

Children Missing from Care, Home or Education

SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER

This joint Protocol regarding children missing from home or care in Cambridgeshire has been endorsed by Cambridgeshire Local Safeguarding Children Board.

RELATED GUIDANCE

[Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, Department for Education](#)

[Cambridgeshire Missing from Home Exemplar Operational Guidance](#)

[Cambridgeshire Missing from Home Exemplar Social Care Guidance](#)

AMENDMENT

In February 2016, the following sections of this chapter were revised and updated:

- [Section 13, Return Home Interview;](#)
- [Section 16, Children Who Repeatedly Go Missing;](#)
- [Section 31, Initial Action by the Police \(Missing from Care\).](#)

This chapter is currently under review.

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1. Introduction

This Protocol is important for the safeguarding of children and families in Cambridgeshire, or those using services in the County. It should be read and implemented, where necessary by all practitioners and managers working with children/young people who are missing from Home or Care.

It was approved by members of Cambridgeshire Safeguarding Children Board and members of the Children's Trust Stay Safe Partnership following the publication of "statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care" in July 2009 which is designed to support local authorities in meeting the requirements of National Indicator 71- Missing from Home and Care.

The most effective assessment and support comes through good information sharing, joint assessments of need, joint planning, and professional trust within the interagency network and joint action in partnership with families.

Cambridgeshire Safeguarding Children Board and Cambridgeshire Children's Trust expects all agencies working with children/young people who are missing from Home or Care to implement this protocol and ensure that all relevant staff are aware of it and how to use it.

If you believe that a child/ young person is at immediate risk, this should be reported without delay to the **Police as a 999 emergency** and a contact made to the **County Council Contact Centre telephone number 0345 045 1362**. A telephone referral should be followed up in writing within 48 hours. If a previous EHA assessment has been done this should be forwarded too.

2. Causes of Running Away

The main reasons for running away are:

- Problems at home - ranging from arguments with parents or carers to long-term abuse or maltreatment;
- Family break-up where young people are drawn into their parents conflict;
- Mental health problems;
- Bullying, racism and racial harassment, homophobia;
- Teenage pregnancy;
- Wanting to be near friends or family - especially where a young person is in care and there are problems with contact;
- Grooming for sexual exploitation - evidence indicates that 90% of children subject to sexual exploitation go missing at some point;
- Child trafficking - young people may go missing when they are being trafficked (see separate guidance: [East of England Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children \(UASC\) Safeguarding Protocol](#));
- Forced Marriage - some young people may run away because they are at risk of or in a forced marriage.

The immediate risks associated with going missing include:

- No means of support or legitimate income- leading to high risk activities;
- Involvement in criminal activities;
- Victim of Abuse;
- Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and exploitation;
- Alcohol/substance misuse;
- Deterioration of physical and mental health;
- Missing out on schooling and education;
- Increased vulnerability.

Longer-term risks include:

- Long-term drug dependency/alcohol dependency;
- Crime;
- Homelessness;
- Disengagement from education;
- Child sexual exploitation;
- Poor physical and/or mental health.

3. Scope of Protocol

This protocol is designed for:

- All children/young people under 18 who go missing from their family home;
- Children/young people in the care of Cambridgeshire County Council placed in Local Authority Children's Homes within the authority's boundaries;
- Children/young people in the care of Cambridgeshire County Council placed with foster carers within the authority's boundaries;
- Children/young people in the care of Cambridgeshire County Council placed in private establishments or with agency foster carers within the local authority boundaries and where compliance with the protocol is specified in the contract or placement agreement;
- Children/young people in the care of other local authorities who are placed in Cambridgeshire;
- Children and young people who are identified as being at risk of running away;
- This protocol will always apply to children/young people who have a disability, which limits their independence whatever their age. It also recognizes that some of children/young people will be placed within residential special schools and educational establishments.

Children Missing from Education:

See also the January 2015 Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities "[Children Missing Education](#)".

Children and young people who run away and go missing are also likely to be missing from education. Some children missing education may also be missing from home. Information will be exchanged with Cambridgeshire

County Council Children Missing Education Officer (see [Appendix 5: Children Missing Education: The Role of the Local Authority in Identifying and Addressing Children Missing from Home or Care](#)).

Emergency Duty Team services:

Procedures are set out to include occasions when children/young people go missing or are located out of office hours and the involvement of EDT is required. EDT has established protocols for working with other agencies where there are concerns about children.

Services to young people who may run away:

The needs of children / young people who may run away can be identified through use of the EHA, planning and review process by the wide range of agencies that make up the children's workforce and / or Youth Support services within the County Council or voluntary sector. This will help identify cases of running away early and provide opportunities to address and prevent escalation.

Children with mental health needs, learning and physical disabilities are particularly vulnerable when missing. They may have communication difficulties and fewer opportunities to disclose reasons for running away. All agencies should be alert to the particular needs of disabled children, making sure they know how to raise concerns and receive whatever assistance and support they require.

Cambridgeshire County Council Children & Young People's Services has emergency accommodation available for young people for whom it is not in their best interests to return home.

4. Monitoring Cambridgeshire's Missing Children/Young People

Cambridgeshire Police collect information about missing children on the Lotus Notes database. The Police will provide Children's Social Care (Head of Children's Social Care) with regular reports of children who have been reported missing.

As and when the Police "Compact" missing persons database is available in Cambridgeshire, the Police will provide Children's Social care (Head of Children's Services) with regular reports of children who have been reported missing. Information regarding missing episodes will be monitored through the Children's Trust data set and the Local Safeguarding Children Board through their quality assurance process.

Cambridgeshire's children and young people's social care service will also record missing children known the service on ICS (see [Appendix 6: Social Care Recording a Missing Child on ICS](#) for details).

5. Definitions; Missing, Unauthorised Absence, Absconder

All parties should be clear about the definition of a missing person, and discourage the inappropriate reporting of unauthorised absences, (or 'out without permission'), as missing persons.

Missing Person - (The National Police Chiefs' Council (formerly known as Association of Chief Police Officers') Definition): "a missing person is anyone whose whereabouts are unknown, whatever the circumstances of disappearance. He or she will be considered missing until located and his or her well being, or otherwise, established."

- The terms "**young runaway**" and "**missing**" in this context refer to children/young people up to the age of 18 who have run away from their home or care placement, have been forced to leave, or whose whereabouts is unknown;
- An "**absconder**" is a child/young person who is absent from their placement without permission and who is subject to an order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process such as curfews, tagging etc or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings.

"**Unauthorised absence**" (or 'out without permission') where a child's whereabouts is known - or thought to be known but unconfirmed - they are **not** missing and may be considered as an "unauthorised absence" following a risk assessment that does not raise concern for their immediate safety or that of the public.

Children Missing Education (CME) - see [Appendix 5: Children Missing Education: The Role of the Local Authority in Identifying and Addressing Children Missing from Home or Care](#) for policy and procedures.

Child Abduction - where a child/young person has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence a report should be made immediately to the police.

Separate guidance has been produced for Unaccompanied Asylum seeking Children who go Missing and Trafficking. See [East of England Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children \(UASC\) Safeguarding Protocol](#).

6. Legal Framework

See [Appendix 1: The Legal Framework](#) for further details.

- The law does not regard young people under the age of 16 as being able to live independently away from home. However, in the ruling by Judge Baroness Hale (Southwark ruling 2009) all 16+ year olds who present themselves as hungry and homeless must be assessed as children in need by Children's Social Care under the Children Act 1989;
- Where a child/young person under 16 (or 18 if disabled) stays with a person (other than a person with **Parental Responsibility** or close relative) for 28 days or more, the person caring for them is acting as a 'private foster carer' within the meaning of s.66 of the Children Act 1989 and therefore must notify the local authority that they are privately fostering the child/young person. Failure to notify the local authority is an offence;
- Anyone, without Parental Responsibility, who has care of a child/young person may do what is reasonable in all circumstances to safeguard and promote the child/young person's welfare (s.3(5) Children Act 1989). It is reasonable to inform the Police or Children's Social Care and, if appropriate, their parents, of the child/young person's safety and whereabouts;
- Anyone who "takes or detains" a runaway under the age of 16 without lawful authority may be prosecuted under s.2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984. However, the enforcement of this provision may be problematic if the young person has chosen to stay with an adult of his/her own free will. Police powers should be considered in these circumstances;
- A person who unlawfully removes, keeps away, assists or otherwise encourages a child to run away or stay away from their care placement may be guilty of an offence and liable to prosecution (s49 Children Act 1989);
- A court may make a Recovery Order concerning a child who is the subject of a **Care Order** or an **Emergency Protection Order**; or who is the subject of **Police Protection** under s46 of the Children Act 1989 Order if there are grounds to believe that he has been unlawfully taken away from the person responsible for his care, or if he has run away or has been missing from care (s50 of the Children Act 1989). The Order acts as a direction for the child to be produced or for disclosure of his whereabouts. It also has the effect of permitting a police officer to enter named premises to search for the child using reasonable force if necessary.

7. Children/Young People who Run Away and Go Missing from Home

Please also see:

- [Cambridgeshire Missing from Home Exemplar Operational Guidance](#); and
- [Cambridgeshire Missing from Home Exemplar Social Care Guidance](#).

Quick guide 'Missing from Home' - see [Appendix 3: Young People Missing from Home Process Flowchart](#).

- Every individual has a duty to inform the Police if a child/young person is missing;
- For children and young people, including those over the age of 16, agencies need to consider, along with their family or main carers, their physical and emotional needs, any additional concerns with regard to their wellbeing/welfare and the potential risk factors when assessing the likelihood of harm if the young person continues to be absent from home or their usual accommodation.

Parents and others responsible for the care of a child/young person

Parents and anyone who has care of a child/young person (e.g. friend, child minder, etc.) are expected first to undertake basic measures to try and locate their child if considered safe to do so and ascertain their safety:

- Search bedroom / house / outbuildings / vehicles;
- Contact known friends and relatives where child/ young person may be;
- Visit locations that the child is known to frequent, if safe to do so.

It is considered a reasonable step for parents or carers of a child to inform the Police that their child is missing.

All Agencies (e.g. hospitals, assessment centres etc.) with care of a child or young person, must, before reporting to the Police as a missing person, take all reasonable steps to locate the young person by searching the building, grounds etc. if it is considered safe for the young person or others to do so.

If it comes to the attention of any agency (including voluntary organisations) that a young person is missing from home, they must advise the parent / carer of the agency's duty to ensure that the matter is reported to the police, If necessary, the agency will follow this up by contacting the police to verify the reporting by the parent / carer has occurred.

The consent of a person with Parental Responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any subsequent missing person investigation.

8. Contacting the Police

If the child / young person is not found a report should be made immediately to the Police by telephone or in person.

In an emergency dial 999 and ask for Police, non-emergencies dial 101.

On contacting the Police Central Referral Unit you will be asked the following questions which also form part of a risk assessment:

- Child/young person's name and date of birth, legal status;
- Where missing from, time went missing and who might be with child /young person;
- What the child/young person was wearing;
- Description (with recent photograph if available);
- Medical History with details of GP and dentist;
- Time and location last seen;
- Circumstances of going missing;

- Situation immediately prior to the young person going missing;
- Details of family addresses;
- Details of friends and associates;
- Vulnerability factors which increase risk to the young person - e.g. disability, mental health issues;
- Is this incident out of character?
- Previous absences and exposed to harm;
- Subject to bullying;
- Interaction with others, boundaries, engage in 'risky behaviour';
- Do they know who they could go to to ask for help?
- What action has been taken to locate the child?

9. Initial Action by the Police

On receipt of a report of a runaway/missing child Cambridgeshire Police will institute a plan to locate the child. A decision between the force control room and the duty sergeant will be made as to whether the individual should be dealt with under the 'Missing person' or 'absent' category through a review of the information and the risk. Where the individual is considered to be absent the person will be updated that action will not be taken to locate the individual by the police and that it will be reviewed after a period of change. Should any information that has been provided to the police change it is the responsibility of the reporting person to update the police so that a further review of the risk can be made.

Where the person is deemed to fall into the category of missing person a record will be created on the Compact missing person's database and an investigation will commence. This record will include all details of the missing individual, photographs, risk assessment and tasks to be completed. Reviews of the investigation are monitored by the police supervisor. The 'child at risk' form will be completed by the Police Multi Agency referral unit (MARU) who will make a referral through to children's social care upon closure of all missing reports relating to children, once they have been missing for 5 days or where a specific concern is identified. Where the child is open to children's social care it would be normal for the a task to be created for the Officer investigating the missing child to contact social care and obtain further information held about the child along with requesting and update regarding action taken by children's social care to locate and safeguard the child.

Cambridgeshire Children's Services Contact Centre tel: 0345 045 1362

The police, following national guidance, will conduct a risk assessment by gathering information from family and other agencies as appropriate. See [Appendix 2: Flow chart of Key Questions for Information Sharing](#). This risk assessment will form the basis for the resulting proportionate actions. See [Appendix 7: Risk identification: Questions from Police Central Referral Unit](#) and [Appendix 8: Police Risk Assessment and Decision Making Guide for Missing Children](#)).

If the child / young person is found by family or friends it is their responsibility to return them to the home address. Parents and carers must inform the police when a child/young person returns of their own accord.

In recovering a child/young person where there is a substantial risk in doing so, the police may become involved in assisting.

Routinely the child/young person should be returned home unless there are grounds to suspect there is a risk posed at home. If risk is suspected Police officers are encouraged to consider their powers under CA 1989 s.46 (Police Protection).

10. Planning for Locating and /or the Return of a Child/Young Person - Safe and Well Check and Referral to Contact Centre

If the police have any safeguarding concerns they should refer the child/young person to the **County Council Contact Centre. Tel: 0345 0451362.**

On a child being located the police will conduct a "**Safe and Well**" check as soon as possible after the young person has returned home. This is in order to ensure the young person's well being and safety; and to establish if they were a victim of crime or abuse whilst missing.

Police risk assessment and referral to Contact Centre

All missing children will be referred through to the contact centre for information sharing purposes and to enable the return interview to be conducted by an independent individual. Where there are specific concerns because they meet the criteria detailed below (see **Section 22, Strategy Meetings (Missing)**), i.e. the individual has been missing 3 times in 90 days, the individual has been missing for over 5 days in one period or there are specific safeguarding concerns raised by any professional agency. A referral to the Contact Centre should be based upon safeguarding concerns, whether the child still missing or returned (see **Appendix 7: Risk Identification: Questions from Police Central Referral Unit** and **Appendix 8: Police Risk Assessment and Decision Making Guide for Missing Children**) with particular attention to the child's age and vulnerability and will take into account:

- Individual circumstances, including family circumstances in which the child/young person has gone missing such as whether the parents are unable or unwilling to work to support or meet the needs of the child;
- Motivation for running;
- Whether the child/young person has, or is likely to suffer **Significant Harm**;
- Possible destination;
- Missing overnight;
- Gone missing/run away on more than one occasion;
- Known mental health issues;
- Known risk of sexual exploitation;
- Known risk of contact with persons posing a risk to children/young people;
- Involved as victim or perpetrator of criminal behaviour whilst missing/running away.

Outcome of discussions between Police and Contact Centre

Agreement about the course of action to assist or protect the child will be reached and recorded:

- A request to initiate an Early Help Assessment and the following Team Around the Child/Family (TAC/F) planning and review process with the involvement of the relevant Locality Team:
- or**
- A **Single Assessment** of need by Children's Social Care. The views of the child gained in the return interview (see below) will be of importance and inform the assessment and decision-making. This will be co-ordinated by Children's Social Care and the outcome recorded on ICS;

- Section 47 (Children Act 1989) joint enquiries to be undertaken by Police and Social Care where there is reason to suspect the child is suffering or likely to suffer Significant Harm. A strategy discussion will be held to agree and plan any joint enquiry and must be considered if the child has not been found, may be harmed or has been persistently running away;

or

- Actions identified only for the Police resulting from information sharing with Children's Social Care/other agencies.

11. Out of hours/Emergency Duty Team

Where the Police have immediate concerns about the circumstances of a child who has been reported missing from home out of office hours e.g. concern that the child may be at risk if returned home, they will contact Emergency Duty Team to assess the child's needs and make appropriate arrangements for accommodation. This will include young people who may be at risk of 'honour'-based violence or forced marriage.

Should EDT have involvement with a missing child they will inform and provide information to the relevant Children's Social Care Team for the child's area or case responsible social worker for action as soon as day time services resume.

Social Care Teams will send an alert to EDT where a child with whom they are working has run away/gone missing from home with specific plans should the child be located.

12. Notification to Safeguarding and Standards Unit

All children who are considered to be missing must be reported to the Safeguarding & Standards Unit (CCC) so that alerts can be sent to other authorities, Register Custodians and the Missing from Education Service is informed by SASU. Data collected on ICS to inform service monitoring and planning.

Notification email address: notifications.cpru@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Strategy Meetings

A strategy meeting should involve:

- Children's Social Care;
- Police;
- Other relevant agency or professional.

The criteria for holding a strategy meeting are:

- Where the child has had 3 instances of missing overnight within the last 90 days; or
- Where the child has been missing for more than 5 days continuously; or
- Where the child is subject of a child protection plan;
- Where the child/young person is a looked after child, a Multi-Agency Risk Management Meeting (MRMM) will be held but these cover much the same ground as strategy discussions for non-looked after children (see [Section 22, Strategy Meetings \(Missing\)](#));
- Other special circumstances e.g. where a child with significant health needs has gone missing and has no access to require medication.

The Strategy meeting should address:

- Collation of information about the missing child/young person (description, ethnicity, disability, health needs, substance misuse etc.) See Cambridgeshire Constabulary 'Missing Person - Initial Report' in [Appendix 7: Risk Identification: Questions from Police Central Referral Unit](#);
- Last known whereabouts;
- Any intelligence relevant to the child/young person - their family, friends or other significant relationships;
- Plan of action and by whom;
- Media strategy where appropriate;
- Date for follow up strategy meeting;
- Plan of action upon the return of the child in relation to contacting all parties. How and who will receive the child and who will conduct the Return Interview;
- The Return Interview should trigger a final strategy meeting to consider the case, the risk factors and a plan to prevent any further absconding behaviour.

Further guidance on Strategy Meetings/Discussions is available in Cambridgeshire LSCB Inter-Agency Safeguarding Procedures.

13. Return Home Interview

An independent person should carry out a return interview within 72 hours of the child/young person being located or returning from an absence.

Statutory procedures state a Return Interview must be offered within 72 hours of a child being found when a child has been reported missing.

Who undertakes the return home interview?

Children who are open to children's social care and are subject to a CIN plan are offered a RI with SFSS. For Cambs LAC a RI is offered by NYAS.

The assessment interview should, preferably, be undertaken in a neutral place and:

- Identify and deal with any harm suffered, including any need for medical attention;
- Understand and try to address the reasons for the running away episode;
- Try to prevent a repeat.

The child/young person should be offered the relevant support by either a statutory or voluntary organisation depending on the level of need.

In some cases a specialist assessment may be required should it appear that the child/young person has complex needs. The return interview needs to be shared with the police through the missing person's team via emailing missingperson@cambs.pnn.police.uk. This return interview is used to assist in future missing investigations and intelligence around general criminal activity that impacts on vulnerable individuals (e.g. CSE risks).

When child/young person who was not reported to the police as missing is located it may be necessary to see if there are any continuing safeguarding concerns or whether the family should be offered family support services.

See [Appendix 3: Young People Missing from Home Process Flowchart](#).

What Should be Covered in the Return Interview

The following are prompts for issues to be discussed in a Return Interview:

- Whether the child/young person has any immediate need for health or emotional support as a result of what happened;
- What the underlying reasons were for the child/young person going missing;
- If there have been previous instances of the child/young person going missing and whether anything was different on this occasion;
- Whether any associates of the child/young person were involved in them going missing and how;
- Whether they committed any offences while missing or whether they were the victim of any offences whilst missing;
- Whether the child/young person is planning to go missing again and what might stop them;
- Whether any follow up support/action is needed e.g. by carer or professionals;
- Whether a (further) Strategy Meeting is needed.

If it is suspected that the child/young person may have been the victim of child sexual exploitation the Cambridgeshire LSCB's 'Child Sexual Exploitation Referral Risk Assessment' (see [Appendix 8: Police Risk Assessment and Decision Making Guide for Missing Children](#)) should be completed and forwarded to the Multi-Agency Referral Unit at referralcentre.children@cambridgeshire.gov.uk - telephone number 0345 045 5203 Cambridgeshire Children's and Young People's Services support 'The Runaway's Charter' issued by the Children's Society. This embraces the following principals about how children and young people should be treated. These particularly apply when talking to a child or young person in the context of a return Interview:

- Be understanding, calm and relaxed with young runaways;
- Help young runaways trust you and don't judge them;
- Be straight forward and honest with young runaways;
- Listen to and take seriously what young runaways say;
- Explain things clearly and give young runaways choices and don't force them into making decisions that they don't understand. (See: makerunawayssafe.org.uk).

14. Support for 16 and 17 Year Olds

N.B. See definitions on missing and unauthorised absence in [Section 5, Definitions; Missing, Unauthorised Absence, Absconder](#).

16 and 17 year olds who run away or go missing are not necessarily any less vulnerable than younger children and are likely to need as much support in order to make a successful transition into adulthood.

However, young people over 16 can choose to leave home and it may be necessary to involve other services e.g. housing officers in the assessment of their needs. See Protocol Social Care and Housing which should be followed in these circumstances.

Vulnerable young people need to be in a secure housing setting - no 16 or 17 year old should be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation by Housing or Children & Young People's services except in an emergency and for the shortest time possible where B&B is the only available alternative to homelessness.

If a young person presents themselves to Children's Social Care as homeless, then a **Single Assessment** will be undertaken by CSC and provided with appropriate services.

If a young person presents themselves as homeless to a housing provider the housing provider will provide emergency accommodation and refer the young person to Children's Social Care for a Single Assessment. The housing provider will continue to provide emergency accommodation while the Single Assessment is being undertaken.

15. Emergency Accommodation

If the child/young person cannot be returned home during normal working hours the decision to place the child elsewhere will be made by at least two members of CAM panel (Children's Allocation Meeting) or if this is not possible by the Head of Social Work. Outside of normal working hours this decision will be made by the Emergency Duty Team in consultation with the Head of Social Work.

16. Children who Repeatedly go Missing from Home

Children's Services and the Police will record and keep up to date on ICS and Police Lotus Notes databases, chronologies for children who repeatedly go missing.

17. Children who are Suffering or Likely to Suffer Significant Harm or Subject to a Child Protection Plan

Any person who receives information about the mother of an unborn child who has gone missing or a child/young person who is suffering or likely to suffer Significant Harm or subject to a child protection plan, who has gone missing must pass the details immediately to the key worker in Children's Social Care or Duty Worker if the key worker is not available, or, if out of hours, to the Emergency Duty Team.

Children's Social Care (via: notifications.cpru@cambridgeshire.gov.uk) or EDT will take responsibility for alerting the appropriate agencies and other Register Custodians, initially by telephone and confirmed in writing as soon as possible.

Local enquiries should always be made of the following as soon as possible:

- Designated Nurse for Safeguarding and other Health professionals including GP;
- Education Attendance Welfare Service (for school age children/young people);
- Head of Early Years (for preschool children);
- Local Authority Housing Provider (if appropriate);
- Police Central Referral Unit or Child Abuse Investigations Unit.

If these enquiries prove unsuccessful

- The local Department for Work and Pensions should be asked to search local and national records;
- The Child Benefit Agency on 0845 302 1444 for any information;
- The key worker must ensure that all information resulting from these enquiries is collated.

Where the likelihood of immediate Significant Harm to the missing child/young person is considered by the Core Group to be high, the key worker should arrange an urgent core group meeting to consider strategies for tracing the child.

Consideration should also be given to informing the Child Protection Review Manager and convening a review child protection conference to determine what further action should be taken to ensure the safety of the child/young person and family.

18. Absconders

An absconder is a young person who is absent from the placement without permission and who is subject to an order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process (e.g. remands, curfews, tagging, conditions of residence, other bail conditions, Police And Criminal Evidence (PACE) detention or Anti-Social Behaviour Injunctions, or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings. Children/young people will be reported in the first instance as missing from home, and latterly as absconding. The primary concern is for the welfare of the child.

A young person in this category must be reported to the Police without delay, who will deal with the matter using the appropriate powers under the relevant legislation. In all cases the child/young person's absence will be reported as a child missing from home regardless of their criminal status.

19. Looked After Children/Young People who Run Away and Go Missing from Local Authority Care

The Local Authority has the same duty of care toward all children who are looked after whether they are accommodated under s20 (CA 1989) or subject to Care or Interim Care Orders.

The Local Authority's approach to managing missing from care episodes is a key element of its corporate parent responsibilities and helping to ensure the best possible outcomes for all the children that it looks after.

Where young people are missing from their care placement it is essential that all professionals concerned work closely together and follow the procedures agreed in this protocol.

The Head of Looked After Children's Services in tandem with the police and partner agencies must analyse missing from care incidents, and take steps to minimise any repeat incidents in particular where trends are identified regarding episodes from particular care placements.

20. Definition of Child Missing from Care

A child/young person under 18 is to be considered missing if their whereabouts are unknown whatever the circumstances of their disappearance and/or there is concern for the child/young person because of their vulnerability, or there is a potential danger to the public. He or she is considered missing until located and his or her well-being, or otherwise, is established.

All Looked After young people, including those over the age of 16, will be reported as missing if their whereabouts are not known and they have been missing from placement whether this is care or semi-independent accommodation.

Please do not get this confused with "Unauthorised absence" (or 'out without permission') where a child's whereabouts is known - or thought to be known but unconfirmed - they are not missing and may be considered as an "unauthorised absence" following a risk assessment that does not raise concern for their immediate safety or that of the public. This is discussed in more detail later on.

21. Reporting Procedures for Missing Looked After Children/Young People

The reporting process for a child in care who is missing has to be influenced by the risk factors in the individual circumstance, e.g. age of child, risks, specific vulnerabilities etc.

All efforts to locate the child/young person must be recorded and available to audit.

If the child is considered **missing from a residential home** (as opposed to unauthorised absence), staff from the residential home will, without delay, inform the police and within normal working hours the child/young person's social worker or duty worker or if out of office hours the Emergency Duty Team. Residential staff will also inform the child/young person's school/college.

A decision will be made with the duty worker about who will inform the parent/s and when.

If the child is considered **missing from their foster home** (as opposed to unauthorised absence), the foster carer will, without delay, inform the police and the duty worker in the fostering team or out of hours the Emergency Duty Team. The foster carer will also inform the child/young person's school/college. A decision will have already been made with the duty worker about who will inform the parent/s and when.

In the case of a child missing from foster care, residential care or residential special school, the details should be recorded and made available to Ofsted in accordance with the requirements of the National Minimum Standards.

In the case of an asylum-seeking child, children's social care is required to notify UK Borders Agency (Ref. "*East of England Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Safeguarding Protocol*") Any child or young person who is missing for more than 24 hours will be reported to the Head of Children's Social Care, the Children's Social Care Service Director and Director of Children's Services by the relevant Service Manager via a 'Need to Know' notification and an Ofsted notification.

22. Strategy Meetings (Missing)

Any child or young person missing for a maximum period of 5 days, usually much sooner, must trigger a strategy meeting with all relevant agencies and staff, the outcome of which **MUST** be reported to the Head of Looked After Children's Services, the Service Director, Children's Social Care and Executive Director of Children's Services.

The strategy meeting **must** address;

- Last known whereabouts;
- Any intelligence relevant to the child/young person, their family friends or any other significant relationships;
- Plan of action and by whom;
- Media strategy where appropriate;
- Consideration of informing Ofsted:
- Date for follow up strategy meeting;
- Plan of action upon the return of the child in relation to contacting all parties, how and who will receive the child, who will conduct the return interview;
- The return interview should trigger a final strategy meeting to consider the case, the risk factors and issues and a plan to prevent any further absconding behaviour.

Further guidance is available in Cambridgeshire LSCB interagency safeguarding procedures.

23. Preventing a Looked After Child/Young Person Going Missing

During the assessment phase of considering whether to receive a child/young person into Care, the child's social worker will ensure that any previous missing from home information is made available at the threshold to care meeting - Cambridgeshire Allocation Meeting (CAM).

24. Placement Information Record and Safety Plan

When a child/young person becomes Looked After and there is information to suggest they might go missing, their Placement Information Record (PIR section 7 & 10) should note this and be given to their carers. It should also be addressed at the Placement Agreement Meeting and in the Safety Plan. This information must be shared with carers as it provides the baseline information about the child's behaviour pattern and how to respond. This should be updated where appropriate whether the child remains in placement or moves to another placement. The Placement Information Record and Safety Plan will also be attached to Children's Social Care electronic data recording system (One/ICS) and should include the following:

- Describe the likelihood of the child/young person going missing;
- Detail the level of supervision and support the child/young person requires currently;
- Describe the likely level of risk to and by the child should the child go missing;
- Detail the parent's views on what action should be taken if the child/young person goes missing if applicable.

The social worker will ensure that the child has this information explained to them so that they understand what actions will be taken if they absent themselves without permission and that they will be reported missing from home to the police. This should be done both through discussion and written information.

Carers should be requested to obtain an up to date photograph of the child/young person once they move in, as the police will need this if they go missing.

In their placement all children/young people should be given clear information about:

- Giving carers times of going out and returning;
- Who to tell about where they are going;
- How to seek help if they are unable to get back for the agreed time, whether this has happened accidentally or on purpose;
- Who they can contact if they have any worries/problems;
- This information will be recorded on Placement Information Record.

This is not an exhaustive list; clearly good parenting will denote the appropriate response. All of the above should be set out clearly within the Placement Information Record. It is the social worker's responsibility to ensure that the information is comprehensive and reflects perceived risk.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) should ensure this matter is considered at Child Care Reviews.

25. Looked After Children Going Missing During an External Activity

If a child becomes absent whilst on an external activity, the carer or member of staff in charge will:

- Arrange an initial search in the area the child went absent;

- Notify local police;
- Notify the child/young person's home police force that the child/young person is missing /has now returned home;
- Notify the child's social worker or the accountable team manager, both locally and within the placing authority where applicable;
- Notify the senior manager at the residential home (if applicable);
- Notify the Youth Offending Team if the child is on remand;
- Notify the Emergency Duty Team (if applicable);
- This protocol recognizes that schools, and residential schools and establishments also have complimentary protocol to follow. However following the steps above are the minimum responses expected and should be in addition to their protocols.

26. Absences of Looked After Children Giving Rise to Particular Concern

In situations where the age or vulnerability, including disability, of the child/young person or the circumstances in which the child/young person goes missing, including suspicion of abuse highlight particular safeguarding concerns the child's social worker should be contacted immediately. If their social worker is unavailable the duty worker and if out of hours the Emergency Duty Team should be contacted for consideration as to whether the threshold is met for a child protection enquiry to be launched.

Possible actions are a risk management meeting, or a strategy meeting under Section 47 of The Children Act 1989 and as set out within the interagency safeguarding procedures.

The Police should be contacted if, after basic checks, the child's whereabouts are unknown and they are considered missing.

27. Absences where Child/Young Person is Looked After by Another Authority and Placed in Cambridgeshire

When a child/young person placed in Cambridgeshire by another local authority goes missing, the registered manager or delegated senior of the children's home or fostering service is responsible for ensuring that the accountable manager in the child's placing local authority receives notification that their looked after child has gone missing and that appropriate actions have been initiated. The placing Local authority must be informed within 1 working day of the child being notified as missing. Cambridgeshire Police will liaise with the Police in the child's placing Authority.

28. Absences of Cambridgeshire Looked After Child/Young Person who is Placed in Another Authority

Cambridgeshire County Council will ensure that the child's Placement Information Record (PIR) is as detailed as possible, including specific behaviour management strategies.

The care provider will be responsible for following their local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care procedures and contacting the child's social worker or social Care manager in Cambridgeshire who will consider the need for a Missing Child Strategy Discussion to include local police and ensure that a return interview is conducted by an independent person within 72 hours of the child returning. An early LAC review may be convened to address issues for the child and placement.

29. Informing Other Children in Placement

Should a child's absence continue after the matter has been reported to the police, the staff of the residential home/educational setting should make arrangements to inform all children and staff. In respect of children in foster care, a similar process needs to be undertaken by the foster carers. In this way, distressing rumours may be avoided and additional information may be gained regarding the missing child's whereabouts. Any relevant information should be passed to the police immediately.

30. Reporting Missing Looked After Children to the Police

In an emergency dial 999, for non-emergencies dial 101.

When the police are contacted the following information should be provided:

- Child/young person's name, date of birth and legal status;
- What the child/young person was wearing;
- Description (with recent photograph to be provided);
- Where missing from, time went missing and who might be with the child/young person;
- Medical history including details of GP and dentist;
- Time and location last seen;
- Circumstances of going missing;
- Details of family addresses;
- Details of friends and associates;
- Details of circumstances which increase risk to the young person;
- Situation immediately prior to the young person going missing;
- What action has been taken to locate the missing child by the carer.

31. Initial Action by the Police (Missing from Care)

Where the individual is assessed as a missing person a police officer will attend. They will require further information to assist their enquiries. They should be provided with details of the child which should have been completed prior to their arrival by the relevant staff member or foster carer. Residential carers should complete this electronically and sign and date it and foster carers should complete it either by hand or electronically and sign or date the record.

The police will also require the following information for risk identification (see [Appendix 7: Risk identification: Questions from Police Central Referral Unit](#)):

- Guidance already agreed and incorporated within the child/young person's Placement Information Record and Keeping Safe Plan;
- The age and maturity of the child/young person;
- Clear consideration must be given to children/young people with disabilities and/or special needs as they are deemed most vulnerable and high risk;
- The legal status of the child/young person;
- Previous behaviour patterns and activity;

- Is there a reason for the child/young person to go missing?
- State of mind/perceived risk;
- Group behaviour, social networks and environmental factors;
- Consideration of any external influences, which may result in a child's removal without consent;
- The possibility of a child being harboured/abducted;
- Any disclosures made by the child/young person or others prior to the child/young person going missing;
- The possibility of the child/young person being in the company of a person who poses a risk to children;
- Do they need essential medication that is not likely to be available to them.

The level of risk that the child/young person will be determined by the police (see [Appendix 8: Police Risk Assessment and Decision Making Guide for Missing Children](#)) and information in the Missing from Care risk assessment report will enable them to do this in conjunction with the Local Authority. Police will share information with other agencies as appropriate (see [Appendix 1 - information sharing](#)).

The attending police officer will take the information and photograph to assist them with their investigations.

Whilst missing persons aged under 18 are automatically classed as "vulnerable missing persons" this is NOT an indication of risk.

32. Police Assessment of Risk

All reports of missing children will be subject to a risk assessment by the police. Cambridgeshire Police will conduct a risk assessment in line with nationally agreed guidance (see [Appendix 7: Risk Identification: Questions from Police Central Referral Unit](#) and [Appendix 8: Police Risk Assessment and Decision Making Guide for Missing Children](#)). This will be carried out for each child/young person on every separate occasion they are reported missing. This risk assessment, conducted by the initial investigating officer, and subsequently confirmed or revised by the supervising officer will form the basis for the appropriate level of investigation. It is an ongoing process and will be reviewed throughout the investigation. The police have two categories for risk:

a. High Risk

The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing the child/young person is in danger through their own vulnerability; or may have been the victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing the public is in danger.

b. Medium Risk

The risk posed is likely to place the child/young person in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.

Please remember that after reporting a looked after child/young person as missing that, whilst all agencies share responsibility for the safeguarding of the child/young person, children's social care is responsible for children in their care and this responsibility is not absolved when they have made a report to the police.

The Police do use 'Low risk' as a third category. However, vulnerable people, which includes children and young persons should never be categorised as low.

33. Police Powers

Police powers are often limited and difficulties can arise when missing children/young people are located, but do not wish to return to home.

Section 46 of the Children Act 1989 empowers police officers to take a child/young person into Police Protection in prescribed circumstances i.e. when police have reasonable cause to believe that they would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm, they may remove them to suitable accommodation and keep them there. Police officers, on exercising such powers, must contact Children's Social Care.

Home Office Circular 44/2003 gives guidance on the application of Section 46 (CA 1989) for children/young people who are subject to an order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings and is absent from their placement without permission is an absconder (see Section 2.3). The police must be informed of the absence without delay and they will deal with the matter using appropriate powers under the relevant legislation.

34. Multi-Agency Review (Missing from Care)

During the initial stages of the investigation it may be appropriate for the review to be in the form of a phone call by police to relevant agencies. However, if the looked after child/young person is still missing after a maximum of 7 days, or usually much sooner if there is a high risk factor, there should be a Missing from Care Review. This will be arranged by the responsible Social Care Manager and attended by the following:

- Police;
- Social worker and Team Manager;
- Foster carer or residential staff;
- Foster carer's supervising social worker (if applicable);
- Any other agency or person able to contribute to the meeting (e.g. Attendance Welfare Service, Youth Offending Service, etc).

There will be a set agenda for the meeting, which covers the following points, at all times a return to placement interview must be considered:

1. Current searches that have taken place;
2. The risks and vulnerability to the child;
3. Any associates they are with;
4. Any other parties that need to be informed of the situation.

This is not an exhaustive list; discretion must be used to ensure that any areas of concern are addressed.

35. Informing the Press (Missing from Care)

It is a decision for the police, to advise the media regarding any missing child/young person.

Whether the child/young person is missing from public or private care providers, the decision to publicise by press and /or television will always be made in consultation with the responsible social worker and the Head of Social Care. This will be arranged at a local level, by the Head of Social Care or nominee with Cambridgeshire County Council press office. The social worker will be informed before any publicity in order to advise the parents. However, there may be occasions where the decision to go to the press is immediately instigated by the police if the situation is deemed life threatening. All efforts will be made by the police to liaise with children's social care in the first instance or immediately after.

36. Recording (Missing from Care)

Children's homes and the fostering teams will maintain a distinct log that records on a regular basis all unauthorised absences and missing from care episodes. A full record must be kept of all actions taken and messages received / given this could be used as evidence.

For residential staff they should make a note in the home's log of any action taken, messages received and cross reference it to the running log for Missing in Care. The running log for missing in care should be completed electronically and a full record of all action taken and messages noted on this.

The foster carers must record all unauthorised absences and missing from care episodes in their records log. They must complete the Running log for Missing in Care and the fostering team to enter this on the One/ICS electronic data system.

37. Planning for Locating and/or the Return of a Child/Young Person

The police will conduct a "Safe and Well" check for ALL children/young people reported missing **as soon as possible and within 24 hours after their return**. This is with the small exception of those high level repeat missing persons who are looked after by professional carers within care homes and where these children are being managed through ongoing joint strategy meetings to discuss their ongoing risk, wellbeing and management. On these occasions due to the individuals being seen on a regular basis by officers and the report of their return being made by a professional it may be appropriate and more proportionate not to attend on each occasion. This will be in discussion with the Child's carers at the residential care home and only where the behaviour is not out of character and there are no new concerns highlighted.

If a child/young person's absence comes within this protocol, the senior residential manager on duty within the home or the duty officer, in consultation with the social worker, police, carers and parents (where appropriate) should commence contingency planning for when the child/young person is located. Such plans will include:

1. The Return interview (within 72 hours of the child/young person returning) and determining the most appropriate way to ensure the child/young person is listened to; deciding where the interview should occur and who should carry this out. The timing for the interview may vary from child/young person depending on the circumstances at the time, discretion should be used and reason for any delay clearly recorded;
2. Giving the child/young person the opportunity to speak with someone independent of direct involvement, this person maybe an advocate or a social worker/police officer not directly involved with the child/young person. Ensuring that the child/young person is aware of his/her rights and access to an advocate;
3. Identify ways in which the child/young person can meaningfully inform and participate in the return plan;
4. Deciding if the child/young person is to return to the previous placement?
5. If returning to placement, deciding how he/she be conveyed there?
6. Agreeing how and when the police see a child/young person on their return to undertake the "safe and well" check. The timing and process to do this will be based on the outcome of the discussion noted in point 1 but should be done within 24 hrs;
7. Plan and identify who will complete the **return to placement** interview;
8. It is usual for children's social care to make the arrangements for the transportation of the child/young person back to their placement. Where appropriate and subject to policing requirements at the time the police will assist. However the responsibility remains with children's social care;
9. Discussion should take place between children's social care and the police regarding their respective powers to enforce a return if the child/young person resists and is not apparently at risk. Children's social care legal department should be consulted. If there is a failure to agree on a course of action then the Head of Social Care and the local police inspector will be consulted;

10. The police will work in partnership with the plan developed by children's social care to return a child/young person to his/her placement. If there are any allegations of abuse, or a suggestion that the child/young person has been a victim, or a perpetrator of any crime, the police need to be contacted immediately and they will consider implementing child protection procedures;
11. Due consideration must be given to the securing of evidence and possible forensic examination. This may include keeping any clothes the child/young person was wearing and/or sensitively discouraging bathing/showering and toileting where this can be managed appropriately. The police will advise on appropriate procedures to follow;
12. An early LAC review may be convened to address issues for the child and placement.

38. Returning to Placement Interview

A return to placement interview must be undertaken within 72 hours of the child/young person returning to their placement or being found.

The message we give when a child/young person returns to the home is crucial in helping them build a sense of worth and belonging. Looking at what children/young people tell us, it is perhaps not the best time to ask questions about their whereabouts and actions whilst missing, this can be done at a later date. Care staff and foster carers will need to offer warm and consistent care when the young person returns - showing genuine concern for their safety and offering food and drink are very basic but powerful messages that we care and a positive way of welcoming the child/young person back home.

Framework for return to placement interview.

This is not to be used as a checklist but as a prompt for areas to include in the interview:

- Whether they need any immediate treatment (health and emotional support) as a result of what happened?
- What are the underlying reasons for why they went missing?
- Where they went and who was present?
- Are there any issues in relation to their placement that need to be considered?
- What are you doing when you go missing?
- What is different if there have been other times you have gone missing?
- Any associates involved in them going missing and how?
- Whether any offences have occurred to them or by them during this time and how this might be dealt with?
- Are you planning it again, what might stop you?
- Any follow up support/action that is needed, either by carers or other professionals?
- Should there be a multi-agency strategy meeting?
- Is there need for an early Child Care Review?
- Review any prevention/support work currently being undertaken with the child/young person.

See [Appendix 4: Young People Missing from Care Process Flowchart](#).

39. Emergency Accommodation

If the child/young person cannot be returned to the previous placement during normal working hours the decision to place the child elsewhere will be made by the appropriate service manager within children's social care; outside of normal working hours this decision will be made by the Emergency Duty Team in consultation with the duty service manager.

40. Assessment and Analysis of Missing from Care Episodes

Individual children:

An important part of supporting a child/young person is identifying patterns and themes arising from their missing from care episodes, analysis of information arising from each episode must form part of the ongoing work with the child/young person.

Once a child/young person returns consideration should be given to:

- The need for a multi-agency strategy meeting?
- The need for an early Child Care Review?
- Review any prevention/support work currently being undertaken with the child/young person;
- A placement support meeting.

Child/young person's Placement Information Record on ICS should be updated.

Factors to consider:

- The likeliness of the child/young person continuing to go missing and any factors which may reduce this;
- Are there issues in relation to the placement meeting their needs, additional risks given adults and children they associate with and how can these be addressed;
- The level of supervision and support the child/young person requires currently;
- The likely level of risk should the child go missing and any additional action that should be taken.

41. Definition Unauthorised Absence (Out Without Permission)

Where a child/young person's whereabouts is known, or thought to be known but is unconfirmed, and a risk assessment does not raise concerns for their immediate safety or that of the public, they are not considered to be 'missing' but to be 'out without permission/unauthorised absence.'

Some children and young people absent themselves for a short period and then return, with their whereabouts known to the carer. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed, either on purpose to test boundaries, or accidentally. This kind of boundary testing activity is well within the range of normal teenage behaviour and should not come within the definition of "missing" as used within this protocol.

To cover these situations the category of unauthorised absence should be considered. Examples of situations where unauthorised absence will apply are:

- Running away after a dispute;
- Failing to return on time;
- Staying at a known location or with someone else and there are no other reasons for concern;

- They are communicating regularly with carers and there are no other reasons for concern.

42. Actions for Unauthorised Absences

If the child/young person does not return at the expected time, residential workers/ foster carers must take all reasonable steps to ascertain the child/young person's whereabouts and safety prior to contacting the police. In doing this, there should not be undue delay in proceeding from what is expected of a reasonable parental response and contacting the Police. The Police should not be notified about "unauthorised absences" and do not record them.

N.B. The Police do not record "unauthorised absences."

All carers/staff will take the following action:

Initiate procedures, which encourage the child/young person to return as quickly and safely as possible, ensuring that they are not intimidated by the prospect of returning.

Staff and carers should carry out a number of basic actions. The following should be seen as a guide only:

- Check premises and outside areas;
- Ask other children/residents if they know the whereabouts of the child/young person;
- Attempt to contact child/young person by mobile phone using text or voicemail if appropriate;
- Check with other carers or staff in the residential unit;
- Make enquiries with relatives and or friends.

The responsibility for managing unauthorised absence lies with the staff of the residential home/educational setting or foster carer. It is essential that professionals work closely together in order to locate the child/young person as quickly as possible. The degree of urgency will be determined by the age and maturity of the child/young person, understanding and past history taking into account any previous missing episodes. This also applies to many vulnerable children with an **Education, Health and Care Plan** including being placed in a residential special school.

In assessing the significance of a child's absence, consideration must be given to the guidance already agreed and incorporated into the child/young person's Placement Plan / Placement Information Record (PIR) and Safety Plan. Any unauthorised absence must be kept under regular review. It is important to consider whether the circumstances of the disappearance would now render the child likely to suffer harm, for example:

- The child requires medication at a set time;
- or
- Weather conditions have severely deteriorated;
 - Time of day e.g. night-time.

Unauthorised absences must be risk assessed and kept under regular review. The timescales given below are a guide only and in many cases a shorter period will be more appropriate and is dependant on a number of aggravating factors, such as time of day/night. (See **Section 43, Reporting Procedures for Unauthorised Absence of Looked After Children (Out Without Permission)** for reporting procedures).

For those children who are out without permission/unauthorised absence who have not returned but who have been communicated with and/or seen, the details of these contacts should be recorded.

Young people who regularly go out without permission should be subject to a local multi-agency professionals meeting to agree an individual plan of action.

43. Reporting Procedures for Unauthorised Absence of Looked After Children (Out Without Permission)

Foster Carers (Unauthorised Absence)

Foster carers should contact the police in the first instance and then the child/young person's social worker (or if not available duty officer) and if out of hours, the Emergency Duty Team. The decision will then be made if the absence is unauthorised or falls under missing from care, taking into consideration the factors determining the child/young persons vulnerability and any potential danger to the public. A decision will be made with the duty worker about who will inform the parent/s and when. The fostering team duty worker/out of hours help line should also be contacted.

Children's Homes (Unauthorised Absence)

Within residential homes, the team and senior manager on duty should be informed immediately of a child/young person going missing. The decision will be made if the absence is unauthorised or falls under 'missing' procedures, taking into consideration the factors determining the child/young persons vulnerability and any potential danger to the public. Information regarding events and actions will be recorded on ICS by residential staff.

Further Action (Unauthorised Absence)

The team and senior manager on duty within the residential home, or the child's social worker or the duty officer will consider whether the absence causing such concern is to fall within the missing procedures. If it does not, and the young person is considered to be out without permission the residential team and manager or the duty officer should take whatever steps are required and appropriate to ensure that the child/young person returns to the establishment or the home without undue delay. In responses such as these the Emergency Duty Team should be notified by email for information in case of any further events e.g. at the location where the young person has been seen.

Children's social care will ensure that they have recorded all reasonable steps taken to ascertain the child/young person's whereabouts and safety.

If there is reason to believe a risk has materialised or the child has not returned or not been communicated with or not seen within **four hours** (*or sooner*) of any existing agreement between carer and child, in consultation with the child's social worker serious consideration, must be given to reporting them as missing to the police immediately. **Six hours, should be regarded as the maximum time** of the young person having not returned, been communicated with or seen. In many cases a shorter period will be more appropriate and is dependant on a number of aggravating factors, such as time of day/night, any medication etc.

Any unauthorised absence lasting a *maximum of six hours*, irrespective of whether the child has been seen or spoken with, should be reported to the Head of Social Care and Service Manager by the relevant manager of the children's home, fostering service or emergency duty team out of hours. Parents must be informed as agreed.

Strategy Meetings (Unauthorised Absence)

Any unauthorised absence lasting up to a maximum of 5 days, i.e, whereabouts are known but he/she has not returned to their placement, must trigger a strategy meeting with all relevant agencies and staff, the outcome of which **MUST** be reported to the Head of Social Work, the Service Director and Director of Children's Services by way of a 'Need to Know.' Ofsted must also be made aware at the point at which a strategy meeting is held.

The strategy meeting **must** address;

- Last known whereabouts;
- Any intelligence relevant to the child/young person, their family friends or any other significant relationships;
- Plan of action and by whom;
- Media strategy where appropriate;
- Follow up strategy meeting no more than 5 working days apart;
- Plan of action upon the return of the child in relation to contacting all parties, how and who will receive the child, who will conduct the return interview;
- The return interview should trigger a final strategy meeting to consider the case, the risk factors and issues and a plan to prevent any further absconding behaviour.

Young people who regularly go out without permission should be subject to a local multi-agency professionals meeting to agree an individual plan of action.

44. Monitoring - Cambridgeshire-Wide Information on Missing Children

Cambridgeshire Police collect information about missing children on the Compact database. The police will provide Children's Social Care with monthly reports of children who have been reported missing and the outcomes for those children.

The Police through their analysts are a good source of data base information to highlight trends and any possible action that may be needed.

Information regarding missing episodes will be monitored through the Children's Trust data set and the Local Safeguarding Children Board through their quality assurance process.

The Head of Service should be responsible for ensuring missing from home and care protocols are implemented. They should receive information about patterns of absence among children in care.

The responsible social worker should record and monitor on ICS how often the child/young person goes missing, how the placement manages that child/young person's missing episodes and ensure plans are in place to safeguard the child.

The social worker should report to managers any concerns about a placement being able to meet the needs of the child/young person, the foster carers handling of the incidents will form part of their annual review report and also will be fed into continuing training.

45. 'Regulation 33' Checks of Residential Children's Homes

Regular monitoring of restraint procedures, accident reports and missing from care records will be monitored as part of the Head of Care supervision agenda. Children's social care will also monitor this as part of their quality assurance audit cycle. Following this, all findings from the audits will form part of ongoing training and will contribute to updating policies and procedures.

46. Bibliography

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2. Missing Children & Adults - A cross-Government Strategy (Home Office Dec. 2011);
3. The All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers - 'Report from the Joint Inquiry into Children who go Missing from Care (June 2012).

47. Other Useful Guidance

1. Dept for Children, Schools and Families (2009) Statutory Guidance (revised) for Local Authorities in England to identify Children not receiving a Suitable Education. London [Department for Education](#);
2. [Child Sexual Exploitation: Definition and Guide for Practitioners](#) (DfE, February 2017);
3. HM Government (2009) Multi Agency Practice Guidance. Handling Cases of Forced Marriage. [Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#);
4. HM Government (2008) [Safeguarding Children who may have been trafficked](#);
5. HM Government, [Information Sharing: Guide for Practitioners and Managers \(2008\)](#); a pocket guide is also available at [Department for Education](#) ref: DCSF-00808-2008;
6. Children Missing Education: the role of the local authority in identifying and addressing children missing from home or care (Cambridgeshire);
7. [East of England Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children \(UASC\) Safeguarding Protocol](#);
8. Suffolk Safeguarding Board Safeguarding Children who Run Away and go missing from Home or Care - policy, procedures and practice guidance (March 2010).

48. Helplines - Information

Missing People

Missing People provides support for missing children, vulnerable adults and families left in limbo.

Through the **Runaway Helpline**, the charity provides crisis-support to any young person who has run away from home or care, or been forced to leave. The service is 24/7, free, confidential and can be contacted via Freephone 0808 800 7070, by emailing runaway@missingpeople.org.uk and also by texting 80234.

Missing People also helps local authorities to find young people missing from home or care. The charity can provide liaison and publicity opportunities, including national media partners, to aid the safe return of a child.

Missing People accepts referrals from any agency or carer involved with a missing child as long as the case has already been reported to police. A straightforward media consent form will need to be signed by whoever has parental responsibility.

To contact Missing People about a missing child, email: services@missingpeople.org.uk or call 0871 222 50 55.

Childline

Childline is a free confidential telephone helpline providing counselling service for children and young people run by the NSPCC. The phone number is 0800 1111.

Get Connected

Get Connected is a free, national helpline for any young person under 25 facing any issue, giving each young person the emotional support they need to work out what they want to do about their situation, and the information they need to choose the most appropriate help.

Get Connected holds details of over 13,000 different services and allows the young person to make their own decisions at their own pace. They then connect them, free, to their chosen service.

In the case of a young person who has run away or been thrown out of home, they can explore their accommodation options, including friends, family, social services, refuges/hostels or returning home. If the young person wants to find help with any other issues, Get Connected can also put them in touch with services such as counselling, advice, drop-in centres and practical help.

Get Connected website

Phone: 0808 808 4994 (1pm-11pm every day)

Email: help@getconnected.org.uk

Webchat: **Get Connected** (7pm-10pm every day)

FRANK

FRANK telephone line and website (**Talk To Frank**) is the joint DCSF, Department of Health and Home Office drugs advice and information campaign for young people: 0800 77 66 00.

Appendix 1: The Legal Framework

- The law does not generally regard young people under the age of 16 as being able to live independently away from home;
- Where a child/young person under 16 (or 18 if disabled) stays with a person (other than a person with Parental Responsibility or a close relative), for 28 days or more, the person caring for them is acting as a 'private foster carer' within the meaning of s66 of the Children Act 1989 and therefore they must notify the local authority that they are privately fostering the child/young person. 'Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005' SI 2005/1533. Failure to notify the local authority may be an offence;
- Anyone who has care of a child without Parental Responsibility may do what is reasonable in all the circumstances to safeguard and promote the child's welfare (Children Act 1989 s3 (5)). It is likely to be 'reasonable' to inform the police, or children's services departments, and, if appropriate, their parents, of the child/young person's safety and whereabouts;
- Anyone who 'takes or detains' a runaway under 16 without lawful authority may be prosecuted under s2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984. The enforcement of this provision might be problematic, however, if the young person has chosen to stay with another adult of his or her own free will;
- Where a young person who has run away is likely to be a child in need within the meaning of s17 of the Children Act 1989, the local authority should consider whether it should provide any services for the child, and in particular, whether the child meets the criteria in s20(1) of the 1989 for accommodation. This will almost always entail undertaking a **Single Assessment** in accordance with the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families*;
- If the local authority has reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering or is likely to suffer Significant Harm, they should also undertake appropriate enquiries to enable them to decide what, if any, action they should take to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. Those enquiries must be started as soon as possible and in any event within 48 hours;
- A court may make a Recovery Order concerning a child who is the subject of a care order or an Emergency Protection Order; or who is the subject of police protection under s46 of the Children Act 1989 Order if there are grounds to believe that he has been unlawfully taken away from the person responsible for his care, or if he has run away or has been missing from care (s50 of the Children Act 1989). The Order acts as a direction for the child to be produced or for disclosure of his whereabouts. It

also has the effect of permitting a police officer to enter named premises to search for the child using reasonable force if necessary;

- A person, who unlawfully removes, keeps away, assists or otherwise encourages a child to run away or stay away from their care placement may be guilty of an offence and liable to prosecution (s49 of the Children Act 1989);
- Where it is inappropriate or not immediately possible to seek parental consent, s51 of the Children Act 1989 exempts agencies which provide refuges from charges under s2 of the Abduction Act, referred to previously, and from other charges relating to children missing from care. Young people may only be accommodated under this Section if they appear to be likely to suffer harm. They may stay in refuge provision for a continuous period of up to 14 days, and for no more than 21 days in a three-month period.

Appendix 2: Flow Chart of Key Questions for Information Sharing

[Click here for Appendix 2: Flow chart of Key Questions for information sharing.](#)

Appendix 3: Young People Missing from Home Process Flowchart

[Click here for Appendix 3: Young People Missing from Home Process Flowchart.](#)

Appendix 4: Young People Missing from Care Process Flowchart

[Click here for Appendix 4: Young People Missing from Care Process Flowchart.](#)

Appendix 5: Children Missing Education: The Role of the Local Authority in Identifying and Addressing Children Missing from Home or Care

School Attendance Procedures

Parents are responsible for ensuring their children receive a suitable education usually by regularly attending school.

All schools are recommended to make first day contact with parents whose children have failed to arrive at school without explanation.

If attendance falls below 80-85% and some of the absence is unauthorised (without an acceptable reason) the family may be referred to the Education Welfare Officer (EWO). Ultimately parents could be the subject of legal proceedings if the situation doesn't improve.

If pupils fail to return to school within 10 days and parents fail to offer an explanation, schools would refer the family to their EWO. If there were safeguarding concerns consideration would be given to asking the police to undertake a safe and well check.

Schools also notify Children's Social Care (CSC) if children who are the subject of a Child Protection (CP) plan are absent or are excluded.

If parents or carers inform school that their child was living in another household, schools would advise parents if this constituted a private fostering arrangement that there was a requirement for a CSC assessment.

If parents were to disclose that the children were missing from home they would be advised to contact the police.

Children Missing Education

See also the January 2015 Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities "[Children Missing Education](#)".

Children Missing Education (CME) will not necessarily be missing from home or care but Local Authority (LA) interventions designed to identify and address CME may be relevant in certain circumstances.

Children can miss education either when they fail to register with a school, or when they fall out of the education system by moving house or school without engaging with the appropriate services. Their personal circumstances or those of their families may contribute to the withdrawal process and the failure to make a successful transition. For example they may:

- Fail to start appropriate provision and hence never enter the system;
- Cease to attend, due to illegal exclusion or withdrawal; or
- Fail to complete a transition between providers (e.g. being unable to find a suitable school place after moving to a new local authority area, or after leaving a custodial establishment).

Some children living in certain circumstances face more obstacles to achieving the 5 Every Child Matters (ECM) Outcomes and this can include not receiving a suitable education. Amongst these are (this list is not exclusive):

- Children and young people under the supervision of the youth justice system;
- Children from families fleeing domestic violence;
- Children of homeless families, perhaps living in temporary accommodation, house of multiple occupancy or Bed and Breakfast;
- Young runaways;
- Children in families involved in anti-social behaviour;
- Children who are on the child protection register;
- Children affected by substance and/or alcohol;
- Unaccompanied asylum seekers; children of refugees and asylum seeking families;
- Children in new immigrant families, who are not yet established in the UK and may not have fixed addresses;
- Children of migrant worker families (who may not be familiar with the education system);
- Children of families who can be highly mobile, e.g. parents in the armed forces, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families;
- Children who do not receive a suitable education whilst being educated at home;
- Children who have been bullied;
- Children who have suffered discrimination on the grounds of race, faith, gender, disability or sexuality;
- Children at risk of sexual exploitation, including children who have been trafficked to, or within the UK;
- Children at risk of "honour"-based violence including forced marriage or female genital mutilation;
- Looked after children/children in care; children who go missing from care;
- Children who are privately fostered;
- Young carers;

- Teenage parents;
- Children who are permanently excluded from school, particularly those excluded unlawfully e.g. for problematic behaviour or offending;
- Children whose parents take them abroad for a prolonged period;
- Children who were registered with a school that has closed, and have not made the transition to another school;
- Children of parents with mental health problems;
- Children of parents with learning difficulties;
- Children with long term medical or emotional problems.

Local authorities have a legal responsibility to identify CME and to put in place effective tracking systems and support arrangements involving partner agencies as appropriate.

If parents inform a school that they are leaving the area or otherwise transferring schools, the new school would be contacted to ascertain that this was the case and to enable transfer of school records including any child protection files.

If parents do not contact the school or are unable to provide any forwarding address the school will refer the family to their EWO who will undertake an investigation. If the family cannot be traced the school will post them on the national S2S Lost Pupils database.

The Local Authority CME administrator will maintain a database of all CME cases who come into, go missing within, or leave the authority. All CME cases are investigated by an EWO within 28 days of notification.

Children Without a School Place

These are children who the LA has information about including their address, who for a variety of reasons do not have a school place. Securing a school place is a Parental Responsibility but support is available from the LA admissions department or the local EWO. As from September 2010 all admissions will be centrally managed by the LA.

Parents who fail to ensure their children receive and education either by attendance at school or otherwise could be the subject of a School Attendance Order.

Children without a school place, missing from home or with poor attendance could be picked up on a truancy sweep. Information on children without a school place is also routinely shared by health partners.

Elective Home Education

Some parent elect to educate their children at home. The LA can only intervene 'if it appears' that the parents are not providing a suitable education. Beyond its existing safeguarding duty the Local Authority has no extra powers to enter the home, see the children or inspect the education being provided.

Appendix 6: Social Care Recording a Missing Child on ICS

1. In ICS the Person Detail Record should be completed to ensure that when children go missing there is a clear place to record this and what actions are being taken;
2. The panel "Missing Person Events"(Panel 17) needs to be completed with exact details about the child/young person who went missing as far as they are known. Each time a child/young person goes missing this needs to be recorded and this will build up an on line chronology within ICS. There can also

be an alert put on for missing child/young person and this will stay on until the Date Found is confirmed in box;

3. In addition an ICS case note (Missing from home - MFH) should be completed and include the following information:
 - Police incident number and name of police force;
 - Agree with police timescales and level of phone calls to keep each other informed of developments;
 - Confirm that persons with Parental Responsibility are informed;
 - Identify if child/young person is missing by themselves or with others i.e. parents and carers; adults that pose a risk; other children;
 - Whether there is a likelihood of aggressive or anti-social behaviour; alcohol or drug related issues;
 - Confirm if there is a possibility that the child or young person may have been taken out of the UK;
 - Note if the child has been missing before or if this is completely out of character;
 - Confirm that Area Teams and EDT are aware that child/young person is missing;
 - Ensure that "return home interview" is conducted and identify by whom;
 - Identify which managers have been informed as per policy.
4. Other part of Personal Details that links to this (Panel I4 of ICS Person Details);
5. When a child is returned an ICS case note (Returned - MFHR) should be completed and saved on child's record. This record should confirm:
 - That "return home interview" has been conducted and by whom;
 - Relevant information that might help in preventing further instances of going missing.
6. In addition to the case note it is essential that you record that the child has returned in Panel 17 'Missing Person Events' on ICS Person Details.

Appendix 7: Risk identification: Questions from Police Central Referral Unit

[Click here for Appendix 7: Risk identification: Questions from Police Central Referral Unit.](#)

Appendix 8: Police Risk Assessment and Decision Making Guide for Missing Children

[Click here for Appendix 8: Police Risk Assessment and Decision Making Guide for Missing Children.](#)

Appendix 9: Missing from Home Protocol - Return Home Interview Guidance for Locality Teams

[Click here for Appendix 9: Missing from Home Protocol - Return Home Interview Form.](#)

End