



To the Mayor and Members of the City Council

June 21, 2022

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**SUBJECT: FORT WORTH POLICE DEPARTMENT POLICY FOR RUNAWAY CHILDREN**

The purpose of this Informal Report is to provide information on the Fort Worth Police Department's policy on runaway children.<sup>1</sup>

Definitions

1. A **runaway** is any child under the age of eighteen (18) who is voluntarily missing without the consent of the child's parent or guardian, regardless of whether the child plans to return or not.
  - a. Texas Family Code 51.03
    - i. (b) Conduct in Need of Supervision
      1. (2) the voluntary absence of a child from the child's home without the consent of the child's parent or guardian for a substantial length of time or without intent to return.
  - b. These cases will remain open until the parent or guardian has possession or can be provided with the whereabouts of the runaway.
2. A **missing child** is a child under the age of eighteen (18) and the child's custodian is unaware of the child's location, the circumstances of whose absence indicate that:
  - a. The child did not voluntarily leave, and the child was taken in violation of law,
  - b. The child voluntarily left without the custodian's consent and does not plan to return, or
  - c. The child was taken or retained in violation of a court order.
3. A **critical missing person** includes a child who is subject to immediate danger, or who is a danger to others. A missing child is listed under the **critical missing person** criteria when:
  - d. The child is under twelve years old (12), unless he or she is mature beyond his or her chronological age and is a habitual runaway.
  - e. The child has proven physical challenges like:
    - i. The child has a physical condition which requires him or her to be continuously supervised by another.
    - ii. The child has a proven mental health impairment that severely limits the child's ability to provide for his or her safety, necessities, or medications, and/or limits the child's ability to communicate.
    - iii. The child is required to take daily medication.
    - iv. The child is a danger to his or her self or others.
  - f. The child is absent under suspicious circumstances which suggest that the child might be the victim of a criminal act or foul play.

Policy

Reports of a missing person shall be taken immediately, as there is no required waiting period. A supervisor will be dispatched to any missing person under twelve (12) years of age or who has a proven mental health impairment. The responding officer shall conduct an initial investigation by obtaining all the facts surrounding the child's absence. If the child is deemed to be in immediate danger of serious bodily injury

<sup>1</sup>The sources used for this Informal Report are Family Code 51.03 (b) (2), Fort Worth Police Department General Orders 334.01, 334.02, 334.04, and the Fort Worth Police Department's Missing Person's Unit Standard Operating Procedures.

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or death or has a proven mental disability, a request may be made in writing to the Department of Public Safety for the Amber Plan may be employed. The Amber Plan shall be initiated whenever a child seventeen (17) years of age or younger or an individual under proven mental or physical disability is abducted, the child is believed to be in danger of serious injury or death, and there is enough descriptive information about the child, abductor and/or suspect vehicle to believe an immediate broadcast alert will be helpful. The Amber Plan shall be initiated whenever circumstances indicate the need for an immediate large-scale, organized search for an abducted child. The officer shall notify their supervisor with the details of the call. The supervisor will then contact the Major Case Unit for a request for the issuance of the alert.

If the circumstances of the child's absence are unclear, a normal investigation shall ensue. A search of the immediate area will be initiated and may include Air 1, Mounted Patrol, CERT volunteers, and/or the Fort Worth Police K9 Unit. Officers will exhaust all known avenues like friends, relatives, or associates as well as all other reasonable places that the child may be (jails, hospitals, shelters, etc.). If needed or as appropriate, the patrol supervisor will notify the Major Case Unit, the division commander, or designee, and the Public Relations Office.

Field searches may be discontinued and transferred to Major Case Missing Persons officers under certain circumstances, but only after a thorough investigation and permission to transfer the search is given by the division commander, or designee, if the child is a habitual runaway, there is no reason to believe that the child is in any immediate danger, the child does not fall under the Critical Missing Person criteria, and the Department has exhausted all known avenues of investigation.

If you have any questions about this information, please contact Assistant Chief Joseph Sparrow at 817-392-4231 or [Joseph.Sparrow@fortworthtexas.gov](mailto:Joseph.Sparrow@fortworthtexas.gov).

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