



NH Department of Health & Human Services  
Division for Children, Youth & Families

## DCYF Standard Operating Procedure

### 1173.3 MISSING PARENTS-ASSESSMENT

Policy Directive: **20-25**

Effective Date: **June 2020**

Implements Policy: **1173**

Approved:

Joseph E. Ribsam, Jr., DCYF Director

This SOP defines the procedures for identifying and locating missing parents during an Assessment.

#### Procedure

*The following information is to support the implementation of the above referenced policy. This document shall not preclude staff from using their professional judgement based on individual circumstances, consistent with the requirements of the policy.*

- I. CPSWs should seek information about missing parents at the start of the Assessment and they should make contact with that parent unless it is determined not necessary through consultation with their Supervisor. Efforts should include:
  - A. Direct conversation with the custodial parent/guardian(s)
  - B. Engaging children, as developmentally appropriate, who are able to articulate their thoughts and feelings verbally, about their other parent if/when it is emotionally safe for them to do so;
  - C. Exploration of collateral resources (see the Frequently Asked Questions section);
    1. The CPSW should ask to speak with these collaterals when a custodial parent/guardian has no or insufficient information regarding the missing parent.
  - D. Contacting Law Enforcement in communities where the missing parent is thought to reside and asking about any contact that might assist in locating said parent. The custodial parent's consent is not needed to gather information from Law Enforcement;
  - E. Searching the Master Client Index (MCI) by entering as much demographic information as available and reviewing the "Golden Record" for information from both New HEIGHTS and NECSES (The New England Child Support Enforcement System);
  - F. Utilizing a variety of online searches/networks as outlined in Frequently Asked Questions, including requesting the assistance of District Office staff (Permanency and Resource Workers, Permanency Supervisors, and specifically identified JPPOs) who have access to complete Accurint Searches; and

- G. Consulting with a Supervisor and the Staff Attorney to explore additional resources that may be available (including the Federal Parent Locator Service) if placement has occurred or is likely to occur.
- II. CPSWs are expected to make a minimum of 2 attempts to identify and locate a missing parent in all Assessments and to make 3 attempts when legal action is being considered.
- III. Prior to contacting a missing parent who has been located, the CPSW should decide how to engage that parent, taking into account:
  - A. The custodial parent/guardian(s) and child's perspective, particularly if there is reason to believe that contacting the missing parent may result in physical harm or trauma to the child or custodial parent/guardian(s); and
  - B. Information gathered through both formal Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools and informal assessment.
- IV. The CPSW should initiate contact with the missing parent to introduce themselves and request a meeting.
  - A. The initial contact to a missing parent should be by phone whenever possible, or in the event that the missing parent cannot be reached by phone in a timely manner, the CPSW should attempt to reach them by written correspondence.
  - B. The CPSW is not to divulge protected information that may jeopardize the safety or confidentiality of the custodial parent/guardian.
  - C. The CPSW should:
    - 1. Be clear in identifying expectations and roles;
    - 2. Share the concerns leading to the Division's involvement and how the CPSW has ensured the safety of their child;
    - 3. Share any legal involvement the Division has or is likely to have with their child;
    - 4. Gather information from the parent that will assist in assessing their ability to meet the safety, permanency, and well-being needs of their child and be a resource to the family; and
    - 5. Gather information as to their historical involvement with their child (visitation/parenting time, child support, etc.).

- V. If the missing parent does not engage with DCYF, the CPSW should clarify why the parent declines to be involved and engage them around the importance of their being involved for the safety and well-being of their child(ren).
  - A. Inform them DCYF may continue to make efforts to engage with them throughout the Assessment as appropriate.
- VI. Once located, the parent will be engaged as outlined in the Engaging Parents/Guardians procedure (SOP 1173.2) moving forward.
- VII. Demographic information will be entered/updated in the DCYF electronic information system by the end of the next business day when a missing parent is identified and again when they are located.
- VIII. All efforts to identify and locate a missing parent must be documented in the DCYF electronic information system by the end of the next business day under the correct drop down selections for type of contact and purpose. All contacts should reflect the details, including:
  - A. Efforts to gather information about the missing parent;
  - B. Efforts to locate and contact the a missing parent;
  - C. Any direct intervention by the CPSW; and
  - D. Any Action or Safety Plans put in place.

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### **Q1. Who are collateral resources I might utilize in locating a missing parent?**

- A** Information around the missing parent(s)' last known address, family and friends, and employment history can be gathered from the custodial parent, the child(ren), and collaterals to provide helpful starting points in regards to locating that parent;
- A** Other adults in the household, extended family and close family friends may be asked about possible ways of locating the missing parent, as well as their thoughts around the appropriateness of that parent being involved in the child's life;
- A** Schools, police departments, and other community supports involved with the family who may know of the missing parent and how to contact them;
- A** Local town offices may also share certain municipal records considered to be public information, including voter registration and property taxes, that may provide information as to the whereabouts of a missing parent;
- A** Therapists (with a release);
- A** Medical providers (the absence of a release does not preclude a CPSW from speaking to medical providers and asking for information pertaining to a victim

child. If the medical provider requires a release, the CPSW should attempt to get one.); and

- A It is critical to remember that although a CPSW can seek to obtain information relevant to a victim child without a release, they must be diligent in not disclosing confidential information.

**Q2. Can I send a letter without a known address?**

- A Written correspondence can be sent to a last known address of a missing parent or to another address when there is a reasonable expectation that they will receive it, such as at their parent's home or a treatment facility they are reported to be seeking treatment at;
- A Limited information should be sent until their identity/parental status has been confirmed, but they can be asked to contact DCYF about a child thought to be theirs without including the child's name or other identifying information; and
- A If the missing parent is thought to be residing in a rural community, without a legal address, the CPSW should contact the Post Master in that area to inquire as to if they will accept a letter "general delivery" on the parent's behalf.

**Q3. Can I contact the Division of Motor Vehicles to request records or information?**

- A Pursuant to RSA 260:14, III DCYF, as a government agency, can submit a request for motor vehicle records for use in official business. Administrative Rule Saf-C 5602.06 provides information on how to complete a request to be reviewed by the Division of Motor Vehicles on a case-by-case basis.

**Q4. What Internet search resources may help me locate a missing parent?**

- A Google.com, Zabasearch.com, zoominfo.com, birthdatabase.com, searchsystems.net, myfamily.com, brbpub.com, pipl.com, thepaperboy.com, intelius.com, truepeoplesearch.com and/or publicrecordsonlinerecords.com;
- A Accurint (can be accessed by each office's Permanency CPSW/JPPPO and/or Resource Worker, and the Permanency Supervisor);
- A For incarcerated parents in NH: [http://www4.egov.nh.gov/inmate\\_locator/](http://www4.egov.nh.gov/inmate_locator/);
- A For incarcerated parents outside NH: <http://www.corrections.com/>; and
- A For parents who have to register as criminal offenders: <http://business.nh.gov/nsor/Search.aspx>.

❖ *Not all staff have access to all these websites. Staff who do not have clearance to access one of these sites through their DHHS workspace may coordinate with the Permanency CPSW/JPPPO within their office to have the Permanency CPSW/JPPPO look up the information.*

**Q5. What if there are indications that contacting the missing parent could create risk of safety to the family?**

- A Consult with the Family Violence Prevention Specialist (FVPS) to discuss how best to mitigate danger and explore if safety planning can be made that will allow for contact while ensuring the family's safety (when there are concerns for domestic violence).

- A Review any existing court orders for restrictions or information on contact between the missing parent and their child, if available.
- A Consult with law enforcement in the area the parent is thought to reside or where it is thought the parent may have had involvement with law enforcement to inquire as to any involvement and safety concerns.

**Q6. What do I do when there is evidence to support that the child or custodial parent's safety would be at risk as a result of communicating with the missing parent?**

- A Document the decision, and the information supporting this decision, in the DCYF electronic information system, after consultation with the Supervisor in which it was determined that no further action should be taken to engage the missing parent; and
- A Conduct ongoing evaluation of the appropriateness of engaging the missing parent over the life of the Assessment.

**Q7. What rights do missing parents have regarding an Assessment that involves their child?**

- A Parents have a right to know if their child is involved with DCYF (unless there are court orders indicating otherwise). They must be given the opportunity to be a resource, if appropriate, and it is recognized that their engagement may prevent the removal/support the reunification of their child.
- A Pursuant to RSA 170-G:8-a, DCYF must provide parents whose rights have not been terminated or surrendered access to records regarding their child, unless it is determined that the harm to the child resulting from the disclosure outweighs the need for the disclosure.

**Q8. How do I make contact with potential missing parents when conducting a global search without violating policy or the law?**

- A If you have reason to believe that a certain person may be the person you are searching for, consult with your Supervisor about how to proceed. Contact can often be made without divulging confidential information.

**Q9. What if the missing parent requests paternity testing before agreeing to become involved?**

- A If there is a concern for paternity, it is in the best interest of all parties to confirm paternity before any information is shared.
- A If the Assessment will not result in the opening of a court case, the CPSW may assist the missing parent to work with the Department's Child Support Services or in identifying alternate means to seek paternity testing, however it must be made clear that DCYF is not responsible for establishing paternity in an Assessment unless court action is taken.
- A If an Assessment results in the opening of a court case, an **individual** for whom **DCYF believes paternity testing is required will NOT be named** as a **parent** on a RSA 169-C petition. When named as a parent, an individual is automatically made a party to the case and therefore entitled to all confidential

information. Instead, DCYF should file a Motion for Paternity Testing for Putative Father as set forth in the Court Protocols.

**Q10. What do I do if a missing parent is identified and reported as deceased?**

- A** The CPSW should seek confirmation through a death certificate, obituary, or other reliable source.
- A** The CPSW double-clicks on “client” under the case navigator in the DCYF electronic information system, selecting the appropriate client, and entering the date of death (if available) in the client’s information tab. The CPSW then end dates the deceased parent in the demographics screen.

**Q11. What if it is reported that the missing parent’s parental rights were terminated prior to the Division’s involvement?**

- A** The CPSW should seek confirmation through a court order or other reliable source.
- A** If a missing parent is confirmed as having their parental rights terminated, this must be documented in the DCYF electronic information system.
- A** The CPSW then end dates the terminated parent in the demographics screen.
- A** If the missing parent is still involved in the child’s life, they may be contacted with the custodial parent/guardian’s permission, but may not be provided any information regarding the specifics of the Division’s involvement.

**Q12. At what point does the Assessment CPSW stop their efforts to locate a missing parent when a case has been opened?**

- A** When a case is opened, the case joining meeting (as outlined in 1217 Transition from Assessment to Family Services) can serve as an avenue to determine what tasks relevant to identifying and/or locating of missing parent need to be performed and who will do this.

**Glossary and Document Specific Definitions**

A - B    C - D    E - F    G - I    J - L    M - N    O - Q    R - S    T - V    W - Z

**Document Change Log**

PD	Modification Made	Approved	Date
----	-------------------	----------	------