



**TEXAS**  
**Department of Family  
and Protective Services**

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*Investigations*

**Finding Families  
Resource Guide**

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**Purpose** - This Resource Guide provides general strategies for locating families and specific strategies for certain common situations. The strategies and information are meant to provide guidance, not mandates or policy, for how to address certain situations.

**When Do You Do This?** - Locating families may need to be done at any time during the life of the case; however, it is especially crucial during the initial contact.

**Introduction** - It is critical to know a family's location in order to maintain contact with the family. The caseworker is expected to make a reasonable effort to locate a family, and thoroughly document that effort, before requesting the assistance of a Special Investigator (SI).

Maintaining contact with the family is critical to ensuring child safety. It not only allows you to identify any dangers to the child, it is vital to engaging in a collaborative effort with caregivers and other individuals important to the family, to establish a safety network that is committed to sustaining the child's safety. This cooperative team increases the caseworker's knowledge of the child's location and safety.

Remember that no single strategy or set of strategies applies to all situations. What you do in each situation depends largely on the unique circumstances of that situation. Consult with your supervisor and determine the best strategic approach to each case.

## POLICY

Refer to policy in CPS Handbook, [3100 - Actions to Take When a Child or Principal Cannot Be Located](#)

## STRATEGIES FOR FINDING FAMILIES

### COLLECTING AND DOCUMENTING CONTACT INFORMATION

The best way you can help yourself and other caseworkers find families is to collect as much contact and identifying information about family members as possible. This includes not just basic information such as addresses and telephone numbers, but also information such as family history, habits and detailed identifying information (see *Strategies* below). This information can give you or other caseworkers clues as to how to locate a family if the agency later needs to contact that family or individual members.

### STRATEGIES

**Try to find out where the family has lived before**, or where they have family or friends. This information can assist in locating the family later.

**Try to find out who is important to the family.** Don't just ask who is in their support network, ask who is on their cell phone, who is on their Facebook pages, who they see regularly. Who would they turn to for help? Who have they known the longest? Ask about community members who are important to them (such as pastors, doctors, etc.). These may be potential resources in locating the family.

**When interviewing collaterals, ask deeper questions** (beyond just "Are they here?"). Try to find out details about the family's habits and characteristics. Ask detailed questions about ways to contact, last contact, contacting others who know the family. At the same time, engage in a conversation, rather than confronting individuals. Talk about the people, not the case. Spend time to gain the collateral's trust,

emphasizing that you are seeking to ensure the child's safety. Leave your business card when making a contact visit.

**Gather as much detailed information as you can about each family member.** Information that may be useful in finding an individual includes (but is not limited to):

- Specific identifying information (DOB, SSN, Driver's License number, etc.)
- Physical description (age, height, weight, eye color, hair color, scars or tattoos)
- Alternate name spellings, nicknames, maiden names or aliases
- Where they were born or grew up
- Relatives/close friends, and where they live
- Schools they attended
- Work history, type of work they typically do (for example, welder, accountant, etc.)
- Former marriages
- Military history
- What kind of car they drive; license plate number
- Hobbies or interests
- Organizations they may belong to

**Document as much of this information as possible in IMPACT.** It may help you or other caseworkers later.

Don't just enter contact details in your contacts, but make sure you **update all applicable information on the Person List.**

**Document all attempted contacts thoroughly.** This will demonstrate timely and diligent efforts to locate the family.

## NO ADDRESS IS GIVEN AT INTAKE

In this situation your first priority is to obtain possible addresses for the family. Once you determine an address, you should attempt contact, or request a courtesy visit immediately.

## STRATEGIES

**Look through the intake and previous history for possible contact numbers or addresses.** Don't just look for parents or caregivers; look for relatives and other adults who may know where the family is. Also look for other information that may be useful, for example, hours children attend school, weekly meetings an adult may attend, and so on.

**Always try to contact the reporter (unless anonymous),** and see if they can provide contact information.

**Run the family's information through various databases** (for example: TIERS, Facebook, Google, local law enforcement, and so on). Support staff, such as Admin Techs, can do some of these tasks. (When requesting a Special Investigator, he or she will also search databases such as Accurint and the Texas Education Agency.)

**Speak with local school districts, if the child is school-aged.** Check for current enrollment or a records request from another district.

If you cannot locate the family, see [3110](#) Conducting a Diligent Search and Placing the Family on the Child Safety Check Alert List.

## THE ADDRESS DOES NOT EXIST

In this situation you have an address, but it is clearly incorrect. Maybe the address is to a vacant lot, abandoned building, or even a business. In this scenario you want to obtain as much information as you can about the area around the reported address before working the case.

### STRATEGIES

Use the same strategies for "No Address Given at Intake".

Check the intake report to ensure the address numbers have not been "transposed" (switched around).

Speak with a property manager, neighbors, or any other collaterals around the address. Check the corner grocery, gas station, pharmacy or other location an individual may have frequented. (See "[When interviewing collaterals...](#)", under **Collecting and Documenting Contact Information**.)

## THE ADDRESS EXISTS, BUT THE FAMILY HAS MOVED

In this scenario you have a valid address, but the family is clearly no longer there. The goal in this scenario is twofold: gain as much information from collaterals who might have known the family, and find the family.

### STRATEGIES

Use the same strategies for "No Address Given at Intake" and "The Address Does Not Exist".

Contact the property owner or manager. See if you can gain access to the home or apartment. This will allow you to assess the condition of home and also look for clues of their potential location.

If you have school or work contact information, use that information to attempt contact.

If you have phone or e-mail information, try contacting a family member that way. This includes texting an individual.

Send registered and non-registered mail to the former or last known address.

If you cannot locate the family, see [3110](#) Conducting a Diligent Search and Placing the Family on the Child Safety Check Alert List.

## FAMILY WILL NOT RESPOND

In this scenario all evidence points to the family living in the home, but not answering the door. This scenario is tricky, especially if you have P1. You want to engage with the family, but you must still take the necessary steps to assess safety.

### STRATEGIES

Contact all principals and collaterals associated with the case. (See "[When interviewing collaterals...](#)", under **Collecting and Documenting Contact Information**.)

Conduct visits at different times of the day, especially "after hours", including before 8AM and after 7PM.

**Try meeting the parents at the school**, or call the parents from the school's landline.

Try to **schedule appointments with the family at other locations and times** to meet their needs.

If necessary, **call in a police welfare check after hours**. If law enforcement makes contact with the family, be prepared to respond to the residence if necessary. Be sure to staff with your supervisor before taking this approach.

If you know where the family is but they refuse to respond, do not conduct a diligent search and do not put the family and child on the CSCAL. See [3114](#) Exceptions to the Requirement to Place the Family on the CSCAL.

## CAREGIVERS REFUSE TO COOPERATE

This scenario can be very frustrating for a caseworker. You know where the parents are, but they flat out refuse to cooperate with you. In this scenario, remain calm. Remember how you would feel if CPS knocked on your door. Gather as much information as you can during any cooperative conversations.

## STRATEGIES

**Contact all principals and personal collaterals** associated with the case.

**Contact all available professional collaterals** (school, personal, medical, etc.).

**NOTE:** Once you have obtained as much information as possible and the family still refuses to meet, you should consider **requesting Special Investigator assistance and/or staffing the case with legal counsel** for a motion/order to investigate. If an order is needed, continue attempts to engage the family while waiting on the order.

If you know where the family is but they refuse to cooperate, do not conduct a diligent search and do not put the family and child on the CSCAL. See [3114](#) Exceptions to the Requirement to Place the Family on the CSCAL.

## PLACING THE FAMILY ON THE CHILD SAFETY ALERT CHECK LIST (CSCAL)

### CONDUCTING A DILIGENT SEARCH

#### ***Per [3111](#) The Caseworker's Responsibilities:***

In an investigation (INV), alternative response (AR), or family preservation (FPR) stage, the caseworker must begin a diligent search immediately after the first unsuccessful attempt to contact the child and family.

#### **Time Frames for the Diligent Search**

The caseworker must conduct the diligent search for the following time periods, beginning with the day of the caseworker's first unsuccessful attempt to contact the child and family.

- Four days for Priority 1 INVs
- Ten days for Priority 2 INV, AR, and FPR stages

As part of the diligent search, take the actions listed in [3111.2](#) Required Diligent Search Actions.

If you are unable to locate the family by the end of the fourth or tenth day, respectively, take the actions listed in [3111.3](#) Actions at the End of the Caseworker's Diligent Search.

#### **Exception: A Child in Imminent Danger**

If at any time you believe that the child is in imminent danger, immediately staff with your supervisor. If the supervisor agrees the child is in imminent danger, the supervisor will staff with the special investigator program director (SIPD) to submit a referral to DPS immediately.

#### **Listing a Family on the Child Safety Check Alert List (CSCAL)**

If the family has not been located within the appropriate time period, the caseworker or special investigator (depending on the Priority level - P1 INV or P2 INV, AR, FPR - and stage of the case) completes the form to have the child and family placed on the Child Safety Check Alert List (CSCAL). The caseworker or special investigator forwards the form to the special investigator program director (SIPD). The SIPD submits a request to the Texas Crime Information Center (TCIC) at the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to have the child or family placed on CSCAL.

See [3113](#) The Special Investigator Program Director's (SIPD) Responsibilities.

### STRATEGIES

The supervisor will request that a Special Investigator (SI) be assigned to the case:

- on the fourth day after the diligent search began for Priority 1 investigations; or
- on the tenth day for P2 INV, AR and FPR cases.

See [3111.3](#) Actions at the End of the Caseworker's Diligent Search.

When requesting an SI, **provide as much specific detail about the individuals as possible**. For example, age or date of birth, SSN, appearance (height, weight, eye and hair color, scars, marks or tattoos), driver's license info, car make and model, license plate and state of registration.

**Thoroughly document your efforts for the SI**, so he or she doesn't duplicate efforts. Provide extensive details about contact attempts and efforts to locate the family. Before requesting an SI, make sure the *Person List* is updated with the most accurate information.

Once the SI request is accepted, be sure to **make the SI the secondary on the case**.

The SI will take further actions to locate the family. See [3112](#) The Special Investigator's Responsibilities.

## ACTIONS DURING A DILIGENT SEARCH

See [3111.2](#) Required Diligent Search Actions.

During the diligent search, complete all reasonable actions and use all available resources appropriate for the case, to locate the child or family as quickly as possible.

Additionally, you should take these actions when conducting a diligent search for a family, when the action is reasonable based on the case circumstances.

- Contact the reporter unless anonymous.
- Contact property managers or landlords or any other collaterals around the address, such as the corner grocery, gas station, pharmacy or other location an individual may have frequented.
- Contact the school or day care center that the child attended.
- Contact the parents' employers.
- Request or conduct available on-line searches through various databases such as Facebook, Google, and so on.
- Attempt to contact everyone listed on the Intake. This includes calling all phone numbers listed on the Intake (reporter, family members and collaterals) or anyone associated with the person(s) in IMPACT and updating their information in IMPACT if phone numbers and addresses are found to be invalid.
- Review CPS history on the family and make attempts to contact absent fathers and other family members listed in those cases.
- Contact other professionals involved with the family (medical, school, etc.).
- Review FINDRS search returns and follow up on any information that might help locate the person(s). Include or forward these returns with the request to the SIPD.
- If information is available, phone or e-mail or text the family members that can't be located. Call the parents using the school or day care's landline.
- Send registered and non-registered mail to the former or last known address, if any.
- Complete good basic investigative steps to locate these person(s).
- Document all contacts and attempted contacts.
- Review the current case documentation to ensure it is up to date and complete. The supervisor needs to verify this.

**This is not an exhaustive list of steps.** You and your supervisor need to look at the circumstances surrounding each case and determine the appropriate steps.



## CHILD IN DPS CONSERVATORSHIP ABDUCTED BY BIOLOGICAL FAMILY

### **Per [3115](#) Child in DFPS Conservatorship Goes Missing:**

If a child in DFPS conservatorship is abducted by his or her biological family, or runs away, the caseworker must report the child as missing to the appropriate law enforcement officials, for placement onto the National Crime Information Center Database (NCIC) as a missing person.

If the law enforcement officials decline to enter the child as a missing person on NCIC, the caseworker must, within 24 hours of learning of law enforcement's decision not to enter the child as a missing person:

- notify the supervisor;
- complete the *CSCAL Data Entry Form*, stating the name of the law enforcement agency contacted, complete the *Additional Child or Offender* form if necessary, and send them to the special investigator program director (SIPD) for referral to the Child Safety Check Alert List (CSCAL); and
- continue searching for the child.

The caseworker and SI must continue searching for the child in DFPS conservatorship until the child is found or a court dismisses conservatorship of the child.

If the biological family flees with the child and DFPS obtains conservatorship so we can place the child in substitute care when located, follow the same procedure.

## REMOVING THE FAMILY FROM THE CHILD SAFETY ALERT CHECKLIST

State law requires that CPS remove a child or family from CSCAL once CPS locates the child or family.

If you locate a child or family who is on CSCAL and in an INV, AR, FPR or CVS case, immediately notify your supervisor and the SIPD. The SIPD will take immediate steps to remove the child or family from CSCAL.

See:

[3111.5](#) Immediate Face-to-Face Contact When a Family is Located

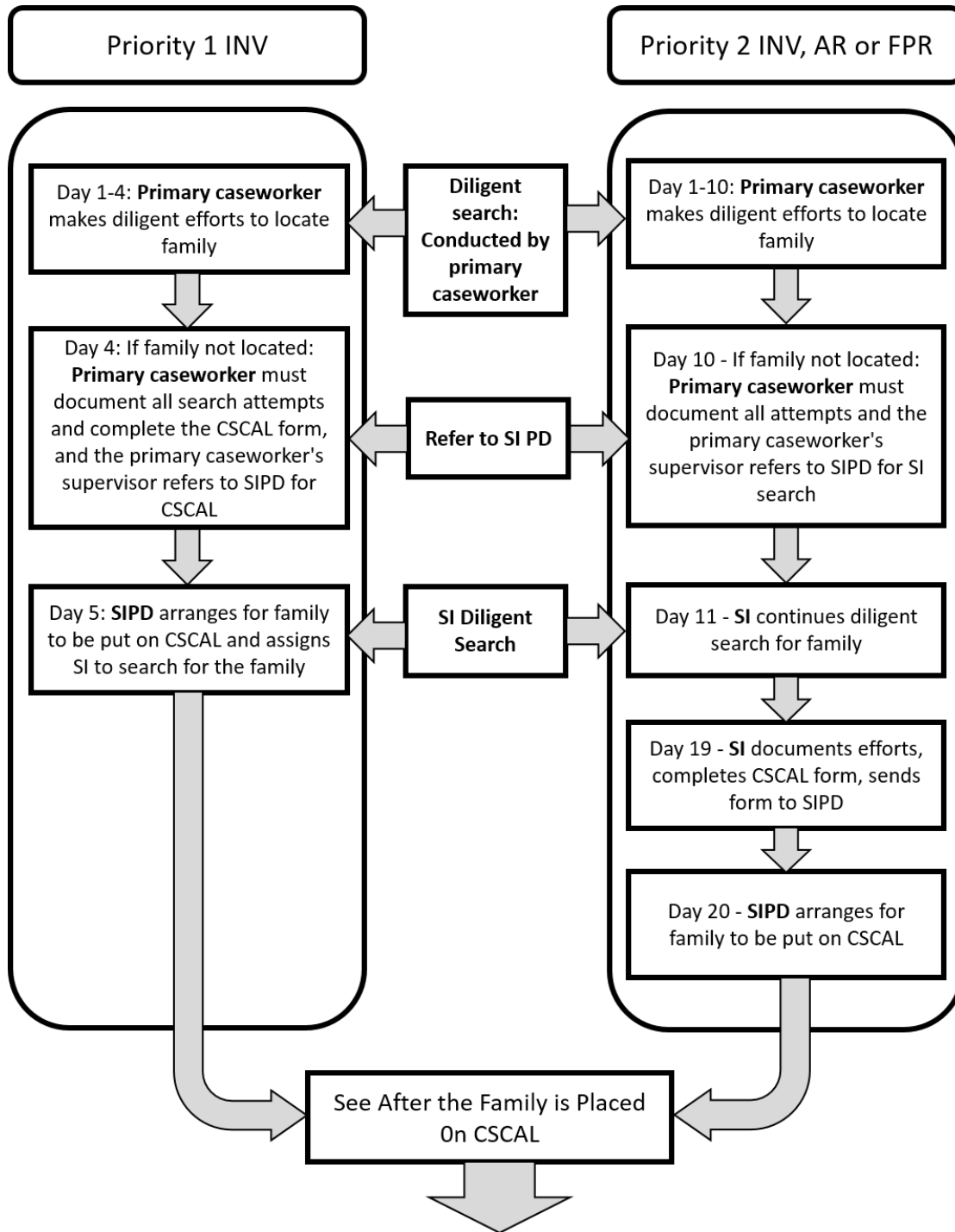
[3112.4](#) Special Investigator Locates a Child on CSCAL

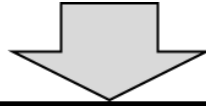
[3113.3](#) Arranging for Child and Family to be Taken Off the CSCAL

[3114](#) Exceptions to the Requirement to Place the Family on the CSCAL

# CSCAL FLOW CHARTS

## SEARCHING FOR AND ENTERING CHILD AND FAMILY ON CSCAL





**After the Family is Placed on CSCAL**

After the family is placed on the CSCAL, the SI continues to search for family until the child is located, avenues for searching for the family have been exhausted, or 30 days have passed since CSCAL was filed, whichever comes first. If the family is located through their diligent search efforts, then the SI will interview the child/family and complete the safety assessment (for investigations). If the SI determines that a safety intervention is required they may request caseworker assistance from the supervisor if needed. After contact with the family, the SI sends the case back to the primary caseworker for completion. If the family is not located in an investigation, the SI submits the case for closure in accordance with policy. If the family is not located in an AR or FPR case then the SI notifies the primary caseworker and the primary caseworker closes the case.

**CHILD IS LOCATED AND CSCAL IS CLEARED IN AN OPEN CASE**

