

CONVERSATION GUIDE ON RETURN FROM AWOLP

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

Upon locating a youth who is AWOLP, federal mandate requires a conversation to determine the primary factors that contributed to the youth being absent from foster care and to determine the youth's experiences while absent. This should occur between the youth and their foster care worker within the first five days after a youth is located and the conversation documented in SW contacts with the purpose categorized as "Interview w/youth on return from AWOLP." Specific details of the youth's AWOLP experience should be included in Additional Narrative section of the SW contacts.

This guide is provided to offer potential approaches to identify reasons a youth may have left their placement and potential trauma or risk the youth was exposed to during the AWOLP episode, including being a victim of sex trafficking.¹ This conversation should also identify future placement needs and services.

Prior to the start of the interview, instruct the youth the interview is to not assign blame, make them feel uncomfortable, or to get them in trouble, but to gather information to better support them. The conversation should be held at a location the youth has chosen. If the youth does not feel comfortable with verbal answers, they may write down their answers instead. No single affirmative answer determines whether a youth has been a victim of trafficking. If the interviewer feels the youth is a victim of sex trafficking, contact Central Intake immediately.

I. What led the youth to leave placement?

- Did your previous placement address your needs?
- Was there an incident that caused you to leave your previous placement?

II. What are the youth's preferences for the next placement?

- What can your current or next placement do to meet your needs?

III. What situations/experiences was the youth exposed to during AWOLP?

- How did you support yourself while AWOLP (i.e. obtain food, shelter, etc.)?
- Did you earn any money? Did anyone take your money or a portion of your money? Did anyone hold your money for "safe keeping?"
- When you were AWOLP, were you living or staying by yourself, with your family, or with others? If others, with whom did you live?
- Did anyone at the place(s) you lived, monitor you or stop you from contacting your family, friends, or others?
- Did anyone take and keep your identification documents; for example, your passport, state ID, or driver's license? Do you know what they did with it?
- Did anyone provide you with identification that didn't belong to you?
- Did anyone ask you to lie about your age or your experiences while AWOLP?
- If you did borrow or owe money, were you pressured to do anything you didn't want to do to pay it back? Are you currently in debt to someone?
- Did anyone make you feel scared or unsafe?
- Did anyone hurt you or threaten to hurt you? Did anyone threaten to hurt your family?
- Did anyone take a photo of you that you were uncomfortable with?
- Did you give out your contact information to anyone while AWOLP, including cell phone number or social media info? If so, to whom did you give it?
- In any situation while AWOLP, did anyone provide you with illegal drugs, substances or alcohol?

¹ A sex trafficking victim is defined as "an individual subject to the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act" or who is a victim of a "severe form of trafficking in persons" in which "a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induces to perform the act is under 18 years old." Section 103 of the Sex Trafficking Victims Protection Act.