
2010-001

January 26, 2010

Issuer **Disaster Services Department**

Audience **Disaster Services**

Topic **Unaccompanied Minors in Shelters**

I. PURPOSE

This Connection further defines the role of the Red Cross in addressing the needs of unaccompanied minors at Red Cross shelters and service delivery sites, guides coordination with state and local law enforcement authorities, and provides information to assist in planning with partners and managing internal and external expectations. An “unaccompanied minor” is generally defined as any individual younger than 18 years of age who is not with a parent or guardian.

Note that this Connection supersedes guidance that was previously issued in the *Shelter Operations Management Toolkit*.

II. KEY POINTS

Following are the key points of this Connection. Each of these key points is explained in further detail in the Guidance Section of this document.

1. This guidance supersedes any previously issued guidance on this topic.
2. If an unaccompanied minor arrives at a shelter or service center, Red Cross should try to reach the parent or legal guardian and contact law enforcement if unable to do so.
3. The [American Red Cross Unaccompanied Minors Report Form](#) must be used to document the minor’s arrival, changes in circumstances, etc.
4. Red Cross should make every effort to designate two volunteers or paid staff members to supervise an unaccompanied minor.
5. If an unaccompanied minor arrives with an urgent health need, he/she should be referred to appropriate medical facilities and the circumstances should be documented.
6. If the minor’s medical status requires transfer to a medical facility, Emergency Medical Service assumes responsibility for the minor during transport and transfers responsibility to the medical facility staff upon its arrival.
7. Unaccompanied minors should not be photographed or interviewed by third parties except in very specific circumstances (as outlined below).
8. Parents or guardians must provide government-issued identification when taking custody of a minor, and the transfer must be documented.

III. ACCEPTING UNACCOMPANIED MINORS AT RED CROSS SHELTERS AND OTHER SERVICE DELIVERY SITES

While care of unaccompanied minors is not the primary responsibility of the Red Cross

and is instead the responsibility of government agencies and other social service organizations, the Red Cross's trustworthiness and high visibility during times of disaster often results in situations in which unaccompanied minors arrive at a Red Cross shelter or service delivery site. When this occurs, the Red Cross should accept unaccompanied minors and should implement special safeguards to ensure their safety.

During non-disaster times, Red Cross units are encouraged to coordinate with other agencies and partners to ensure that the community has an appropriate plan for unaccompanied minors and that roles of various organizations are well-defined and understood. It is also important to anticipate any expected language needs.

IV. CONTACTING STATE OR LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES

When an unaccompanied minor arrives at a Red Cross shelter or other Red Cross service delivery site, Red Cross staff members must attempt to reach the parent or legal guardian by phone. If unable to reach a parent or legal guardian, a Red Cross staff member must contact state or local law enforcement authorities immediately. In the event of a catastrophic incident, notification must occur as soon as possible under the circumstances. It is the responsibility of the Red Cross unit to determine in advance which state or local law enforcement agency should be contacted. In addition, that organization's contact information should be readily available at the Red Cross shelter or Red Cross service delivery site.

Once the state or local law enforcement authorities have been informed of the unaccompanied minor in the Red Cross shelter or service delivery site, Red Cross staff will coordinate with those authorities until the unaccompanied minor is transferred to the custody of the state or local authority.

In the event that Red Cross is unable to contact state or local law enforcement authorities (for any length of time), staff should follow the policies described in this guidance.

V. SUPERVISION OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

If possible, Red Cross should designate licensed volunteer or paid staff (e.g., health or mental health professionals) to supervise unaccompanied minors until the minors are transferred to the custody of state or local authorities. If no licensed volunteer or paid staff is available to provide such assistance, an established chapter or Disaster Services Human Resources (DSHR) volunteer or paid staff member should supervise the minor. If possible, there should be at least two adults present with an unaccompanied minor, and the minor should not be left alone or with other unaccompanied minors without adult supervision. Staff members providing supervision must have passed a background check. Spontaneous volunteers must not be

designated to supervise unaccompanied minors.

VI. MAINTAINING DETAILED RECORDS

If an unaccompanied minor is accepted at a Red Cross service delivery site, detailed records of his or her situation must be kept by the volunteer or paid staff supervising the minor, including any form of identification from schools or other agencies. Using the [American Red Cross Unaccompanied Minors Report Form](#), gather detailed information from the minor or the individual or group that accompanied the minor. The following information must be recorded: the minor's name and address (if possible to ascertain); any information that could help identify the parents or guardians; information on where the minor was found or how the minor came to be separated from his or her parent or guardian; contact details for any state or local law enforcement authorities; record of date and time of any contacts with such authorities along with information on the plan for ensuring the minor's safety; and detailed information on transfer of minor into the custody of state or local law enforcement authorities (to be recorded when that transfer takes place).

VII. UNACCOMPANIED MINORS WITH IMMEDIATE/ URGENT MEDICAL NEEDS

If an unaccompanied minor arrives at a Red Cross service delivery site with a health need that requires immediate urgent medical care or assessment, he or she should be referred to the appropriate available medical facilities. When this occurs, it is critical that Disaster Health Services and/or Disaster Mental Health guidance regarding urgent/emergent referrals to a higher level of care be followed. This guidance ensures that these minors can be accurately tracked.

If a medical referral of a minor occurs, local and/or state law enforcement authorities must be consulted immediately to initiate the process for reuniting the unaccompanied minor with his or her parent or guardian and for local or state authorities to assume responsibility for coordinating care for medical needs. If the minor's medical status requires transfer to a medical facility prior to local and/or law enforcement arrival, the Emergency Medical Service will assume responsibility for the minor during transport and will then transfer responsibility to the medical facility staff upon its arrival. In this instance, the local and/or state law enforcement authorities must be notified of any change in the minor's condition and of any transfers of responsibility.

VIII. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Unaccompanied minors should not be photographed or interviewed by third parties other than local or state law enforcement, child welfare agencies within the jurisdiction, and partner agencies which have a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Red Cross regarding services and care for minors.

IX. PROPER IDENTIFICATION OF PARENT OR GUARDIAN AND DOCUMENTATION

If the unaccompanied minor leaves the Red Cross facility prior to transfer into the custody of the state or local law enforcement authorities, or without the involvement of law enforcement, obtain the following information from the individual who is accompanying the minor: his or her name, address, phone number or other contact information, and personal identification from a government source, such as a driver's license (if possible). This requirement applies even where the person claiming an unaccompanied minor states that he or she is the parent or guardian of the minor.

Use the [American Red Cross Unaccompanied Minors Report Form](#), to document identification, authorities involved and transfer information. Completed forms should remain on file with Health Services until the child is transferred and then should be retained in chapter records.

X. FURTHER INFORMATION

Questions regarding this Disaster Services Connection may be directed to the following contacts:

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