



**CHILD PROTECTION
OMBUDSMAN**
of COLORADO



KEYSTONE
POLICY CENTER

State Policy Snapshot:

Assessing Why Youth Run, and Creating Prevention Plans

The Timothy Montoya Task Force to Prevent Youth from Running from Out-of-Home Placement, and its Prevention Subcommittee, is considering policy options to enhance efforts to prevent youth from running away from care. To aid this, the Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman (CPO) has conducted research on approaches taken in other states' statutes and regulations and compiled them for consideration.

The following pages present regulations in three states – Georgia, Nevada and Wisconsin – requiring an assessment of why a youth ran away from care, after the youth returns. That information is then used to help develop a runaway prevention plan. This document also provides a summary and links to a residential runaway risk assessment user guide from Illinois.

Each section begins with a brief summary of the state's regulations, then provides text which has only been edited for formatting to bold key phrases or terms of interest. Please refer to the provided citations and links to see the full context and regulation details as desired.

Additionally, federal resources providing overviews of related state policies are [here](#) and [here](#).

It is important to note that the CPO is providing this document as an informational resource as task force members consider possible changes in Colorado. The curation of this information is not an endorsement of any particular policy, and the CPO neither endorses nor disapproves of the policies included below.

Georgia: If a youth runs away and returns, a written runaway prevention plan must be developed. Regulations detail methods to be used in these plans, including alteration of care experiences to create a more desirable environment for the youth.

Nevada: Regulations require the use of a Child De-Briefing Tool to interview a youth who has returned from running away, to determine why they ran and what could have prevented the run. The tool then informs determinations of whether additional supports are needed.

Wisconsin: A youth who has returned after running away from care must be interviewed to determine their reasons for running. This includes considerations of if the youth was running *to* something or running *from* something. These primary factors must be documented in the state's child welfare information system.

Illinois: This assessment user guide is designed for use at the time of the youth's admission, and includes consideration of whether additional individualized treatment planning or intensified/decreased interventions (like the use of restraint) are appropriate to prevent runs.

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Georgia

Regulations (DCFS Child Welfare Policy Manual, #19.22¹) require the Division of Family and Children Services to develop a written runaway prevention plan for youth when they return from a runaway episode. Guidance includes altering the youth's experience in out-of-home care in response to the reasons given for having run away, as well as utilizing other methods to address the factors that led to the runaway episode in an effort to prevent future occurrences.

DFCS shall **develop a written runaway prevention plan** for youth at risk of runaway behavior within 7 calendar days following a youth returning from a runaway episode.

A runaway prevention plan is a method of **addressing circumstances and situations that might lead to a runaway episode or a recurrence of runaway behavior**. The plan is a written document that helps to promote clarity and accountability. To be more effective, the runaway prevention plan should be **developed collaboratively with children, their caregivers, and others working with the children**. The plan needs to be **realistic, positive, and based on a child's strengths, which will increase the chances of success**. Since people and circumstances change, the plan should be **updated** to ensure it remains applicable to current circumstances.

When developing the plan, the SSCM [Social Services Case Manager] should do the following:

- Help children identify their **strengths** in language that is easy to understand (e.g., good at being on time, friendly, respectful, athletic)
- Ask children **what has prevented them from running away** in the past (e.g., talking to their case manager, listening to music, talking to a friend, taking a walk, sports)
- Try to help children identify **triggers**, feelings or behaviors that occur when they have thoughts of running away (e.g., feeling overwhelmed, trapped, not knowing what to do)
- Ask children how their case manager and caregivers can **best support them** in remaining in their placement
- List any other supports that may be needed (e.g., counseling, mentoring)
- Include **contact information** for DFCS and other significant persons in the youth's support network, such as individuals the youth may contact at any time they find themselves in an unsafe situation or simply wish to return from runaway status

The SSCM will ask children, their caregivers, and **all involved parties to sign the plan and give everyone a copy**. This makes the plan feel like a real **commitment between all the parties involved**.

Some tips for plan development include the following:

- If a child runs away **to see friends**, work with caregivers to increase activities the child has with friends.

¹ These regulations should be available [here](#), but as of time of writing that website has an error. Text on this page is taken from regulation compilations by the [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#), current through May 2020.

- If a child runs away **to see birth family**, increase family visits (if possible) and make efforts to secure placement with a relative with whom the child is willing to remain. If the agency can limit trauma to the child/young adult and increase connections with supportive people, the child/young adult will be more likely to make progress toward a stable adulthood.
- If a child runs away **to reunite with parents or caregivers** from whom he/she was removed, determine if the factors that prevented reunification in the past are still relevant. If not, follow the department requirements for pursuing the **possibility of reunification**.
- If a child runs away **to use drugs**, refer the child for a substance use assessment and any recommended treatment.
- If a child runs away because of **problems with school**, increase educational supports.
- If a child runs away because of **conflicts with the foster caregivers**, work with the child and the caregivers to resolve the conflicts. If it is not possible to resolve the conflicts between the child and caregivers, then **seek a more suitable placement** for the child.

DFCS shall have protocols for **determining the child's experiences while absent from care**, including screening the child to determine if the child is a possible sex trafficking victim.

When the child is located, the SSCM will do the following...:

- **Interview the child within 24 hours of the child's return** to determine factors that contributed to the child being missing, the child's experiences while absent from care, and to assess whether the child is at risk or is a victim of sex trafficking.
- Arrange for a medical examination within 48 hours of the child's return. In child protective services cases, the parent must obtain the medical examination.
- Refer the child and family for appropriate services to **address identified issues related to the runaway episode** or other identified at-risk behaviors.
- **Develop a written runaway prevention plan with the child, their caregivers, and others working with the child to address situations that might lead to a recurrence of the runaway behavior.**
- Visit the child more frequently (weekly or more often as needed) to work with the child and caregiver(s) to stabilize their relationship and to **address the factors that led to the runaway episode and prevent further disruption.**
- **Update the case plan** when there are newly identified or modified services, treatment, and/or needs **based on the runaway episode.**
- Document all case management activities.

Nevada

Regulations ([MTL #0210- Reporting, Locating and Responding to Missing Children](#)) specify requirements caseworkers must follow when a youth has been returned to care. The state also has adapted a [Returning Child De-Briefing Tool](#) and a [Runaway Prevention Interventions Guide](#) to aid the gathering of information from the youth, and inform plan alterations to prevent future runs.

Procedures After a Child Has Been Located, Returned and/or identified as a Victim of Exploitation

Upon a child's return to care, the child welfare caseworker must ensure that all of the following steps are completed..

1. Welcome the child back. Ensure the child knows and is aware of the concerns expressed regarding his/her safety and wellbeing by friends, family and others who have significant relations with the child.
2. **Assess and meet the child's immediate physical and health needs ...**
7. **Identify Services** the child may need.
8. Interview Child Utilizing Returning Child De-Briefing Tool ([Attachment B](#)). The Returning Child DeBriefing tool asks questions to help identify **why the youth ran away**, what they did while they were gone, **reasons** that contributed to their absence, if they have any immediate safety, medical, emotional **needs upon return** and if there **is anything that could have been done to prevent them from leaving**. Guidelines for completing the tool include:
 - a. Within twenty-four (24) hours of the child's return, a trusted adult must **complete an interview** with the child utilizing the tool to **initiate strategies to prevent the youth from leaving and make referrals for appropriate services**.
 - b. The tool is required to be completed for the first runaway episode if a child has been missing for twenty four (24) hours or longer.
 - c. After subsequent runaway episodes **review the tool to consider changes and possible referrals to support runaway prevention**.
 - d. At next supervision of the case, review the tool and **determine if additional supports are needed**.
3. Screening for commercial sexual exploitation/sex trafficking. If the child was missing, returns from runaway, from being absconded or is suspected of being a victim of exploitation, a screening for sexual exploitation must be completed within twenty-four (24) hours of the child's return...

Preventing Runaways

1. The following questions and the checklist entitled Runaway Prevention Interventions Guide (FPO 0210C – Runaway Prevention Intervention [Guide](#)), may be used to engage a child in **identifying triggers that might prompt a runaway episode**. They also help **identify coping strategies to prevent a runaway episode**.

- a. What are your **strengths**? What are you good at?
 - b. What are some **triggers** or behaviors that you have noticed occur when you start to feel like running?
 - c. What has helped **prevent** you from running in the past?
 - d. Who is a **good support** to you when you feel like running?
2. Applying Prudent Parenting Standard/Normalcy... **Caseworkers should encourage caregivers to promote normalcy for every foster child as another means of preventing runaway behavior**

Wisconsin

Wisconsin regulations for the Division of Safety and Performance on this topic can be found [here](#) (see pages 211-212 in particular). These outline agency responsibilities when the youth has been found, efforts to understand why the youth ran (including understanding what they were running to or running from), and creating plans for the prevention of future runs.

Responsibilities When a Child or Youth is No Longer Missing

Agencies must evaluate the child's or youth's need for treatment and services within one business day following an episode of missing from care, by:

- Interview the child or youth about the missing episode to **determine the primary factors that contributed to the child's or youth's missing episode** and follow-up on any safety or well-being concerns raised by the child or youth or his or her caregivers.
 - Assess the child or youth to determine if the child or youth experienced sex trafficking during the missing episode...
 - Seek any necessary medical attention for the child or youth.
 - Discuss **planning for the prevention of future missing in care episodes** with the child or youth and family team to ensure child or youth safety, community safety, permanency, and well-being.
 - Note: Child welfare professionals should be aware of mandatory reporting requirements if a child a child or youth discloses any abuse or victimization that may have occurred while they were missing from out-of-home care during the assessment.

Within 5 business days, the agency must **document the primary factors that contributed to the child's or juvenile's missing episode in eWiSACWIS** [Wisconsin's Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System]. Documentation of this information will be prompted in eWiSACWIS in the Assessment when a Child or youth is No Longer Missing group box once the child or youth's placement status is updated to reflect the child or youth is no longer missing...

- Document the **primary factors** that contributed to the child’s or youth’s missing episode and the child’s or youth’s experience(s) while missing. See Appendix XII: Assessment when a Child or youth is No Longer Missing for a detailed description of this assessment on page 332 [included in next section, or see page 332 [here](#)].

Assessment when a Child or Youth is No Longer Missing

When a child or youth is no longer missing from out-of-home care, the agency with placement and care responsibility shall interview the child or youth about the missing episode to determine the primary factors that contributed to the child’s or juvenile’s missing episode and follow-up on any safety or well-being concerns raised by the child or youth or his or her caregiver(s)...

The following is a description of the assessment that the child welfare professional shall document in eWiSACWIS, which may assist the child welfare professional in preparing for the interview with the child or youth...

1. Determine if the missing episode was the result of the child or youth running away. If the missing episode was due to the child or youth running away, the child welfare professional shall assess the following: **Frequency of Running; Consistency of Destination; Safety of Destination; Involvement in Illegal Activities; Likelihood to Return on their Own; Involvement with Others; Realistic Expectations...**
2. Determine if the child or youth was missing as the result of a perpetrator or exploiter influence, such as being forced or coerced to run away.
3. Determine the child’s or juvenile’s motivation for running away.
 - a. Determine if the child or youth was **running to something**, such as peers, birth parent(s), or other family members.
 - b. Determine if the child or youth was **running from something**, such as an unsafe environment or unsafe person.
4. Determine if the child or youth was a **victim** of any of the following during the missing episode: Sex Trafficking; Sexual Assault; Physical Abuse; Emotional Abuse; Medical Trauma; Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse; Injuries
5. Describe the **plan for the prevention of future missing episodes**. This plan should be **discussed with the child or youth; the child’s or juvenile’s birth parent(s)/legal guardian; the out-of-home care provider; the child’s or juvenile’s treatment team; the tribe, if applicable; and any other individual(s) who would be taking a role in the prevention of future missing episodes**.

Illinois

A working group convened by the University of Illinois at Chicago developed [this](#) Residential Runaway Risk Assessment User Guide. Although it is not clear if state policy encourages or requires its use, considering its contents may be of interest to task force members. The guide contains special sections on determining a youth's risk to run, determining risk once a youth has run, and treatment planning. One treatment planning sample on page 43 outlines specific interventions to be made in a hypothetical case based on assessment, including manual restraints to prevent a youth from running.

The primary purpose of this assessment is to facilitate comprehensive and effective treatment planning and intervention for youth residing in group homes and residential treatment settings for whom runaway behavior is problematic. Treatment planning that focuses on runaway behavior should be driven by an accurate determination of a youth's risk of runaway as well as their risk in the community once they run...

Use of this tool will facilitate the development of a specific set of **individualized recommendations directed toward preventing a resident from running away**, providing specific **direction to staff for reducing the risk of harm** to the youth (and others) should he/she successfully run away, and/or **successfully reintegrating the youth** into the therapeutic community upon return. Recommendations incorporate an assessment of both the individual needs for each youth as well as relevant contextual factors and treatment program characteristics. As a large measure of clinical judgment is required to make these determinations, clear guidelines are provided to ensure consistency among those who use this tool...

The risk assessment should be **initially conducted at admission** and revised, as needed, during the youth's course of treatment to reflect shifts in a youth's risk level over time. Minimally, revisions are recommended at thirty days following admission and at quarterly reviews. It is particularly important that new information gathered through de-briefings with youth **following actual runaway episodes be incorporated** into the assessment and treatment planning decisions...

Section III: Treatment Planning [page 27]

The following guidelines are to be used to assist the clinician in determining if **additional individualized treatment planning** is indicated given the youth's assessed level of risk. To make this determination, the **clinician must carefully review** and take into consideration the areas described below. Clinical judgment is required to ascertain how these areas interact to create a need for modified treatment planning **beyond the agency's standard runaway protocol**. Based on this assessment, the clinician will determine **if interventions should be intensified** in specific areas, if the agency's standard protocol interventions are sufficient, or if a **possible decrease in interventions** would be beneficial. Given that **there is no simple formula** for determining the need for additional planning, clinician-raters should refer to these instructions as well as the attached example vignettes.