

DSS Policy and Procedure Guide

Division 03: Child Welfare

Chapter 16: Transitional Shelter

Item 02: Runaway Plan

Suggested changes send to: [DSS PSOA](#) Mailbox

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References:

Title 22, Div 6, [Chapter 1](#), [Chapter 5](#), [Chapter 12](#),
[WIC§16001.9](#), [WIC§16501.35](#), [All County Letter 16-15](#), [PPG 03-11-001](#)

New

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Preamble

Child Welfare Policy and Procedure Guides (PPG) are meant to be used as tools to relay best practice and staff expectations. It is understood that specific case scenarios may not always align themselves with the stated practices and that at all times what is of paramount importance is the Safety and Well-being of the children we are charged to protect.

Policy

The Department of Social Services (DSS) will ensure an appropriate response to any potential runaway youth or to those who have ran away while awaiting placement at the Fresno County Transitional Shelter Care Facility (TrSCF).

Purpose

This PPG provides guidelines to Fresno County DSS TrSCF staff who are responsible for the supervision of children awaiting placement to implement the Runaway Plan as outlined in the Fresno County TrSCF Plan of Operation. The Runaway Plan describes how Fresno County TrSCF staff will respond to potential runaway youth or to those who have ran away while awaiting placement at the TrSCF. The Runaway Plan will be trauma-informed and support the health, safety, and well-being of the youth served. Every intervention used will consider the history of behavior, age and developmental status, the physical and psychological condition of the child/youth involved and recognize that running away is a symptom of various experienced-trauma.

Definitions

For the purpose of this PPG, the following definitions apply:

Runaway: A person under the age of 18 who has fled from the custody or residence of a parent, legal guardian, caregiver, or agency entitled to legal custody without permission.

Procedure

Intake

Consistent with the Transitional Shelter Operational Standards, Section 86722.2(a), the Runaway Plan will be provided to, and discussed with each youth and their authorized representative at the time of admission into the TrSCF. If during the discussion, it is determined that the youth has a history of running away from placement, facility staff and the youth's CMSW will develop an [individualized plan](#) for that youth. The individualized runaway prevention plan will be maintained in the youth's record and will take into account the age, size, emotional, behavioral, and developmental level of the youth. The plan shall also incorporate the individual youth's trauma history, trauma sources and triggers.

Runaway Prevention and Intervention

Staff will utilize the following interventions when a youth is suspected of planning an unauthorized leave, has a runaway history, or is outside the facility property without permission, yet within view of facility staff:

- Staff will alert the on-duty Supervisor and associate staff. Staff will make every attempt to de-escalate the situation and determine what is prompting the youth's decision to leave the facility.
- Staff will assess the situation to determine whether there is a need for contacting the youth's SW, mental health clinician, wraparound provider, Family Urgent Response System (FURS), or other individuals of the youth's support team.

NOTE: Under no circumstances will facility staff prohibit a youth from leaving the facility by blocking or locking them in a room, or any part of the facility, pursuant to WIC§16001.9.

Facility staff will engage the potential runaway child or youth to:

- Discuss other options the youth may explore such as outings, meetings, and phone calls.
- Point out dangers and consequences of running away.
- Offer to help the youth in contacting their support team, assigned DSS SW, clinician, and/or attorney.
- Staff will follow the youth by foot and attempt to de-escalate the situation using verbal redirection or until it presents a safety risk for the youth. For example, staff will not follow a youth in a high-traffic area where the youth may be at risk of being struck by a moving vehicle.
- Staff will maintain visual contact until they lose sight of the youth, taking note of the direction they are traveling and anyone they come in contact with, such as getting into a car or meeting someone.

- Staff will make note of the description of the youth, such as what they are wearing, or any other identifying information.

Continuum of Interventions:

The continuum of interventions for runaway behavior is designed to be responsive to the impact of trauma, emphasizing the emotional and physical safety of youth and those around them. Below is the continuum of interventions utilized with youth who have a propensity to run away:

- Preventive Interventions
 - Assess for antecedents and triggers that may lead to the desire to run away.
 - Utilize positive and calm verbal interventions as the earliest possible intervention.
 - Offer problem-solving alternatives to running away such as talking to someone, journaling, etc.
 - Utilize strategies such as distraction for youth who are at risk of an impulsive run.
 - Incorporate calming/self-soothing activities such as listening to music, reading, exercising, cooking, etc. for youth who cannot regulate their affect.
 - Offer a separate space for youth, away from others, to assist them in calming, processing, or reducing stimulation.
 - Utilize verbal reminders about reasons to not run away, specific to that child.
 - Utilize reminders about consequences.
 - Offer rewards for making good decisions.
- Utilize Relationships
 - Identify who has a good relationship with each youth so that they may be accessed to verbally intervene.
 - In the midst of oppositional behavior on the part of youth, staff convey that youth are wanted and the youth's safety is important to them.
 - When appropriate, convene an emergency Child and Family Team Meeting.

- When appropriate, offer the youth the opportunity to speak to family members or other support people.
- Increase levels of supervision: the program may provide 1:1 staff support for youth at risk of running away.
- If a youth has left the facility property but is still visible to the staff, the staff will assess the youth's danger to themselves or others.
- Staff will attempt to verbally counsel the youth to return to the facility. The facility staff will follow the youth as long as they are visible.

Runaway Notification and Documentation

Once a youth is no longer in sight and absent from the facility without permission, the youth is considered a "runaway". Staff will then **immediately** do the following:

- Search the surrounding area.
- Notify the on-duty supervisor or facility manager when after the search, the youth cannot be located.
- Fresno County Sheriff's will be contacted by the staff or facility manager in order to file a missing person's report and request assistance, as appropriate.
 - For youth who are assessed to be vulnerable, based on the age, size, emotional, behavioral, or developmental level, at risk of, has a history or is a known victim of human trafficking or commercially sexually exploited children (CSEC), the Sheriff's Department is to be contacted immediately.
 - For all other youth, dependent on the vulnerability and risk factors, Fresno County Sheriff's Department will be contacted within two hours.

NOTE: When calling law enforcement, staff is to indicate to dispatch that they are calling from an "at risk youth shelter" and specify if the youth is a trafficking victim or suspected trafficking victim as well as any other risk factors. Staff should report any additional information shared by the youth of who they may be with (including nicknames) or where they may be going as well as contact information such as phone numbers and/or social media account username(s), if known.

- Document in the youth's folder the time the youth left, the attempts to de-escalate, the youth's response, what the youth was wearing, the direction they went and any other significant information that was observed.

- Notify youth's assigned DSS SW, Social Work Supervisor (SWS) or Child Protective Services (CPS) hotline if afterhours, on weekends or holidays and the standby supervisor is not available.
- Notify youth's parents, if contact information is available.
- Email Reportable Incident to the Critical Incident Report Inbox and include the assigned Social Worker, Supervisor and DC. Refer to PPG 03-11-001 Incident Reporting and Investigation.
- Complete an Incident Report ([LIC 624-LE](#)) and the Additional Reporting Information (84061(h)(6) form and provide to the Facility Manager or Administrator for review to send to Community Care Licensing within seven calendar days. Reports will include at least the following information:
 - Date, time, duration, and location of the incident.
 - When and how the youth's absence was first noted.
 - If known, the youth's last activities.
 - What were the circumstances surrounding the youth's absence.
 - What action did the facility staff take to discourage the youth from leaving, and what interventions were utilized, if any.
 - What action was taken by facility staff to locate the youth.
 - If law enforcement was involved in the incident, a detailed description of the incident.
 - Documentation that the youth's SW has been notified of the incident.

Youth who run from school will be addressed with the same procedures listed above.

Approved Leave Time

For youth who are approved to be absent from the facility for a designated amount of time and do not return timely, a grace period of up to 30 minutes will be given before enacting the same procedures listed above. Dependent on the vulnerability of the youth and other risk factors, staff may contact the Sheriff's Department immediately and not wait the entire 30 minutes.

Runaway Personal Belongings Handling Procedures

24 hours after a youth is on runaway status, their personal belongings will be removed from their

room, inventoried, and stored for safekeeping. All personal belongings will be held in the designated storage area at the Child Welfare Services (CWS) office (Building 5) pending the youth's return.

Runaway Return and Exits

- Youth on runaway status who are gone for more than 30 days, will need to be re-admitted upon return.
- Youth will remain on runaway status from the shelter until they return.
- Shelter staff will discharge the youth from the shelter upon the 30th day, if they have not returned.
- Time in the shelter is accumulated only during the time the youth is physically present at the shelter.
- The clock stops upon youth running away and resumes upon return if within 30 days. The time will be inclusive of the hours prior to runaway as part of the nine day time limit.
- Youth on runaway status who are seeking reentry will be directed to the facility staff in charge of admissions to complete the intake and admissions process.
- If there is reasonable belief based on the history of the youth that they may be in possession of drugs or weapons, personal belongings will be searched if the youth does not disclose them at time of reentry.
- Facility staff will notify the assigned SW and law enforcement of the runaway return.
- When contacting law enforcement, staff will report any known information shared by the youth of their location or who they were with (including nicknames) while absent without approval.
- Staff will offer medical clearance or seek medical care for youth returning from runaway.

Staff Training Plan

Staff will be trained on the Runaway Plan and procedures once they are hired and annually.