

**The Philadelphia Department of Human Services
Children and Youth Division
Policy and Procedural Guide**

Effective November 18, 2004

TO: All CYD Social Work Staff

FROM: John McGee, Deputy Commissioner, Children and Youth

RE: Policy and Procedure for Gaining Access to Children and Searching for Children and Families During Investigations/Assessments or When Accepted for Services

The purpose of this guide is to transmit clarified, changed and/or new policy and procedures for searching for children and families.

Clarifications:

- Policy and procedure for when a social worker reasonably believes a child to live at a particular address and cannot gain access to the child to assess safety and risk.
- Requirements when a social worker is told that a child is residing in another jurisdiction (county/state).

Changes:

- Supervisory review responsibilities while searching for an active child/family who cannot be located.

Additions:

- Social Worker's responsibilities for searching for a child/family.
- Supervisor's responsibilities for searching for a child/family.
- Additional contact requirements when a social worker cannot locate a child/family during an investigation/assessment or when responding to a formal alert on a family receiving services.
- Timeframe for ongoing search efforts when a social worker cannot locate a family.
- Minimum requirements for closing a case/investigation/assessment when a child/family cannot be located.
- Use of an electronic search.
- Use of a Private Investigator.
- Use of court intervention.
- Reporting to the Philadelphia Police when unable to locate a child/family.

Except for the changes and additions included in this guide, all requirements of current policy regarding investigating/assessing reports of abuse or neglect, timely completion and submission of CY-48s¹, and completion of risk assessments according to risk assessment case interval policy remain in effect.

¹ For CPS reports, the CY-48 must be filed with ChildLine before the 60th day from the date the Hotline received the report even if the report is being unfounded.

POLICY: GAINING ACCESS TO CHILD(REN) DURING AN INVESTIGATION/ASSESSMENT OR WHILE PROVIDING SERVICES

When a DHS social worker is refused access to any child² by the parent(s)/caregiver(s), whether by being refused entry or by evasion, the social worker will consult with the supervisor about seeking immediate court intervention and/or police assistance.

When a family is refusing to allow a provider social worker access to any child, the provider social worker must report this to DHS by speaking to someone in the chain of command responsible for the case. The DHS social worker and supervisor, and as necessary, administrator or director, will determine the most appropriate course of action.

Any time that a social worker has evidence to believe a child to be in a home and in immediate danger, the worker will seek immediate police assistance. The social worker will then inform his/her supervisor of the action and take whatever other actions are necessary to ensure the child's safety including seeking court intervention.

Procedures

In determining the appropriate course of action when a worker is refused access to a child or the family appears to be evading, some considerations may include:

- *For investigations/assessments - the risk level determined by the Hotline (for high risk cases, court intervention should be sought immediately), the nature of the allegations on the report, and the age of the children who are subject of the report.*
- *For families receiving services – The last safety assessment and safety plan, the risk level determined on the last risk assessment, the level of family functioning as indicated on the last Family Assessment Form, the reason the case was accepted for service, the level and type of services being provided, the progress toward the goal and objectives of the service plan, critical incident reports, previous formal alerts.*

An appropriate course of action may include an immediate, unannounced visit by the DHS social worker, attempting to see the child at another location, for example, at school or a child-care provider, seeking court intervention or obtaining police assistance.

*If a child is believed to be in immediate danger, the social worker will dial 911 to obtain immediate police assistance. If immediate **placement** is necessary to secure the safety of the child, the worker will obtain a restraining order according to current policy and procedures, and take custody of the child.*

POLICY: SEARCHING FOR CHILDREN/FAMILIES

General

When a family cannot be located, it is not possible to assess the safety of the children. It becomes the immediate responsibility of the DHS social worker and supervisor to initiate efforts to locate the family, assess the safety of the children and, if appropriate, establish or re-establish services.

For any report, and any time there is an inability to locate a family or child(ren), if the social worker, in consultation with the supervisor, believes that it is necessary to obtain police assistance, an electronic search or court intervention, such actions should be taken.

Any time a social worker is told that the child(ren) have moved to another jurisdiction, the social worker, through a home visit or collateral sources, must attempt to confirm the child(ren)'s move.

² Throughout this document "child" refers to anyone under age 18 or under age 21 if committed to DHS.

There must be written follow-up to ensure that an official of the child welfare agency of that jurisdiction is made aware of the need to assess the safety of the child(ren). The social worker must attempt to obtain sufficient identifying information to permit follow-up by the other jurisdiction. The social worker must document, in the case record, his/her contact with the other jurisdiction and the other jurisdiction's response.

All search efforts will be clearly documented in the case record and reviewed with the supervisor.

If, at any point in the search process, the child(ren)/family are located, an investigation/assessment, if applicable, proceeds based on established guidelines and timeframes.

Procedures

Contact attempts should occur at times and places with the highest probability of seeing the child (e.g. a school age child during the school year, with no allegations that the child is not attending school, the best chance of seeing the child is during school hours; parents work, the best chance of seeing the child is after regular working hours).

- *If there is no information on the family then at least one attempted contact should be during regular working hours, and one should be during non-working hours.*

Contact attempts, electronic and existing record searches, as well as searches using other resources can be conducted simultaneously.

Documentation of search efforts must include results of electronic searches and searches by the Private Investigator, in addition to the social worker's search efforts.

POLICY: SEARCHING FOR CHILD(REN)/FAMILIES DURING AN INVESTIGATION/ASSESSMENT

Social Worker's Responsibilities

Initial Search Efforts

When the subject children cannot be seen on the first visit, the worker must make a **minimum second attempt** to see the child and assess safety.

- For any report designated Response Priority 1 or Response Priority 2, this visit must occur **within the first 24 hours** after the Hotline receives the report.
- For any GPS report designated Response Priority 3, this visit must be **within two (2) working days of the first visit**.

If a social worker has reason to believe that the address on the report, the family's last known address, or the purported location of the child is incorrect, the social worker will request an **electronic search** from the Liaison Unit.

- For CPS and E-GPS reports, the Liaison Unit will respond within one (1) working day, or sooner if required by the circumstances. The Liaison Unit will respond within two (2) working days for all other requests.

A third attempt to have face-to-face contact with the child(ren) should be made within 24 hours after the second unsuccessful visit for CPS and E-GPS reports.

- Exceptions to the contact requirements may only be made at or above the social work administrator level based on credible information that the child/family will be at a particular location on a particular date within a reasonable time frame.

Failure to locate a child/family within 3 attempts must be discussed by the social worker and supervisor with the social work administrator and director.

If there is no response from the family within 24 hours after the third unsuccessful visit, the social worker and supervisor should discuss seeking court intervention. Possible circumstances for court intervention include when the worker believes that someone has information as to the family's whereabouts and is deliberately concealing or refusing to reveal the information.

Continuing Search Efforts

Decisions about the full extent of ongoing search efforts, the resources used, and the timing of resource use should be made on a case-by-case basis as a joint decision between the social worker and the supervisor with review by the administrator and director. Ongoing search efforts must be based on credible information. All decisions, and the basis for the decisions, must be fully documented in the case record, and must be able to support a decision to close the case if the family/child is not found.

The worker will make additional visits, as appropriate. If no electronic search has been completed, an electronic search must be initiated within 15 days of the report date, if the family has not responded or been located by that time. Search efforts will be reviewed at least every 10 calendar days during the required supervisory review conferences.

A referral to the **Private Investigator** must be made for all CPS and GPS cases if the family has not responded or been located after an electronic search. **This may occur at any time, but not later than 30 days** after the date of the report.

An active search for a child/family will continue for 60 days from the date the report was received by the Hotline.

- A search must continue if the court orders the search to continue or declines to discharge the petition.

Determining a Report and Closing When a Child/Family Cannot Be Located

If no further information is available on an investigation/assessment, and the family has not been located, the report will be unfounded or unsubstantiated due to an inability to locate the child(ren)/family, and all appropriate paperwork completed, **by the 60th day**.

- The case will be closed. After review by the social work supervisor, the social work administrator and director must approve the closing of any case for an inability to locate and assess a child or family. The approval will be based on documented, extensive, unsuccessful search efforts.

Any court involvement must be discharged prior to closing the case. If the court declines to discharge the petition, the case cannot be closed, and the assigned social worker must continue the active search efforts.

All case closing requirements mandated by current policy must be completed. (CYD Policy Manual §§ 1230 and 4210)

Procedures

Initial Search Efforts

If the social worker cannot make contact and see the child on the first visit:

- *The worker should call to inform the supervisor of the inability to see the children, and the supervisor should review all available information from any existing record to suggest other possible locations or contacts for the family.*
- *If the property appears vacant and no additional information can be obtained from neighbors³ or other sources in the file, the supervisor may request that the Liaison Unit conduct an electronic search, giving the Liaison Unit any available information.*

Second, and subsequent, visits could be at the original address or at any other probable location of the child, such as another possible address, school, day care, etc., depending on information as it becomes available from contact with neighbors and additional sources of information, such as relatives or collaterals from an existing record.

- *The worker should contact his/her supervisor, inform him/her of the progress of the search and **consider the merits of an electronic search.***

At the 3rd unsuccessful attempted visit, the worker will leave a letter which explains that we have made three attempts to see the children; and that we may initiate court activity if we receive no response within 24 hours from the time on the letter.

To seek court intervention, the worker will contact the Law Department and provide the Law Department with all available information. It is the responsibility of the Law Department to use the information provided, to elicit additional information sufficient to obtain the requested order, and to aggressively pursue the order.

- *The social worker will document the Law Department's response in the case record.*

Continuing Search Efforts

After an electronic search done on a CPS or GPS case, the social worker will receive an inquiry from the Liaison unit to determine whether the children have been located. When the social worker indicates children have not been located, an e-mail to the director will be automatically generated, notifying that a referral to the Private Investigator is mandatory on this case. The director will indicate authorization on the electronic "Request for Child Search" form. An authorized referral will automatically be forwarded to the Private Investigator, with notification down the chain of command, and to the Liaison unit. A copy of the form will be printed out by the social worker and maintained in the case record. The Liaison Unit will act as a central contact point for the Private Investigator, and monitor the status of referrals.

Closing

Close reason code #22 – "service need not established" - will be used for all reports. For CPS reports, the determination code will be "X" – "unable to complete". For GPS reports, the determination code will be "N" – "unsubstantiated".

If a dependent or other petition was filed on an investigation/assessment, the social worker will seek to have the petition discharged. The assigned social worker will contact the Law Department at the time the report is determined, and request that a status hearing be held. If the child(ren) or family have not been located, the social worker will request that the petition be discharged without prejudice.

Supervisor's Responsibilities

Initial Search Efforts

The supervisor must ensure that the social worker follows prescribed search policies and procedures as outlined above.

³ Confidentiality requirements continue to be in effect during a search. A social worker may ask a neighbor the whereabouts of a family, but may not reveal any information about the family, the report or the reporter.

- Within the first 24 hours of a search, the supervisor must review search attempts with the social worker, discuss child safety and whether the child(ren) may be at imminent risk. (CYD Policy Manual § 3110)
- If, based on information obtained at the point of this initial supervisory review, risk seems to be high or there is reason to believe the child(ren) are unsafe, the afterhours and weekend Hotline shifts should, as circumstances warrant, be requested to make additional attempts to have face-to-face contact with the child(ren) and assess the child(ren)'s safety.

Continuing Search Efforts

As required for all CPS and GPS reports, the social work supervisor must review progress **at least every 10 calendar days** according to CYD Supervisory Review Responsibilities policy (See CYD Policy Manual § 1510).

- The supervisor will review search attempts and the results of electronic searches and referrals to the Private Investigator, ensure that the social worker follows up on sources of information, and make joint decisions about the extent of ongoing search efforts.

Determining the Report and Closing the Case When a Child/Family Cannot Be Located

The supervisor is responsible to review and confirm the determination of the report and the decision to close the case. This must include a review of the search efforts made, the results of the search efforts, and the sufficiency of all documentation. (CYD Policy Manual § 1530)

Procedures

- *While the worker is in the field attempting to locate the child(ren)/family, the supervisor should be facilitating the worker's search efforts by seeking and reviewing sources of information, and attempting to make contact from the office.*
- *The supervisor will request that afterhours/weekend shifts of the Hotline make additional contact attempts when the risk is high, particularly when the subject child is not school age (any child under age seven), when there is reason to believe the child(ren) are unsafe, or when it seems appropriate after consultation with the social worker. The request for attempted contacts during the afterhours/weekend shifts is made to the supervisor on duty in the Hotline. It is the responsibility of that Hotline supervisor to ensure that the visit request is assigned or forwarded to the appropriate supervisor covering the shift in which the visit is to be made. If there is no agreement between supervisors regarding the appropriateness of an afterhours/weekend Hotline visit, attempts to resolve should continue up the chain of command until a decision is made.*

POLICY: SEARCHING FOR CHILDREN/FAMILIES WHO ARE RECEIVING SERVICES

Social Worker's Responsibilities

Initial Search Efforts

Service planning policy requires that a family accepted for services inform DHS or the provider social worker of any change of address. When a provider social worker has confirmed that a family receiving services has moved without providing the new address, the provider social worker must report this to DHS by speaking to someone in the chain of command responsible for the case.

The DHS social worker and supervisor will consult to determine the appropriate plan for locating the family. The urgency and response required will be based on current risk factors, most recent Risk Assessment and FAF summary, and families level of compliance with FSP objectives.

At a minimum, contact will be made with known relatives and other providers of services to the children and family including, when appropriate, schools, day care, mental health providers, etc.

Additionally, the DHS social worker will request an **electronic search from the Liaison Unit** within one working day. The Liaison Unit will respond within two (2) working days, or sooner if required by the circumstances.

The DHS social worker and supervisor should discuss seeking court intervention in circumstances where:

- The worker believes that someone has information as to the family's whereabouts and is deliberately concealing or refusing to reveal the information.
- A family receiving services appears to be deliberately evading DHS, and is not already court-involved.

The worker should contact the Law Department for assistance in seeking court intervention.

Continuing Search Efforts

Decisions about the full extent of ongoing search efforts, the resources used, and the timing of resource use should be made on a case-by-case basis as a joint decision between the social worker and the supervisor with review by the administrator and director. Ongoing search efforts must be based on credible information. All decisions, and the basis for the decisions, must be fully documented in the case record, and must be able to support a decision to close the case if the family/child is not found.

The worker will make additional visits and request additional electronic searches as appropriate. Search efforts will be reviewed at least during **biweekly** supervisory review conferences **until found or closed**.

A referral to the **Private Investigator** will be discussed with the supervisor when all other search resources have been exhausted. **The referrals must be made on the following types of cases:**

- A **court-involved family who is receiving SCOH services;**
- Any **child or family receiving services** when:
 - the last safety assessment indicated the child(ren) to be unsafe or conditionally safe
 - the last risk assessment on an active family indicated a high level of risk, and/or
 - the family has been uncooperative with the safety plan or with services.

In all other situations, a referral to the Private Investigator will be discussed with the administrator and director. The referral will be made at the discretion of the director on a case-by-case basis after review of the situation and search efforts already made. The decision to approve or not approve the referral must be documented in the case record.

An active search for a child/family will continue until search resources (including referral to the Private Investigator) have been exhausted, but no longer than 60 days. The social work administrator or director may authorize continued search efforts.

A search must continue if the court orders the search to continue or declines to discharge the petition.

Closing the Case When a Child/Family Cannot Be Located

The Philadelphia Police will be notified prior to closing a case on any missing family if:

- the last safety assessment indicated the child(ren) to be unsafe or conditionally safe;
- the last risk assessment on the family indicated a high level of risk; and/or
- the family has been uncooperative with the safety plan or with services.

(See CYD Policy Manual § 2200 for allegations on a referral that must be reported to the Police.)

If no further information is available, all search resources have been exhausted, and the family has not been located, the active case will be closed no later than the 60th day after the notification was received. The social work administrator or director may authorize continued search efforts for a limited time to complete specific search activities, such as following up on particular information. After review by the social work supervisor, the social work administrator and director must approve the closing of any case for an inability to locate a child or family. The approval will be based on documented, extensive, unsuccessful search efforts. **Any court involvement must be discharged prior to closing the case.** If the court declines to discharge the petition, the case cannot be closed, and the assigned social worker must continue the active search efforts.

All case closing requirements mandated by current policy must be completed (CYD Policy Manual §§ 1230 and 4210).

Procedures

Initial Search Efforts

To seek court intervention, the worker will contact the Law Department and provide the Law Department with all available information. It is the responsibility of the Law Department to use the information provided, to elicit additional information sufficient to obtain the requested order, and to aggressively pursue the order.

- *The social worker will document the Law Department's response in the case record.*

Continuing Search Efforts

After an electronic search done on a case which requires referral to the Private Investigator, the social worker will receive an inquiry from the Liaison unit to determine whether the children have been located. When the social worker indicates children have not been located, an e-mail to the director will be automatically generated, notifying that a referral to the Private Investigator is mandatory on this case.

In making a decision whether to refer to the Private Investigator, the social worker, supervisor, administrator and director will review all available information and search efforts, including results of an electronic search. The review will be to determine whether the case meets the criteria for mandatory referral, and if not, whether a referral is appropriate. The decision whether or not to approve will be indicated by the director on the electronic "Request for Child Search" form. An approved referral will automatically be forwarded to the Private Investigator, with notification down the chain of command, and to the Liaison unit. A copy of the form will be printed out by the social worker and maintained in the case record. The Liaison Unit will act as a central contact point for the Private Investigator, and monitor the status of referrals.

Closing

The Philadelphia Police will be notified at closing that a family receiving services cannot be located if the family meets the criteria specified in the policy, above. The social worker will file a Missing Persons Report by calling the local police district for the family's last known address.⁴

If a dependent or other petition on a family receiving services was filed, the social worker will seek to have the petition discharged. The assigned social worker will contact the Law Department and request that a status hearing be held prior to the 60th day of the search. If, at the time of this hearing, the child(ren) or family have not been located, the social worker will request that the petition be discharged without prejudice.

⁴ E.g. If the family's last known address was 19th and Poplar, this would be the 9th District.

Case close reason code #13 – “whereabouts unknown” – is to be used unless the family has moved to another jurisdiction.

Supervisor’s Responsibilities

Initial Search Efforts

The supervisor must ensure that the social worker follows prescribed search policies and procedures as outlined below.

- Within the first working day, the supervisor must discuss child safety and whether the child(ren) may be at imminent risk, and what possible locations exist where the family may be located.

If, based on information obtained at the point of this initial supervisory review, risk seems to be high or there is reason to believe the child(ren) are unsafe, the afterhours and weekend Hotline shifts should, as circumstances warrant, be requested to make additional attempts to have face-to-face contact with the child(ren) and assess the child(ren)’s safety.

Continuing Search Efforts

During biweekly supervision with the social worker, the supervisor will review search attempts and the results of electronic searches and any referral to the Private Investigator, ensure that the social worker follows up on sources of information, and make joint decisions about the extent of ongoing search efforts.

Closing the Case When a Child/Family Cannot Be Located

The supervisor is responsible to review and confirm the decision to close the case. This must include a review of the search efforts made, the results of the search efforts, and the sufficiency of all documentation. (CYD Policy Manual § 1530)

Cases closed as “whereabouts unknown” require review and sign off by the social work administrator.

Procedures

While the worker is in the field attempting to locate the child(ren)/family, the supervisor should be facilitating the worker’s search efforts by seeking and reviewing sources of information, and attempting to make contact from the office.

The supervisor will request that afterhours/weekend shifts of the Hotline make additional contact attempts when the risk is high, particularly when the subject child is not school age (any child under age seven), when there is reason to believe the child(ren) are unsafe, or when it seems appropriate after consultation with the social worker. The request for attempted contacts during the afterhours/weekend shifts is made to the supervisor on duty in the Hotline. It is the responsibility of that Hotline supervisor to ensure that the visit request is assigned or forwarded to the appropriate supervisor covering the shift in which the visit is to be made. If there is no agreement between supervisors regarding the appropriateness of an afterhours/weekend Hotline visit, attempts to resolve should continue up the chain of command until a decision is made.

ACCESSING SEARCH RESOURCES

Accessing the After-hours/weekend Hotline for assistance with contacts

When the risk is high, particularly when the subject child is not school age, or when it seems appropriate after consultation with the social worker, the social work supervisor can bring a request to make additional attempts to contact the family during the after-hours/weekend shifts to Hotline supervisor on duty. It is the responsibility of that Hotline supervisor to ensure that the visit request is assigned or forwarded to the appropriate supervisor covering the shift in which the visit is to be made. If there is no agreement between supervisors regarding the appropriateness of an afterhours/weekend Hotline visit, attempts to resolve should continue up the chain of command until a decision is made.

All decisions, and the basis for those decisions, must be documented by the social work administrator, and given to the assigned social worker for inclusion in the record. The contact by the after-hours/weekend staff and the outcome of the contact must be documented and sent by e-mail to the assigned social worker, supervisor and administrator, with a hard copy attached to the case record by the Hotline when it is returned to the assigned social worker the next business day.

Electronic Search

An electronic search is conducted by the Liaison and Customer Information unit. It can be accessed through the on-line "Request for Child Search" form, available through DHS Central. The search accesses electronic databases to search for children and families. The Liaison unit will document search efforts and results, including the date and time of the search, on the Search Results portion of the "Request for Child Search" Form.

Referral to a Private Investigator

The Private Investigator will be used as the search resource of last resort. For cases other than those on which it is required, referral to the Private Investigator requires review by the social work administrator, and approval by the director.

Mandatory referrals to the Private Investigator are:

- *On an investigation or assessment.*
- *On a search for a court-involved family who is receiving SCOH services.*
- *Any child or family receiving SCOH services when:*
 - *the last safety assessment indicated the child(ren) to be unsafe or conditionally safe*
 - *the last risk assessment on an active family indicated a high level of risk, and/or*
 - *the family has been uncooperative with the safety plan or with services.*

In all other situations, a referral to the Private Investigator will be made at the discretion of the director, on a case-by-case basis, after review of the situation and search efforts already made.

All decisions to refer or not to the Private Investigator must be documented in the case record.

Questions regarding this Policy and Procedural Guide may be addressed to:

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