



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

## DCYF Standard Operating Procedure

### 1501.6 MISSING PARENTS-JJS CASE

Policy Directive: **20-28**

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Approved:

Joseph E. Ribsam, Jr., DCYF Director

This SOP defines the procedures for identifying and locating missing parents in a Juvenile Justice Services (JJS) 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. Juvenile Probation and Parole Officers (JPPOs) will make monthly efforts, using a variety of approaches when necessary, to locate missing parents from the onset of their involvement and throughout the case, unless otherwise directed by the Court (or their Supervisor for non-court cases). Efforts may include:
  - A. Direct conversation with the custodial parent;
  - B. Engaging youth (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;
  - D. 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 (it is expected that this will be done if the youth is in placement or likely to be placed);
  - E. 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
  - F. 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 missing 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 JPPO's efforts to gather demographic information and any other efforts to locate said parent.
  - B. This pertains to attempts to contact the missing parent directly, as well as through collateral sources.
- III. When the Court is involved, the JPPO will notify the Court as to the progress made in identifying and locating missing parents at all subsequent hearings with each court progress report until such time as the parent has been located or the Court orders DCYF's efforts to cease.
- A. If the JPPO learns of the identity or location of a missing parent subsequent to the youth entering placement, the JPPO will immediately inform the appropriate Family Court, in writing, of the parent's identity and location to the extent they are known to DCYF.
- IV. Prior to contacting a missing parent who has been located, the JPPO should decide how to initiate contact with that parent, taking into account:
- A. The custodial parent and youth's perspective(s), particularly if there is reason to believe that contacting the missing parent may result in physical harm or trauma to the youth or custodial parent; and
  - B. Information gathered through both formal and informal assessment.
- V. JPPOs should initiate communication with the missing parent when there are no concerns for risk to the youth or family or when a plan can be made to mitigate risks.
- A. JPPOs should contact the missing parent to introduce themselves and request a meeting. Initial contact should be by phone whenever possible, or in the event that the non-custodial parent cannot be reached by phone, the JPPO should attempt to reach them by written correspondence.
  - B. The JPPO will not 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 the youth.
- VI. Upon confirming the missing parent's identity, the JPPO should engage them and share the concerns leading to the Division's involvement and how the JPPO has ensured the safety of the youth. The JPPO should:
- A. Share any legal involvement the Division has with the youth;
  - B. 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 the youth and to be a resource to the family; and

- C. Seek input around meeting the youth's needs.
- VII. If the non-custodial parent does not engage with DCYF, the JPPO 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 youth, or offer to leave a number where the non-custodial parent's family may reach them.
- VIII. JPPOs will take the following additional actions as applicable:
- A. If the JPPO believes that placement of the youth could be avoided or shortened by utilizing the missing parent, they will consult with their Supervisor and determine the best course of action to further explore this; or
  - B. If the youth is in care and their missing parent refuses to engage in meeting the safety, permanency, and well-being of needs of their child, the JPPO will consult with their Supervisor, who will consult with a CPS Supervisor to discuss how to proceed if the parent's lack of engagement could affect the youth's permanency.
- IX. All efforts to identify and locate missing parents should be documented by the end of the next business day in the DCYF electronic information system 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; and
  - B. Efforts to locate and reach out to the missing parent.

## 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.
  - i. The JPPO should seek permission of the custodial parent to speak with these collaterals when a custodial parent represents as having no or insufficient information regarding the parent.

- 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 JPPO to explore identifying and locating a missing parent, the JPPO should engage the parent and explain DCYF's obligation to identify and notify parents as a potential resource to the youth.
- A The JPPO 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 JPPO 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 JPPO 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 confirmed/current 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 youth thought to be their child without including the youth'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 JPPO 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 youth's best interest.
- A The JPPO could consider having a different District Office contact the missing parent to protect the location of the custodial parent and youth.
- A No information identifying the youth 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 Discuss with your Supervisor and develop a plan for how to proceed.

**Q6. 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).

**Q7. 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).

**Q8. What if the non-custodial parent requests paternity testing before agreeing to become involved?**

- A If they are on the birth certificate, they are considered the legal father, regardless. If they chose to contest paternity, it is up to them to pursue this through the Court. A referral to Child Support Services would not be appropriate.

**Q9. How do I involve the Bureau of Child Support Services?**

- A The JPPO 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 System 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.

**Q10. 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.

**Q11. 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/JPPO, 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>

**Q12. 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.  
If a non-custodial parent is confirmed as deceased, the deceased parent's information must be updated in the DCYF electronic information system Client Screen by the JPPO 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 JPPO then end dates the deceased parent in the demographics screen.

**Q13. 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 JPPO then end dates the terminated parent in the demographics screen.
- A If the individual is involved in the youth's life, the JPPO may speak with them as a collateral resource as appropriate.

**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