

Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services

Missing Persons Policy

This protocol applies to individuals supported by DDS who are reported as “missing.” Any individual supported by the Department of Developmental Services, who is missing, may be considered to be at risk. This includes someone who is missing for any period of time, if that individual is considered to be in immediate jeopardy, without regular monitoring or medical supervision. For these persons the following steps should be followed:

- ✓ **The Area Office will be immediately notified by family, providers or significant others.**
- ✓ **The Area Office staff will ask that a search of the immediate area where the person was last seen, will be conducted using as many resources as possible; both external and internal to DDS.**
- ✓ **The Area Office will place a call to Emergency Services/Police Department (911) for individuals in immediate jeopardy.**
- ✓ **DDS Providers/Area Office will complete an Incident Management Report in the HCSIS program.**
- ✓ **The Area Office may consider alerting the media after consultation with the Risk Management team and Central Office. Factors to consider before taking this step are: individual’s history, capacity and other factors.**

An individual’s support plan (ISP) specifies the period of time that an individual could safely be out of contact with family and or community contacts. For individuals living independently whose whereabouts are unknown to usual contacts for more than 24 hours without prior arrangement, the following steps should be followed:

- ✓ **The person who first becomes aware of the missing individual will notify the DDS Area Office.**
- ✓ **The individual’s team will consider previous patterns and behaviors of the individual and discuss with risk team.**
- ✓ **The Area Office will inquire with neighbors, family and companions for possible location of the individual.**
- ✓ **The Area Office will physically check familiar areas that the individual frequents, such as workplace and neighborhood locations like stores and restaurants.**
- ✓ **The Area Office will request a well person check by the local police department.**
- ✓ **The Area Office will evaluate situation in 48 hours and communicate again with known contacts; then act accordingly, communicating status to Risk Management team and Central Office.**
- ✓ **Consider alerting the media after consultation with Risk Management team and Central Office. Factors to consider before taking this step are: individual’s history, capacity and other factors, such as whether this is a common occurrence for the individual.**

EHS Media Relations Involvement:

When the Department of Developmental Services is seriously concerned about the immediate health and safety of an individual based on the individual's capacity to be independent and the length of time they are missing, the Commissioner's designee (Deputy Commissioner or Assistant Commissioner of Field Operations) will notify the Executive Office of Health and Human Services Media Relations team to apprise them of the missing person. Commissioner's designee will contact EHS Media Relations immediately to apprise them when a decision has been made by a provider, family member or Area/Regional office to alert the media. The information provided to EOHHS will include the region of the state and the exact media outlet i.e. television station.