populated with the required information and copies given to the child's care team.

13. Phone numbers

- The addresses of police stations are listed under 'Police Service' in the White Pages of the telephone book and on the Queensland Police Service web site, under 'station locator'.
- Foster and kinship care support line is available Monday to Friday 5pm to 11:30pm; Saturday and Sunday 7am to 11:30 pm. Phone: 1 300 729 309.
- Child Safety After Hours Service Centre is available for after-hours advice and support relating to the management of children subject to child protection orders or ongoing intervention by Child Safety Services, where an immediate response is required. They can be contacted on 1800 177 135 or 3235 9901.

MISSING CHILD CHECKLIST

This form authorises the Queensland Police Service to initiate appropriate actions.

- The checklist is NOT a substitute for making a missing person report to the police.
- It is designed to provide guidance about the kind of information required to locate the missing child.
- You don't need to be able to answer every field. Where information is not known it can be provided later and should not delay taking immediate action.
- The child's care team members may contribute relevant information where this is not known to you at the time.
- It can be completed online or completed manually.
- A copy is to be given to police.
- It can be pre-populated and kept in a safe place, particularly where there have been previous incidents.

1. Details of missing child		
First name: Including aliases:	Surname: Including aliases:	
DOB and age:	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	Mobile number:
2. Description of missing child (if possible, provide police with a current photo)		
Height:	Build:	
Colour of eyes:	Hair colour/length/style (please specify):	
Complexion: <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Light <input type="checkbox"/> Olive <input type="checkbox"/> Tanned <input type="checkbox"/> Dark <input type="checkbox"/> Very dark	Distinguishing features: <input type="checkbox"/> Tattoos <input type="checkbox"/> Birthmark <input type="checkbox"/> Piercings <input type="checkbox"/> Scars Other:	
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (please specify): <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal <input type="checkbox"/> Torres Strait Islander <input type="checkbox"/> Both <input type="checkbox"/> Neither	Cultural and linguistically diverse background (please specify):	
3. Circumstance of disappearance		
Where was the child last seen:	Date:	Time:
Clothing/personal items (worn/taken):		
Name of anyone with the child:		
Information about the last person to see the child		
Name:	Relationship to child:	
Address:	Phone numbers	
Reasons for disappearance (e.g. Notes/letters left by child, did the child leave willingly or were they taken? Any family or relationship issues or conflict, including domestic violence that may have influenced the disappearance?)		

Details of inquiries made/actions taken to locate the child prior to contacting Queensland Police Service	
<input type="checkbox"/> Search of house and premises <input type="checkbox"/> Enquiries with friends or neighbours <input type="checkbox"/> Checking child's likely places to visit	<input type="checkbox"/> Alerting child's friends and networks to be on lookout <input type="checkbox"/> Leaving messages on child's mobile, Facebook <input type="checkbox"/> Telling CSSC or Child Safety After Hours Care Service
4. Concerns/risks/vulnerability for the child	If 'yes', provide details
Age of the child (child is under 13 years old) Please check: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Medical condition (life threatening illness or requires significant medication which is not in the persons possession) Please check: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	
Intellectual impairment (functioning at an age level of 10 years old or less) Please check: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	
Mental health (diagnosed with a psychiatric or psychological disorder such as anxiety, depression) Please check: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	
Substance misuse (known or suspected to be misusing alcohol, drugs or other substances) Please check: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	
Criminal involvement (is known or suspected to commit offences) Please check: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	
Relationship issues (dealing with a current or recent relationship breakdown) Please check: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	
Significant life event (suicide attempt/ bullying) Please check: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	
Out of character (recent behaviour that is unusual for child) Please check: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	
Event (natural disaster/at sea/plane crash)	

Please check: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	
Environmental factors (significant weather conditions (hot, cold, wet, terrain)) Please check: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	
Previous incidents of child missing and location unknown Please check: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	
Any special/complex behavioural or emotional needs (e.g. violence, aggression, possession of weapons)	
5. Current child protection order (CPO) or authority relating to the child	
Type of authority (Please check) <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment order <input type="checkbox"/> Care agreement <input type="checkbox"/> Interim CPO custody to Chief Executive <input type="checkbox"/> CPO custody to Chief Executive <input type="checkbox"/> CPO guardianship to Chief Executive	Child's current placement (Please check) <input type="checkbox"/> Foster care <input type="checkbox"/> Kinship care <input type="checkbox"/> Residential <input type="checkbox"/> Semi-independent living <input type="checkbox"/> Safe house Other
Name of CSO:	Contact phone no:
Child safety service centre:	
6. Additional information which may assist in locating the child	
Places frequented:	
Parents or significant family members:	
Friends or associates:	
Facebook, email or other social media details:	
School or employment:	
Child's bank account details (for older children):	
Name and contact details of any person who may be likely to assist (relatives, friends etc):	

7. Actions after child is located — where child is to be returned to?	
Name:	
Address:	Phone number:
Additional information:	
8. Person who reported child missing to QPS	
Name of carer/worker/position:	
Child Safety or agency:	Phone number:
QPS station/unit:	Date and time:
QPRIME number:	