



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

## DCYF Standard Operating Procedure

### 1501.5 MISSING PARENTS-CPS CASE

Policy Directive: **20-28**

Approved:

Effective Date: **July 2020**

Implements Policy: **1501**

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This SOP defines the procedures for identifying and locating missing parents in a Child Protective Services (CPS) case.

#### 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. Child Protective Service Workers (CPSWs) will make monthly efforts, using a variety of approaches when necessary, to identify and locate missing parents from the onset of their involvement and throughout a case until either the parent has been located and engaged, or they are directed to end these efforts by the Court (or their Supervisor for non-court cases). Efforts may include:
  - A. Frequently revisiting the importance of engaging the other parent with custodial parents;
  - B. Engaging children (as age and developmentally appropriate) in ongoing conversation about their other parent if/when it is emotionally safe for them to do so;
  - C. Exploring collateral resources as appropriate, as outlined in the Frequently Asked Questions section;
  - D. Discussing efforts to identify and locate missing parents at treatment and other team meetings;
  - E. Frequently searching the Master Client Index (MCI Global) on the DCYF electronic information system and exploring any information obtained from this search, including following-up with Child Support (outlined in Frequently Asked Questions) as appropriate and reviewing any prior DCYF involvement;
  - F. Utilizing a variety of online searches/networks as outlined in Frequently Asked Questions, including requesting the assistance of those within the District Office who have access (Permanency and Resource Workers, Permanency Supervisors, and specifically identified JPPOs) to complete Accurint searches; and

- G. Consulting with a Supervisor and the Staff Attorney to explore additional resources that may be available to meet reasonable efforts (including the Federal Parent Locator Service) if placement has occurred or is likely to occur.
- II. Monthly efforts to identify and locate a parent are documented as “attempt to locate” in the DCYF electronic information system under that parent’s ID/name.
- A. The body of the documentation should include the CPSW’s efforts to gather demographic information and any other efforts to locate said parent.
  - B. This pertains to attempts to contact the parent directly, as well as through collateral sources.
- III. The CPSW will update the Court (when involved) as to the progress made in identifying and locating missing parents at all subsequent hearings by submitting court form NHJB 3031-DF DCYF’s Affidavit to Identify and/or Locate a Parent, Legal Guardian or Putative Father with each court progress report until such time as the parent has been located or the Court orders DCYF’s efforts to cease.
- IV. Prior to contacting a missing parent who has been located the CPSW should decide how to reach out to that parent, taking into account:
- A. The custodial parent and child(ren)’s perspective(s), particularly if there is reason to believe that contacting the missing parent may result in physical harm or trauma to the child(ren) or custodial parent; and
  - B. Information gathered through both formal (SDM and other tools) and informal assessment.
- V. Unless there are mitigating circumstances, the CPSW will initiate contact with the missing parent as soon as possible to introduce themselves and request a meeting.
- A. The initial contact should be by phone whenever possible, or in the event that the missing parent cannot be reached by phone after 3 attempts, 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, but should provide information relative to the concerns and the overall safety and well-being of their child.
    - 1. In a situation where there is a putative father, the CPSW does not disclose the name of the child or identifying information, but focuses on gathering information from the potential father.
- VI. Upon confirming the missing parent’s identity, the CPSW should share the concerns leading to the Division’s involvement and how the CPSW has ensured the safety of their child(ren).

- A. Communications with the missing parent should be clear in identifying expectations and roles.
- VII. When the court is not involved, the CPSW will seek to gather information from the missing parent that will assist in assessing their ability to meet the safety, permanency, and well-being needs of their child(ren) and to be a resource to the family.
- VIII. If there is court involvement, but petitions of abuse or neglect have not been filed regarding the missing/non-custodial parent (referred to as the non-petitioned parent by the Court), the CPSW will:
- A. Share any legal involvement the Division has with their child(ren);
  - B. Make the formerly missing parent aware of their rights to a Parental Fitness Hearing and present them with the Notice to Non-Petitioned Parent in an Abuse or Neglect Case (Form 1173) or review it with them over the phone and then mail it to them; and
  - C. Ask them to sign the receipt section and return it (if mailing, include a self-addressed, stamped envelope).
    - 1. Once the signed receipt is back, the CPSW will scan it into the DCYF electronic information system and maintain the paper copy in the file.
- IX. If the missing parent does not engage with DCYF, the CPSW should:
- A. Clarify why the parent declines to be involved and engage them around the importance of their being involved;
  - B. Inform them DCYF will continue to make monthly efforts to engage with them throughout the case or until DCYF is directed to cease these efforts by the Court (court-involved cases); and
  - C. Request the names of any family members who may want to be a resource to the child(ren) or offer to leave a number where the missing parent's family may reach them.
- X. If after providing notification to the missing parent of DCYF's involvement and requesting that they either engage in, or make arrangements for (as applicable), the care of their child, the missing parent refuses to engage with DCYF, the CPSW will consult with their Supervisor and Staff Attorney (for court-involved cases) as to what actions are necessary. This may include filing petitions for neglect on said parent (when the Court is involved).
- XI. Once the CPSW confirms the identity or location of a missing parent the CPSW will immediately inform the Family Court (if involved) of the parent's identity and location to the extent they are known to DCYF by submitting court form NHJB-3171-F.

- A. If the individual was initially named as a petitioned or non-accused parent on the RSA 169-C petition, the CPSW will provide the Court with the parent's address for service (addressed in section 1 of the court's form).
  - B. If the individual was not initially named as the parent on the RSA 169-C petition, and DCYF has concluded that paternity testing is not required because both the mother and the individual report the individual is the father, the CPSW will provide the Court NHJB-3171-F with the parent's name and address for service and motion the court for the non-petitioned parent to be joined to the RSA 169-C case (addressed in section 2 of the court's form).
  - C. If the individual is a putative father and DCYF believes paternity testing is required, DCYF will motion the Court for paternity testing, consistent with DCYF's practice (addressed in section 3 of the court's form).
- XII. CPSWs are expected to take the following action when a putative father, defined as the individual who is commonly regarded as the child's father, is identified (court-involved cases only):
- A. Putative fathers will not be named in any petitions until the Court has established paternity;
  - B. Court form NHJB-3031-DF Affidavit to Identify and/or Locate a Parent, Legal Guardian, or Putative Father will be submitted to the court; and
  - C. A decision will be made in consultation with a Supervisor and Staff Attorney, on whether a paternity test is necessary.
    - 1. If an individual regards themselves as the father and this is confirmed by the mother, a paternity test is not necessary.
    - 2. If an individual regards as the father, but the mother denies this, DCYF may determine a paternity test is necessary and petition the court.
- XIII. All efforts to identify and locate missing parents should 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 of the conversation, including:
- A. Efforts to gather information about the missing parent;
  - B. Efforts to locate the missing parent; and
  - C. Efforts to provide notice to the missing parent of court action and their rights under RSA 169-C (as applicable).

## Applicable Forms

Form	Title
1173	Notice to Non-Petitioned Parent in an Abuse or Neglect Case

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Q1. Who are collateral resources I might utilize in locating a missing 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(ren)'s life.
- A Schools, medical providers, therapists, and other community supports involved with the family who may know of the missing parent and how to contact them.
- A Law Enforcement can be contacted in communities where the missing parent is thought to have resided and asked about any contact that might assist in locating said parent. The Custodial parent's consent is not needed to gather information from law enforcement.
- 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.

### Q2. What do I do if a custodial parent declines to allow me to talk to other children in the home or collateral resources about a missing parent?

- A If a custodial parent declines to provide permission for the CPSW to explore identifying and locating a missing parent, the CPSW should engage the parent around their reasons behind this and explain DCYF's obligation to identify and notify parents as a potential resource to the child.
- A The CPSW should revisit the request with the custodial parent at least quarterly until permission is granted, the missing parent is located, or the case is closed.
- A The CPSW should also consult with a Supervisor if it is determined that there is a significant need, such as pending removal, to contact collateral resources who are thought to have information as to the whereabouts of the missing parent. The CPSW can make a plan with their Supervisor as to how to make contact and request information within the confines of confidentiality and what is allowed by law.

### Q3. Can I send a letter without a known address?

- A Written correspondence can be sent to a last known address of the 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 can be sent until contact has been made, but they can be asked to contact DCYF about a child thought to be theirs without including the child(ren)'s name or other identifying information.

### Q4. What if the custodial parent does not want the missing parent involved because of factors such as a history of domestic violence or drug abuse, and states the family is not safe if the missing parent is involved?

- A The CPSW should document any reported safety concerns and further engage them around the importance of the missing parent's involvement and ways to safely involve the missing parent.

- A The custodial parent should be assured that any efforts to locate and engage the missing parent will take risk and safety factors into account and that DCYF will err on the side of safety.
- A Incarceration of a missing parent by itself is insufficient to determine contact with a missing parent is not in the child(ren)'s best interest.
- A The CPSW could consider having a different District Office contact the missing parent to protect the location of the custodial parent and child(ren).
- A No information identifying the child(ren) and custodial parent should be discussed/included until the missing parent's identity and parental status have been confirmed.

**Q5. What if there are indications that contacting the missing parent could create risk to safety of 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(ren), if available; and
- A Consult with law enforcement in the area the parent is thought to reside or may have had law enforcement involvement, to inquire about any involvement or safety concerns.

**Q6. What do I do when there is evidence to support that the child(ren) 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 case unless otherwise ordered by the Court.
- A For placement cases, there should also be ongoing discussion around contacting and engaging missing parents at regularly scheduled Permanency Planning Team (PPT) meetings or sooner, as needed.

**Q7. What if the non-custodial parent is contacted and requests not to be contacted further and threatens to seek legal action?**

- A Talk to the non-custodial parent about their role, and their rights and responsibilities to and for their child(ren).
- A Encourage the non-custodial parent to be an active participant in ensuring the safety and well-being of their child(ren) and explore with them ways in which they can do this.
- A Explain to them that DCYF is required to continue monthly efforts to engage them until such time as the case closes or the Court orders otherwise (for court-involved cases).

**Q8. What if the non-custodial parent's rights were terminated before the initiation of DCYF's involvement, but they are still involved in the child's life?**

- A The non-custodial parent may be contacted with the custodial parent's permission, but may not be provided any information regarding the specifics of the Division's involvement as with any collateral resource.

**Q9. How do I make contact with potential missing parents when conducting a global search without violating confidentiality and/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. If necessary, ask the Court to

order the Division to initiate contact with the person to confirm their identity and/or parental status (if court involved).

**Q10. What if the non-custodial parent requests paternity testing before agreeing to become involved?**

- A** If they are not on the birth certificate and there is an open case, consult with your Supervisor as to how to proceed.

**Q11. How do I involve the Bureau of Child Support Services?**

- A** The CPSW will consult with their Supervisor on how to contact the local office in person, by phone, or by email. Pursuant to RSA 161-B:7, III records and information collected under the statute on the Support of Dependent Children is to be made available to staff of the department administering programs under Title IV-B and Title IV-E, programs of the Division for Children, Youth and Families. BCSS Form w206 should be completed and submitted as a formal request for information.
- A** BCSS can access the Federal Parent Locator Service and/or the New England Child Support Enforcement System (NECSSES) for information on the missing parent.
- A** BCSS can also access the Putative Father Registry, but only when ordered to do so by the Court. Those results are submitted directly to the Court as DCYF cannot have direct access to them.

**Q12. 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, DCYF 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.

**Q13. What Internet search resources may help me?**

- A** Google.com, Zabasearch.com, zoominfo.com, birthdatabase.com, searchsystems.net, myfamily.com, brbpub.com, pipl.com, thepaperboy.com, intelius.com, truepeoplesearch.com, or publicrecordsonlinerecords.com;
- A** Accurint (can be accessed by each office's Permanency CPSW/JPPPO, 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/) or 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>

**Q14. What do I do if a non-custodial parent is identified and reported as deceased?**

- A** Seek confirmation through a death certificate, obituary, or other reliable source.
- A** If a non-custodial parent is confirmed as deceased, the deceased parent's information is updated in the DCYF electronic information system Client Screen by the CPSW by double-clicking on "client" under the case navigator, 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.

**Q15. What if it is reported that the non-custodial parent's parental rights were terminated prior to the Division's involvement?**

- A** Seek confirmation through a Court order or other reliable source.
- A** If a non-custodial parent is confirmed as having their parental rights terminated, this is documented in the DCYF electronic information system.
- A** The CPSW then end dates the terminated parent in the demographics screen.

## 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

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