

# **PART 15**

## **CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE AND HOME AND VULNERABLE MISSING FAMILIES**

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## Summary of “What to do if a child or young person goes missing”

1. When it first appears that a young person might be missing with cause for concern the persons responsible for their care should try to find them:
  - 1st. Speak to other members of the household to establish whether the young person is, in fact, missing without permission;
  - 2nd. Check the care plan for any previously agreed guidance incorporated within the care plan;
  - 3rd. Make enquiries to try to discover the whereabouts of the young person. Such enquiries would normally be made by phone and should include any places where the young person may have gone, including their home address, friends, etc.
  - 4th. Consult ContactPoint. The Children and Families Service provides a database of information to aid decision making processes when a young person does not return. It enables services to gather information from involved practitioners in the multi agency network (system anticipated to go live 2010);
  - 5th. Start recording, this is the responsibility of the foster carer/residential staff/parent;
  - 6th. Conduct a search of the building including outhouses and attics. Record exactly when and where you have searched;
  - 7th. Make a risk assessment. This is an ongoing risk assessment directly relating to a specific missing episode and will need to remain a live document until the young person returns. There are 2 possible outcomes to this assessment. (For more details see paragraphs 19-28).

## **Introduction and Legislative Framework**

2. This policy has been jointly developed by Staffordshire County Council, Children's Care Council, Children and Families, Health and Police. This policy intends to minimise the risk of young people going missing and to ensure they return as soon as possible.

This Policy considers the following legislation and Guidance.

- Children Act 1989 Section 49, 50, 51.  
[www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts1989/ukpga\\_19890041\\_en\\_7](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts1989/ukpga_19890041_en_7)
- The Children Act 2004 Section 10 (1) (2)  
[http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/ukpga\\_20040031\\_en\\_3](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/ukpga_20040031_en_3)
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Vol 1, 4.88., 4.91.  
<http://www.lbcma.org.uk/guidelines2.pdf>
- Department of health (2002) 'Children Missing from care and from Home – A guide to Good Practice', Department of Health Publications London.  
[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_4024807](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4024807)
- Guidance on the management recording and investigating of Missing Persons 2005 (Centrex, developing Police excellence)  
[http://www.acpo.police.uk/asp/policies/Data/missing\\_persons\\_2005\\_24x02x05.pdf](http://www.acpo.police.uk/asp/policies/Data/missing_persons_2005_24x02x05.pdf)
- The Children Act 2004 Every Child Matters  
<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/files/F9E3F941DC8D4580539EE4C743E9371D.pdf>
- The Care Matters  
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/timeforchange/docs/timeforchange.pdf>
- The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 [The Fostering Services Regulations 2002](#)
- The Children's Homes Regulations [The Children's Homes Regulations 2001](#)
- Child Exploitation  
[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_4003002](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4003002)
- Child Trafficking  
<http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/6C9D5BF6-29B4-42CB-BACB-78EDC71DD866/90476/MicrosoftWordWMdraftChTraffickingguidancesept2008.pdf>

- Child Abduction Act 1984  
[Child Abduction Act 1984 \(c. 37\) - Statute Law Database](#)

3. For the purposes of this protocol a child or young person is any person under the age of 18 years. A young person is now categorised as being 14 – 18 ref:

[http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1991/ukpga\\_19910053\\_en\\_16](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1991/ukpga_19910053_en_16)

4. Children or young people who are missing from Local Authority care, or are otherwise living away from home and go missing, invariably place themselves, and sometimes others at risk. The reasons for their absence are varied and complex and cannot be viewed in isolation from their home circumstances and their experiences of care. Every 'missing', 'unauthorised absence' or 'absconded' episode should therefore attract proper attention from the professionals involved with the child and those professionals, in turn, must collaborate to ensure a consistent and coherent response is given to the child on his/her return.
5. It is acknowledged that children who go missing may require additional support to achieve the five critical outcomes of being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well being.
6. The Police are frequent partners of Children and Families in managing 'missing' and 'absconded' episodes and it is, therefore, important that staff in both agencies work together in safeguarding children's welfare. This joint protocol has been developed to assist in this and combines aspects of Children and Families and Police procedures in relation to missing and absconded persons such that, where they overlap or interface, respective actions and responsibilities are clear.
7. To promote positive collaboration between those professionals delivering social care, Social Workers and the Police, as part of a broader initiative, neighbourhood Police officers are being designated to some residential units to visit young people and build positive relationships.
8. This Policy also aims to clarify the necessary action which must be taken when monitoring unauthorised absences.
9. This protocol addresses the actions required for:
  - Children who go missing from care or who are living away from home;
  - Children who go missing from home;
  - Children, considered vulnerable, who go missing with their families;

- Missing pregnant children and young people who are under 18;
  - Children go missing from education;
  - Children who have episodes of unauthorised absences.
10. When abduction is suspected this protocol will not apply. Actions should, in these circumstances, be taken in accordance with national legislation, Child Abduction Act 1984, [Child Abduction Act 1984 \(c. 37\) - Statute Law Database](#).
11. This protocol defines the roles and responsibilities of all those who are concerned with this process. The protocol depends on good communication and a willingness by all the parties to work together to promote the welfare of all young people who may be subject to this policy, including those who are looked after by the local authority.
12. This protocol should be read in conjunction with the Safeguarding Procedures. (These are available on the LSCB web site <http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/> )

## **Aims**

13. The aims of this protocol are based on the core principles of the council (see **Appendix 1**).
- To develop a high level of co-operation between agencies;
  - To provide a framework and guidance for the risk management of missing, absconded and unauthorised absent young persons;
  - To set out the responsibilities and actions required in individual cases based on an agreed risk assessment;
  - To establish systems for the maintenance of this protocol which includes training and raising awareness;
  - To effectively manage 'missing' procedures at senior and local levels within agencies, including the monitoring and reviewing of these procedures;
  - To enable effective reporting of NI 71.
  - To encourage partner agencies to include this protocol in ongoing training and induction programmes;
  - For other agencies to be familiar with the Missing from Care document e.g. other authorities and private sector;
  - Establish effective guidelines to effectively share information;

- To ensure the objectives of this document are implemented across Staffordshire. In residential care the Senior Manager of the home will be responsible for ensuring the general procedures in relation to a missing young person are followed. The allocated social worker, in consultation with their team manager, will do this in the case of a foster child. Foster carers roles should be clearly stated by the allocated social worker.
- A risk assessment will be undertaken by the child's social worker (or EDS) with the foster carer to determine whether the child is missing or if it is an unauthorised absence. Where the Police need to be notified this will be done by the foster carer. The Independent Return Interview will be arranged by the child's social worker.

## **Definitions**

14. For those professionals considering reporting a child or young person as missing to the Police, a full understanding of the following definitions is required in order for a proper evaluation of any risk assessments to be made:

### **Unauthorised Absence**

15. This category is critical to the clarification of roles of the Police and Children and Lifelong Learning. Some children absent themselves for a short period (and in certain circumstances for longer) and then return. Some of these children may be testing boundaries and are not necessarily at risk. However, through their actions they may place themselves at risk. These children and young people will be monitored on a regular basis by case managers.
16. Where a looked after child's whereabouts is known or thought to be known but unconfirmed, they are not missing and may instead be considered as absent without authorisation from their placement. (DCSF, July 2009).

### **Absconded**

17. A small number of young people enter care after they have been remanded to local authority accommodation (RLAA) by a Youth Court. A child who absconds from local authority accommodation when RLAA is unlawfully at large and has, in legal terms, escaped from custody. If a child who has been RLAA goes missing from a children's home or foster placement, then the Police will follow the established procedures relating to escape from custody.

18. This applies to a young person who is missing and is in breach of a legal requirement that carries a power of arrest including S46 Children Act (Police Protection) and section 38(6) Police and Criminal Evidence Act. It also applies to young people in breach of court or police imposed curfew orders

[http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1989/ukpga\\_19890041\\_en\\_7#pt5-l1q46](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1989/ukpga_19890041_en_7#pt5-l1q46)

**Young people who are in the absconded category should immediately be reported to the Police.**

### **Missing with Cause for Concern**

19. Where the child's location is unknown or the reason for their absence is a cause for concern because of their vulnerability or potential danger to the public or at risk to themselves.

### **Child Abduction**

20. Where a child has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence, this is a 'crime in action' and should be reported to the Police immediately. (DCSF, July 2009).

### **Forced Marriage**

21. Some young people run away because they are at risk of abuse. Forced marriage in particular can lead to young women running away from home. Further guidance can be found at [www.staffsscb.org.uk/publications](http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/publications) and at [www.fco.gov.uk/en/fco-in-action/nationals/forced-marriage-unit/](http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/fco-in-action/nationals/forced-marriage-unit/)

### **Sexual Exploitation**

22. In some cases, young people may run away or go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them sexually. Both boys and girls are at risk of sexual exploitation and looked after children may be targeted by those wishing to abuse and sexually exploit them. Further guidance can be found at ?

### **Child Trafficking**

23. Some missing children subsequently become trafficked, often for the purposes of sexual exploitation. They may be trafficked across both small

and large geographical areas. Guidance for practitioners regarding child trafficking can be found at [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk) and under the regional procedures tab at [www.staffsscb.org/uk/publications](http://www.staffsscb.org/uk/publications).

## **SECTION 1 - CHILDREN IN CARE**

### **The Risk Assessment**

24. If the whereabouts of a looked after child are not known or there are concerns for their safety in a known location; a risk assessment should be carried out to assess the degree of risk. **Appendix 2** contains the questions considered by the Police when they carry out their risk assessment. You should be guided by the information contained in **Appendix 2** when the risk assessment is made. In brief the following should be considered:

- The age of young person e.g. under 10-years old. It is important to also take into consideration the risk posed by young people who's actions and understanding are below that of their chronological age;
- The vulnerability of the young person e.g. special needs, physical/learning disability;
- The young person's legal status, who has parental responsibility?
- Previous behaviour patterns e.g. the absence is out of character and is considered as being unusual;
- The state of mind/perceived risk e.g. the young person is considered to be at particular risk by virtue of self harm or being harmed by others;
- Any known risk of sexual exploitation;
- Trafficking – The Trafficking Toolkit provides helpful guidance on this subject: <http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits>
- Whether the young person is perceived as running to someone safe or risky; or running from a situation;
- Consider the views of the parent/those with parental responsibility if known as previously expressed;
- Any health needs relating to individual young people must be made clear in the risk assessment.

25. A risk assessment may conclude with the decision that a young person falls into one of two categories. Young people can move from one category to another so risk assessments should be repeated at regular intervals. The risk assessment should focus on the degree of risk. **Carry on recording.**

## **Unauthorised Absence**

26. For the purpose of this report young people who are involved in episodes of unauthorised absences should be closely monitored. This will be relevant to young people in residential care or foster care whose unauthorised absences are monitored by regulation 30 of The Children's Homes Regulations (residential care) or regulation 42 The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.
27. This includes young people who have been absent for a short period, who are not considered at risk and who may be just testing boundaries. Occasionally young people stay out longer than agreed either on purpose or unwittingly. This kind of boundary testing activity is well within the range of normal teenage behaviour and should not come within the definition of 'missing' for this protocol.
28. Young people who fall within the category of "unauthorised absence" must be the subject of continuous assessment whilst they remain absent. During their absence circumstances may change and carers need to be in a position to respond. In this phase carers should continue to take all reasonable and practical steps to establish the whereabouts of the young person.
29. The risk assessment form found at **Appendix 2** should be used to help determine when a young person has moved to 'missing with cause for concern'.
30. Young people on care orders can be absent as an unauthorised absence. Their care plan and current placement may however have been agreed by the court. Any stay with parents that is not part of an approved contact arrangement would need to be agreed by a senior manager in Children's Services under the 'Placement with Parents' procedures.
31. Consideration should be given to informing parents and those with parental responsibility. The details of this will be listed in the care plan. The social worker should also be informed of any unauthorised absences.

**Children and young people in this category do not need to be reported to the Police.**

## **Missing with Cause for Concern**

32. There will be a wide range of circumstances when children and young people are missing with cause for concern. These will range from young people at risk of homicide, sexual exploitation, self harm or abduction or

who may be at risk of being forced into marriage or prostitution. Some young people will go voluntarily into risky situations, for example, young person choosing to go to a peer who is a known drug user. All these situations are a cause of concern but they merit different levels of response.

Young people who are missing with cause for concern should be reported to the Police. The Police with other agencies also carry out a risk assessment and identify three levels of risk. Young people up until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday will always be categorised as being at high or medium risk. Again it is necessary to consider the understanding and emotional vulnerability alongside the chronological age of a young person. More details about this risk assessment process can be found in **Appendix 2**.

<b>The Grounds for Categorising a Missing Child or Young Person at High or Medium Risk</b>	
<b>HIGH RISK</b>	
Degree of risk	Joint agency response
The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the subject 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 that the public is in danger. Young people who are identified at risk of Forced Marriage are under this category.	This category requires the immediate deployment of Police resources and the relevant Head of Service must be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels. Such cases should lead to the appointment of a Senior Investigating Officer (Police). There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies.
<b>MEDIUM RISK</b>	
Degree of risk	Joint agency response
The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.	This category requires all agencies to provide a pro-active response in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.  The missing person's details will be passed to <b>Missing People</b> (formerly National Missing Persons Helpline) <b>0500</b>

**No young person who is under the age of 18 and who is missing is ever classed as 'low risk'.**

### **Communication within Residential Homes or with those within Foster Care**

33. Should a young person's absence continue, and after the Police, social worker and parents/carer/foster carer have been informed, the manager (or duty officer) of the home should make arrangements to inform all young people and staff within the home. In this way, distressing rumours may be avoided and additional information regarding the missing young person's whereabouts might be obtained. The young person's school should also be informed in case they, too, have any information regarding their whereabouts. Any such information should be passed to the Police.

### **Missing or Unauthorised Absence During an External Activity**

34. The person in charge of the external activity will:-

- Notify the local Police in that area (in cases of 'Missing' only).
- Notify the relevant Head of Service.
- Institute a local search if staffing levels permit.
- Ensure the safety of the rest of the group.

On going communication will be maintained between the home/foster care and local Police regarding the young person.

### **Young people who have repeated missing incidents**

35. Young people who have repeated incidents of going missing with cause for concern should be the subject of multi disciplinary planning meetings. These should start at a local level but if the incidents of running away continue a formal multi agency strategy meeting should be called (see paragraphs 90 - 99 of this document).

### **Reporting to the Police**

36. To inform the Police about a missing young person dial **0300 123 4455**. The operator answering the call will take the necessary information or will put you through to the right person. **In exceptional circumstances if a very vulnerable child goes missing and an immediate, urgent response is needed dial 999, explain the circumstances of the child's disappearance and the reasons for your concern.**
37. **The Police can (with the permission of a senior officer) issue a Child Rescue Alert. This involves immediate high profile publicity about a child's disappearance.**

**The Police will give an incident number. It is important that a note is kept of this number in the child's case notes**

38. The decision to report to the Police that a young person missing with cause for concern or absconded should, if possible, be taken by main care providers in consultation with senior colleagues and with reference to the risk assessments and referral document (SW120). If this is not possible line managers should review the circumstances of young people who have been reported missing to see if the correct procedures have been followed.

39. Whilst notifying the Police of the absence of a child or young person is an essential part of the overall process, having done so does not absolve staff or foster carers of their corporate parenting responsibilities for the child, and such carers should take all necessary actions to attempt to locate the missing person.

40. In the case of foster care, the child's social worker or EDS worker will complete/review the risk assessment with the carer and make the decision whether to report to the Police. The foster carer will make the call supplying essential details/information.

41. **In very urgent situations these procedures can be overridden but the actions taken should be reviewed at a later date.**

42. Parents and persons with parental responsibility for the child or young person should be notified at the time reports are made to the Police and also on the young person's return. For children in foster care this will be done by the child's social worker or EDS. For cases of potential Forced Marriage contact with parents should not be an immediate action.

43. When the Police receive a notification that a young person is missing with cause for concern, they will need information to help them to search for

the missing person. As part of their efforts to locate the young person, they will ask to search the home of the young person. This search will include looking in outbuildings and accessible attic spaces. There have been a number of cases in which young people have put themselves at great risk whilst being hidden within the house. If carers can demonstrate by their written record that they have carried out a thorough search the Police may not have to repeat this process.

44. It is acknowledged that these searches are very disruptive. Every effort will be made by the Police to keep searches in the middle of the night to a minimum.
45. If the Police have reason to believe that a young person has gone to another Police area they will liaise with the appropriate people in that Police authority.

See **Appendix 3** for details of information to be made available to the Police.

46. On receipt of a missing notification the Police make an entry on the National Computer (all risk levels). For high-risk cases they also immediately inform Missing People (**0500 700 700**). For medium risk cases the Helpline is informed after 72 hours.
47. The Police also inform the National Missing Persons Bureau of all cases where the young person has been missing for 14 days.

### **What the Police Can Do**

48. The Police have significant powers to safeguard vulnerable children. These include powers to enter premises, to recover children and to invoke Police protection powers. Police must have reasonable cause for concern over the young person's safety/wellbeing before they can enter the property.
49. When a missing child is found or known to have been in company with any older person during any missing episode, in circumstances which afford reasonable grounds to suspect that an offence has been committed by that older person relating in any way to that child (i.e. child abduction, sexual offence, drug offence, assault, aid, abet, counsel or procuring child to commit an offence etc), the incident will be taken seriously throughout the process of reporting, investigation and provision of follow up care. The Police priority is the safety and well being of the child; thereafter, the Police will take 'positive action' against any perpetrators, hold them accountable for their actions and prefer charges where appropriate.

50. Police officers dealing with such incidents are encouraged to use the full range of powers of arrest available to them. Police officers should ensure that all the available evidence is collated in order that an informed decision can be made relating to whether a prosecution should be pursued. It is recognised that children who have been the victim of a serious offence may not always see themselves as victims or be willing to assist in the investigation, particularly in the early stages. Likewise those whom others have used for criminal purposes may not be willing to assist the Police. **A complaint from a victim is not required to make an arrest.** Usually 'reasonable suspicion' is enough to arrest. When such an offence has occurred and a power of arrest exists, the offender should normally be arrested. An officer should be prepared to justify a decision not to arrest in these circumstances.
51. Officers will not be deterred from making appropriate lawful arrests in these cases by real difficulties often faced in obtaining sufficient evidence to mount successful prosecutions.
52. Circumstantial evidence, together with evidence from scenes, vehicles, mobile telephony and carers may well assist to build a case further. Moreover, children who initially refuse to assist Police investigations may later agree, particularly when those who have committed an offence against them have been arrested.
53. It is much better to arrest and investigate thoroughly, even if a successful prosecution cannot be brought, than it is to give tacit approval to those who abuse missing children by failing to arrest them in the first place.
54. It is an option in exceptional cases for the Police to recover missing children quickly in order to protect them from further risk. There may be predatory influences and Police need to be aware of the relevant issues.
55. Children and Families will support the Police in taking appropriate but strong action against those who involve 'looked after children' in their offending behaviour.

### **Planning for Return**

56. When a child's absence is reported as 'missing' the child's social worker, residential unit or foster carer placing authority and placement provider (and if possible and where appropriate in consultation with the parents and Police) should commence planning for when the child is located. Such plans should include:

- Whether the child will return to the same placement;
  - How and by whom they will be conveyed there;
  - Do the Police wish to interview the child before they return to their placement? This would only occur if the young person was an offender or a victim of crime;
  - Create a sensitive environment for the child's return;
  - Identify and arrange for an appropriate professional person, independent of the child's placement, to talk to them prior to their return to the placement. (Where possible);
  - Police will visit the child to conduct a 'Safe and Well Interview'. This should not be confused with the role of the Independent Interview. This is especially relevant to cases concerned with Child Abduction and Child Trafficking.
57. Whoever finds a young person has a responsibility to try and find out why the young person ran away. This may be the only opportunity a young person has to report abuse, bullying or mistreatment in a care setting. In the event of significant concern the young person should be reported under Section 47 Procedure to the First Response Team **0800 1313 126**.

### **Longer Absences**

58. When a child has been absent for a period of 48 hours the child's social worker should inform the relevant Assistant Director for their service via the usual line management route. However where there is significant concern an Assistant Director should be alerted immediately.
59. Throughout the enquiry, carers and the Police will continually review the case. After the young person has been missing for 5 days, **or earlier, if deemed appropriate**, the Police and child's social worker will hold an urgent case review meeting. It will involve Police officers, carers, the child's social worker, and any other care professional involved in the care of the child.
60. The meeting will review:
- What action has been taken so far by the Police and care professionals;
  - What action needs to be taken by the Police and care professionals;
  - Whether the young person should return to that placement when

located;

- Any other relevant information;
- Date of further meeting to be agreed by all parties should the missing episode continue;
- Decide if procedures should be invoked under S47 of the Children Act 1989.

61. Minutes of the case review should be provided to the relevant Assistant Director and the child's Independent Reviewing Officer who chairs their 'looked after' Reviews.
62. All Police missing person's files will remain live until the person is traced or until the Area Chief Inspector, Operations in consultation with the respective Assistant Director, is satisfied that all lines of enquiry have been exhausted. They will then forward the file to their appropriate line managers who will take the final decision to file or otherwise. The Assistant Director for Children and Families must be informed of all such cases.
63. Where the decision to file has been made, the Audit Review Team will be responsible for bringing forward the file on persons who remain missing for review by the appropriate senior managers, 12 months after the file date. Further such reviews will take place at least every 5 days thereafter **or earlier, if deemed appropriate.**

### **Return of the Young Person**

64. If the whereabouts are known or suspected, it is the responsibility of the Local Authority or independent provider to arrange for a young persons return.
65. However, there will be exceptional circumstances when, in the interests of the safe return of the young person, the Police may agree to requests from the Local Authority or independent provider to assist. The Police should not unreasonably withhold assistance in cases involving local recovery and transport missions for vulnerable children. However, the Police will not agree to requests to provide escorts for young runaways, which would involve officers leaving their normal areas of patrol.
66. **It is the responsibility of the carer to contact the Police by telephone and to confirm that the missing child has returned to the home.** The Police will accept confirmation from care professionals; however, they may still conduct a safe welfare check. This will lead to the Police closing the missing person investigation and the case being cancelled on the Police national computer.

### **Child Protection Concerns**

67. If it is apparent, upon the return of a young person, that they have been the victim of a crime whilst absent, or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person arising out of circumstances that have occurred whilst they were absent then the Police must be called and asked to attend

- without delay. This is vital for the protection of the child and for the speedy recovery of evidence. A parallel referral is also required under S47 procedures.
68. Where runaways from one LA present themselves in another LA it is important that the LA in which the child is found (receiving authority) works with the authority where the child resides (home authority) to ensure they get access to the help and support services they need.
  69. Responsibility for making child protection enquiries rests with the local authority in which the child is found. If this LA is not the one in which the child normally resides, it may negotiate with the 'home' LA continue with these enquiries (Children Act 1989 – Sec 47).
  70. In such circumstances, the missing persons clothing, mobile phone and trace evidence from their body, fingernails or hair may be crucial. In cases of sexual abuse the child should be discouraged from washing and immediate advice sought from the Police. If carers become aware of the location of the scene of any crime committed against the young person, or of the location of any crucial evidence (i.e. a used condom) they must notify the Police without delay. This will enable the Police to take steps to secure and preserve evidence.
  71. In cases where there is suspicion of sexual abuse the Police have access to specially trained officers, doctors and facilities designed to care for the victim and obtain evidence.
  72. Additionally, in matters of sexual exploitation, or any other situation which indicates that the child may have been subject to, or at risk of, significant harm, referral must be made under the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board Policy Guidance and Procedures. [SSCB Home](#)
  73. When a young person returns to the placement it is the responsibility of the foster carers/residential staff to notify any person notified of the missing episode.

## **The Return**

74. On the young person's return, foster carers/residential staff should make clear to the young person that they are relieved to see the young person is safe and well. Their general condition should be assessed immediately, and if appropriate, medical attention should be arranged. Food and drink should also be a priority. The safety and welfare of the young person should also be ensured especially if it seems that they have run away

because of bullying or harassment. The return should be notified to the Placement Unit – Tel: ?

75. Parents, Police, social workers and all others informed of the absence should be advised of the young person's return without delay. They should be informed of any information gathered on their return.
76. Consideration should be given to whether a strategy meeting is required if for example a pattern of running away is developing. Any of the partner agencies of this protocol can request a strategy meeting following consultation with their first line manager if it appears that there is significant risk to a young person or there are child protection concerns (refer to paragraphs 90, 94 & 95 of this document). A strategy discussion will enable formal consideration to be given to the need to invoke child protection enquiries.

### **Voluntary Return**

77. The Police should be informed immediately following the return of a young person who has been reported missing. The Police will make a return phone call to a residential home/foster home to ensure that the notification of return is genuine. The Police may choose to visit the children's home to verify a young person's return; this will be dependant on individual circumstances. If verification of a return to a foster home can be provided by a social worker, verification by the Police can be delayed until a mutually agreed time.

### **Independent Return Interview(s)**

78. The young person should be told that they will be given the chance to talk to someone, independent of the home or the foster home, about their absence. They should be told that this would normally be their allocated social worker but, if they wish, it could be another person. This person should have no formal line management links with the home. In some circumstances this could be a Police officer. This is an essential part of the safeguarding process.
79. The allocated social worker is responsible for arranging the Independent Return Interview (or a member of their team) must visit and see the young person **within 72-hours of their return**. They should ensure the interview has taken place.

80. The interview should address and deal with any harm or offences that the child/young person came to while they were missing.
81. The interview must be recorded (see **Appendix 4**). The person conducting the interview should try and establish, where the young person was during the time they were missing, who they stayed with, how they survived. This information must be passed on to the residential/foster home, so that it can be used if the young person goes missing again. Relevant information should also be shared with Staffordshire Police.
82. It is important to establish if the young person was running to someone or away from incidents in the home.
83. It is the responsibility of the field social worker/out of hour's social worker to interview the child, or to arrange an interview with an independent person.
84. Children and Families are responsible for ensuring that a return interview is conducted for each missing episode.
85. Ideally, this should be conducted by a person independent of the care placement. Account should also be taken over any preference the young person has for the conducting of the Independent Return Interview.
86. When it is not practicable for a return interview to be conducted by the most suitable person, or an independent person, it is better that an interview is conducted by any care professional than no interview being conducted at all.
87. The Independent Return Interview should be completed as soon as possible. It is expected that it will be conducted within 72 hours of the child's return.
88. The purpose of the interview is:
- To encourage the child/young person to tell their story and express their needs;
  - To discover the factors which led to the missing episode;
  - To inform efforts to prevent further missing episodes;
  - To inform any future missing person investigation should that person go missing again;
  - To learn of the activities, associates, risks and victimisation involved in the missing episode, and where possible to address

those risks.

89. The return interview is important in safeguarding the child in future. It must not be viewed or conducted as a routine administrative task. The interview will be recorded on the form shown at **Appendix 4**.
90. The record of interview will be forwarded to the Police, where possible electronically, in accordance with locally agreed procedures. A copy will also be sent to the child's social worker, and information shared with the carers as appropriate.
91. In some circumstances the child may make extremely sensitive disclosures that the carer feels need particularly careful management. If so, the person conducting the interview may disclose on the form that there are sensitive matters disclosed by the child, which are not being shared on the form. These disclosures should be the subject of a separate record retained by the placement. In such circumstances it will usually be appropriate for the person conducting the interview to discuss such cases with the Police missing person champion/divisional chief inspector for the area. Such records must be kept in such a manner that will become immediately accessible in the event of a future missing episode, when they may become relevant to the investigation to recover and safeguard the child.
92. Where an Independent Return Interview leads to a disclosure that needs specific action, say, to investigate a crime against the young person or require measures to safeguard the child, the matter should be referred:
- To the Police, via telephone.
  - The child's social worker should also be informed (if urgent and out of hours, EDT)
  - Additionally, in matters of sexual exploitation, or any other situation that indicates that the child may have been subject to, or at risk of, significant harm, referral must be made under SSCB Safeguarding Procedures.
93. In consultation with the residential unit, or with the foster carers as appropriate, the social worker and his/her Team Manager should decide whether a Strategy Meeting and/or Looked after Children Review is required. The allocated Independent Reviewing Officer should be consulted. However, if the child's placement is likely to be terminated upon their return any such meeting must be convened as a Statutory (Looked after Child) Review.



## Scaled Intervention

### The role of care planning

94. Every looked-after child must have a care plan based on a comprehensive assessment of their needs that takes into account their wishes, feelings and aspirations for the future. All care plans must be kept under review. The review meeting must be chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).
95. The statutory review should consider the adequacy of the Care Plan in addressing why a child has gone missing and in ensuring adequate strategies are in place to address future missing episodes. The review should consider all push/pull factors in relation to missing episodes (eg sexual exploitation, running to spend contact time with family).
96. Alongside the care plan, a Placement Information Record should be completed between the responsible LA and the provider of the child's placement. The expectations as to how they will meet the child's needs should be sent out in the PIR.
97. The Police, Children and Families, Health, and other relevant partners will operate an escalating system of interventions to reduce the likelihood of a child repeatedly going missing (see paragraphs 90, 94 & 95 of this document).
98. Intervention meetings should take place in the event of repeat episodes of children going missing from care. For these meetings to work, and thereby improve our collective responses, appropriate attendance and clarity of purpose are essential. The intervention meetings should be held **within five working days**. The meetings should be chaired by a Social Worker and recorded and the increased levels of concern reflected in the seniority of those attending as detailed in paragraphs 90, 94 and 95 of this document. For children and young people who are placed in Staffordshire by other local authorities, these meetings should be convened and attended by the placing social worker.
99. **After three episodes within a 90-day period:** This has been labelled as 'Three strikes and you are in.' Young person and advocate (except in exceptional circumstances), parent or those with parental responsibility, Social worker (chair), Police officer, residential worker/foster carer/fostering social worker (as appropriate), person who conducted return interview if different to above, should meet and agree a plan of action.

100. In the event that at the Independent Return Interview certain issues become evident; it would be appropriate to invite relevant professionals to this meeting to benefit from their specialist knowledge. **It should be noted that it is not necessary to wait for 90 days to elapse; this meeting should be initiated as soon as three missing episodes have been reported.**

101. This meeting should try to identify any 'push' or 'pull' factor in the case and any other voluntary or statutory agency, which has an interest, or may take an interest, in the missing person's welfare and circumstances. In the case of 'pull' factors it may be necessary to target those in the community who harbour the missing person or exploit them with regard to crime, sex or drugs. ('Running Away', *Morgan 2006*, may be consulted in these circumstances.)

102. It is appropriate at this point to assess the risk should the young person go missing again within a 90 day period. It may be appropriate to keep a photograph of the young person to be used to help locate them should any further instances occur. The photograph should be stored in a secure location.

103. **After five episodes within a 90-day period:** Team Manager (chair), Young person and advocate (except in exceptional circumstances), parent or those with parental responsibility, team manager from children's services, deputy Police supervisor, residential unit manager/assistant or fostering team manager (as appropriate), social worker, representatives from health and/or education (as appropriate) person who conducted return interview if different to above. This level of intervention meeting is the crucial stage in avoiding serious escalation and must, therefore, be given high priority by all concerned.

104. **After nine episodes within a 90-day period:** Head of Strategic Safeguarding and Performance, Young person and advocate (except in exceptional circumstances), parent or those with parental responsibility, Children's team manager, fostering team manager, police missing person coordinator/champion, residential manager (as appropriate), social worker, representatives from health and/or education (as appropriate) person who conducted return interview if different to above. The Independent Reviewing Officer should be invited, although capacity may prevent this. They should in all circumstances be provided with minutes of the meeting.

105. It should be noted, however, that the **number of incidents** is not the only reason to launch an intervention or to escalate the level of

intervention. The following are both examples of other reasons to launch or escalate interventions:

- Any case where the risks involved in even a single future-missing episode is very high.
- Cases where it has been identified that immediate action is necessary to ensure the well being of the person.
- A quick succession of missing episodes eradicating the need for 90 days to elapse.

106. Meetings at this level should be rare provided that this protocol has been followed with regard to earlier intervention meetings and return interviews. In addition to seeking to reduce future missing episodes and reduce any apparent risks to the young person/child, this meeting should also quality assures compliance with the protocols and the efficacy of earlier intervention meetings and return interviews.

107. At this stage a report should be prepared as the case will feature in the quarterly analysts report on missing persons. This report will be shared with SSCB and The Children's Trust.

108. If the person continues to be reported missing more than nine times in 90 days the Senior Management Team for the division should discuss the case and consider whether it is appropriate for them to intervene further or for the Assistant Chief Constable (Operations) to be asked to intervene.

109. A record shall be made of all intervention meetings held by the Police on the Compact missing person's system as part of the Police computer system. This will be shared with all parties as stated in paragraph 99 of this document. The Residential Units are required to maintain information regarding unauthorised absences. Quarterly reports of unauthorised absences will be requested to inform reports made to the SSCB and Children's Trust.

110. When the local authority or Police believe that an adult is adversely involved with a child or children who are going missing from home, in addition to any action taken under paragraphs 44 -51 of this protocol, the Police, Children and Families, Health and other relevant partners will consider what more can be done to protect the young person.

111. This may involve the making of a formal witness statement by the local authority manager, specifically prohibiting that adult from having any contact with named children, without exceptions. The Police would then show the adult a copy of the statement, a photograph of the child (which

they would not be allowed to keep) and serve upon that adult a notice prohibiting the adult from having any contact whatsoever with the child and explaining any breach would be dealt with by arrest under section 2 Child Abduction Act 1984. (See **Appendix 5** for specimen notices and **Appendix 6** for Police Abduction Flow chart). It should be note that this only applies to young people under the age of 16.

112. Alternatively the local authority, supported by the Police, may decide to institute civil proceedings to obtain an injunction preventing any particular adult having any contact with a named child.

### **Recording within Children's Services**

113. Throughout the process a full record must be kept of all actions taken and messages received or given. This recording should be made within the placement log book or case file. Foster carers will record in their contacts file, copy to be provided to the child's social worker.

114. A full record should be kept of all incidents of young people absenting themselves from placements without permission, whether or not reports are subsequently made to the Police. This should show the time of the start of the absence, the time and circumstances of the return (e.g. why the young person ran away). This may lead to a range of secondary action if, for instance, the young person gave bullying or other problems as the precipitating factor. Similarly, difficulties at home or school may need to be followed through by social workers, carers and residential workers.

115. In addition to any follow up action which may be required residential staff and carers are required to keep the allocated social worker and parents informed and involved with the day to day activity and behaviour of young people being looked after. Allocated social workers are expected to follow up incidents with young people running away and to explore with them the possibility of the behaviour being related to the placement itself.

### **Arbitration Arrangements**

116. The welfare of the young person must not be compromised as a consequence of local agency difficulties. Managers and practitioners are expected to adopt a common sense approach that ensures the safety and welfare of the young person.

117. This protocol will assist both managers and practitioners in responding effectively to young people missing from local authority care. It is recognised that the protocol cannot include guidance for all eventualities

occurring in this important area of partnership working. However, where difficulties at the local level arise, the Head of Strategic Safeguarding and Performance should be informed who will explore appropriate actions for resolution in partnership with involved agencies.

## **SECTION 2 – CHILDREN IN CARE (Out of Local Area Placements)**

### **Staffordshire Looked After Children placed out of County**

118. Children 'looked after' by Staffordshire but placed out of the local area should be subject to equal rigour of care planning as those placed within Staffordshire's borders. They should be subject to escalation meetings, reporting requirements and return interviews as specified in Section 1 of these procedures.
119. The Placement Information Record and Care Plan should clearly detail a young person's needs in relation to missing episodes. Critically, the PIR should detail the expectation that all missing episodes are reported by the placement provider to the caseholding social worker.
120. Standards for return interviews and escalation meetings should be maintained for children placed outside the LA's borders.
121. In order to maintain a full overview of children missing from care, the allocated IRO is required to report the number of missing episodes and the adequacy of responses to these episodes to the ? following each statutory review of a looked after child placed outside of Staffordshire. This will inform strategic planning and reporting. The IRO should inform the designated Team Manager escalation meetings/return interviews for children placed out of county have not been managed in accordance with these procedures.

### **Looked After Children placed within Staffordshire by other LA's**

122. All Independent Providers operating residential provision with the LA area will be provided with a copy of these procedures. They will further be informed of the training which supports these procedures, as provided by the SSCB. Such providers have a responsibility to comply with these procedures and also to comply with any other processes specified in the placing authorities missing from home and care procedures.

123. Local Authorities placing children within Staffordshire are required to inform Staffordshire LA of this placement. Upon receipt of this notification, a record of the child and their placement will be recorded within the Electronic Children's Social Care Record.

124. All missing episodes reported to the Police are recorded and shared with Children and Families for strategic monitoring and planning purposes.

125. Upon receipt of a missing notification regarding a child placed in Staffordshire by another LA, a letter will be sent to the placing local authority advising them of the miss episode.
126. Where a child placed in Staffordshire by another LA is identified to be suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm, child protection procedures will be enacted.
127. Where a child placed in Staffordshire by another LA has gone missing 9 times in a 90 day period the Head of Strategic Safeguarding in the placing LA will be informed in writing and asked to ensure that all appropriate measures are in place for the future care and safety of that child. Formal written details will be required so that the child's ESCR (Staffordshire) can be updated. A copy of this letter will be forwarded to the Missing Children's Champion at Staffordshire Police.
128. Where missing episodes continue to escalate despite the above noted intervention, the Head of Strategic Safeguarding and Performance (Staffordshire) will consider necessary further actions.

## **SECTION 3 – CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME**

### **Principles**

129. A co-ordinated response is equally required for children who are missing from home. This is the case both for those children reported as having gone missing by their parents and those runaways who are not reported.
130. Research has found that around one fifth of runaways can be categorised as having been 'forced to leave home'. Very few of these young people are reported as missing to the Police leaving them a relatively hidden and particularly vulnerable group.

### **Child Reported as Missing to the Police**

131. In the first instance parents/carers should make efforts to locate the missing young person, searching the locality and making enquiries with friends/relatives.
132. To inform the Police about a missing young person dial 0300 123 4455. The operator answering the call will take the necessary information or will put you through to the right person. In exceptional circumstances if a very vulnerable child goes missing and an immediate, urgent response is

needed dial 999, explain the circumstances of the child's disappearance and the reasons for your concern.

133. The Police will need to know:

- Child's name
- Child's date of birth
- Where, when and with whom the child went missing
- What was the child wearing
- Description of the child
- Agree to provide a recent photograph
- Medical history
- Time and location they were last seen
- Circumstances of going missing
- Details of friends/associates

134. Officers will conduct a risk assessment forming the basis for resulting proportionate actions. They will make ongoing enquiries, sharing information with parents and other agencies as appropriate.

#### **Return of a Child Missing from Home**

135. Family/friends locating a child missing from home should return them to their home address.

136. Where a risk is present, a police officer may accompany the family or the police may be requested to return the child to the place of residence only if it is safe to do so.

137. Parents must inform the police when a child returns of their own accord.

138. The police should conduct an interview known as a safe and well check to establish the young person's wellbeing and safety, and to establish whether they were the victim of crime or abuse whilst missing.

#### **Referral to Children's Social Care**

139. Where the Police or other agencies assess that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm an onward referral to Children's Social Care should be made.

140. Their risk assessment will be informed by:

- Individual circumstances, including family circumstances in which the child has gone missing;
- motivation for running;
- possible destination; and

- recent patterns of absences (if any);
- the parent/s appear unable, or unwilling, to work to support and meet the needs of children.

141. Upon receipt of referral concerning a child missing from home the First Response Service will assess whether a referral as a child in need or a child in need of protection is required.

142. Whether a child's case is processed as a child in need or a child protection referral, the receiving social worker should conduct a return interview according to the format provided at Appendix 4.

### **Notification to the LA and Early Intervention Strategies**

143. Where no onward referral to CSC is made, the Police are nevertheless required to report the missing episode, as all others, to the LA.

144. Upon receipt of notifications of children missing from home the LA will identify all those children not subject to a referral to Children's Social Care upon their return.

145. Details of these children will be passed to the Joint Assessment Co-ordinators (previously CAF co-ordinators) who will identify the most appropriate Early Intervention Team member to conduct a Return Interview eg Parent Support Worker.

146. A Common Assessment (CAF) will be conducted, with correct family consents having been acquired, at the same time as the return interview (if a CAF does not already exist). A Lead Professional will be identified if the CAF identifies this as a necessary further action.

147. The young person should subsequently receive appropriate support as identified by the CAF.

148. The outcome of a CAF may also result in onward referral to Children's Social Care.

PARAGRAPHS 143-148 ARE NOT CURRENTLY OPERATIONAL. STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENTS DURING LATE 2009/10 ARE IN PLACE IN ORDER TO REALISE RESPONSES TO CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME.

## **SECTION 4 – STRATEGIC MONITORING/ RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Governance Arrangements**

149. This procedure has been approved by Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) and Staffordshire's Children's Trust (Insert date).
150. The SSCB missing children task-to-finish will receive quarterly reports regarding compliance with this procedure, including statistical analysis of local needs arising, including any identified gaps in service delivery.
151. Exception reports, including any issues pertaining to joint commissioning, will be reported to the SSCB and to the Children's Trust by the Chair of the SSCB.
152. The Chair of the SSCB will include details regarding the quarterly analysis of this procedure in their bi-annual reports to the Scrutiny Committee.

### **Named Responsible Officers**

153. Staffordshire Police have designated as their lead officer with primary strategic responsibility for children missing from care and home – Protective Services Division Superintendent.
154. The Local Authority have designated the Assistant Director, Area Based Services, Children and Families Division as their lead officer with primary strategic responsibility for children missing from care and home.
155. The SSCB and Staffordshire Children's Trust have designated the SSCB Manager to ensure that reporting arrangements are managed according to this procedure.

### **Reporting NI 71 to the DCSF**

156. The Head of Service - Strategic Safeguarding and Performance, Children and Families, is the Designated Officer responsible for ensuring completion of the NI 71 return.

## **Data Analysis**

157. The Police will monitor absences of individual children and absences from each residential establishment/foster placement. They will further collect data about the number of children reported as missing from home. A police analyst will provide a quarterly report which will be made available to the SSCB and the Children's Trust.

158. The Police will provide details of all missing episodes to Children and Families, (Placement Unit). Upon receipt of this information the Placement Unit will

### **For Staffordshire Looked After Children (placed in county)**

- Inform the case holding social worker in writing of the missing episode, requiring written confirmation that a return interview has been conducted.

### **For Staffordshire Looked After Children (placed out of county)**

- Collate information received by the IRO's regarding numbers of return interviews conducted and the effectiveness of care plans in reducing missing episodes.

### **For Looked After Children Placed by other LA's in Staffordshire**

- Inform the placing authority and the residential unit in writing of the missing episode, requiring written confirmation that a return interview has been conducted.

### **For Children Missing from Home**

- Collate information received by the Joint Assessment Co-ordinators regarding numbers of missing episodes resulting in a CAF and numbers of return interviews conducted.
- When robust mechanisms have been established regarding the numbers of return interviews conducted, this will be included in the quarterly reports to SSCB/Corporate Parenting Panel.

## **Annual Strategic Review**

159. The SSCB Missing Children Task-to-Finish Group will consider the quarterly reports received and provide an annual report to the SSCB, the CHILDREN WHO GO MISSING FROM CARE AND HOME AND VULNERABLE MISSING FAMILIES  
REVISED AND APPROVED – DECEMBER 2009

Children's Trust. The Director of Children's Services and Councillors responsible for corporate parenting.

### **Training and Induction**

160. The contents of this protocol should be shared with all key members of staff within each agency. The protocol should be part of the induction of residential staff, foster carers, field social workers, EDT and foster carer support staff. It should be part of the induction of the following staff within the police force; supervisors within force control and Local Policing Units commanders.

161. Inter-Agency Training to support effective implementation of this procedure will be provided by SSCB

## **Glossary of terms**

**Children in Care:** this term includes all those young people placed within Staffordshire County Council from both internal and external agencies/authorities.

**Children's Services** is used to describe the social care services provided by the Children and Young People's Service within each local authority.

**EDS:** Emergency Duty Service.

**SSCB:** Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board.

**Parental responsibility:** is where an adult has a legal responsibility for the care and well-being of a child and can make important decisions about their welfare.

## **Appendix 1 – Care Principles**

### **1. Principles**

The following principles underpin these policies and procedures.

- The safety and welfare of any missing child remains paramount.
- As a corporate parent, the local authority has a duty to care for the wellbeing and safety of Children in Care.
- Safeguarding procedures will be considered in respect of children under age 18 where risk of significant harm may apply.
- Locating and returning looked after and other missing children to a safe environment will be the primary objective.
- Social care providers will only notify the Police of missing children/families in clearly defined circumstances.
- The Police will act on any report of a child missing from the care of the Local Authority. This includes S20 accommodated children as well as those subject to an Order.
- Children who go missing from home may be “children in need”. They should be referred to Children and Lifelong Learning and where appropriate they should receive an Initial Assessment. Assessment of any such referral must give due consideration to the potential need to follow Safeguarding procedures.
- The loss of contact with a child and family where the child is subject to local Safeguarding arrangements or the child is considered to be at risk should always be regarded as acute. Once such loss of contact is established agencies should be pro-active in making efforts to locate the family.
- Once located all missing children should be offered access to an interview. This should be provided by a person independent of their direct care.

### **2. Planning**

Foster carers and residential providers, social work teams, Police and providers should have a copy of this policy which must be followed when a child goes missing. They should be provided with training, supervision and support in the use of this policy and to develop skills to enable them to divert young people from going missing.

Where children are looked after outside of their home authority the care provider will need to have details of the ‘Missing from Care’ policies for

both the placing authority and the authority where the child is resident.

To enable co-ordination with the Police in the area where the child was living at the time that they went missing, the provider will need to follow the procedures that are local to the provision, where the need arises, but must also inform the placing authority and keep them fully up to date.

In planning an admission to a placement or in the ongoing care-planning process, consideration should be given to the likelihood of the child absencing him/herself, and to the potential risk involved for the child. There must be adequate case recording for all Children in Care including up to date chronologies, which will assist in identifying patterns of absence that would be cause for concern.

Information about Children in Care should include a risk assessment as to the likelihood of their going missing. Upon placement parents should be asked if the child/young person has ever run away and the circumstances of this.

The risk assessment should include the following and be recorded in the care plan:

- 1 The degree and the nature of the risk of the child who goes missing.
- 2 The level of supervision/support offered to the child.
- 3 The views of those with parental responsibility on action to be taken if the child goes missing.

This information should be reviewed as appropriate at each Statutory Review. Up to date information should be kept in the case file to help in finding a child should he/she go missing.

The child should be given information about these arrangements in a way which is compatible with their age and understanding and be told what action will be taken if he/she is absent without permission

## Appendix 2 – Assessment of Risk

### Assessment of risks when a young person goes missing from residential or foster care.

<b>1</b>	<b>Name of child/young person</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Age of child</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Date and time child went missing</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Length of time child has been missing</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Is a possible location of the child/young person known or suspected? (Give details)</b>	<b>12</b>

13

	<b>Risk factor</b>	<b>Does this risk factor apply?*</b>		<b>Comments</b>
1	Does the child/young person have any learning/physical disability?	Yes	No	
2	Are they in need of regular medication (e.g. diabetic)?	Yes	No	
3	Do they have a current health problem?	Yes	No	
4	Does the child's age or lack of maturity make them particularly vulnerable?	Yes	No	
<b>Background risk factors</b>				

5	Family history of domestic violence	Yes	No	
6	Parental drug/alcohol misuse	Yes	No	
7	History of sexual abuse	Yes	No	
8	Family members involved in prostitution	Yes	No	
9	History of neglect/emotional abuse	Yes	No	
10	Exclusion/absence from school	Yes	No	
11	History of self-harm	Yes	No	
<b>Current safeguarding concerns</b>				
12	Is there any known association with 'risky' adults (e.g. those known to be involved in criminal activities).	Yes	No	
13	Have unexplained money or 'gifts' been received.	Yes	No	
14	Does the young person have an older 'boyfriend' or relationships with adult men?	Yes	No	
15	Has there been any concerning telephone contact or visitors prior to going missing.	Yes	No	
16	Are any of their peers involved in prostitution?	Yes	No	

17	Does the young person use drugs and/or alcohol?	Yes	No	
<b>Risks relating to previous missing episodes</b>				
18	Is there a previous history of going missing?	Yes	No	
19	Have previous missing episodes involved risky activities or harm to the young person? (e.g. physical injuries, or need for emergency contraception)	Yes	No	
20	Do issues that lead to previous missing incidents remain unresolved?	Yes	No	
<b>Risks relating to current missing episode</b>				
21	Is the weather bad? (e.g. severe cold or heat)	Yes	No	
22	Have there been recent concerns about the child's state of mind ?	Yes	No	
23	Is the child likely to be afraid to return for any reason?	Yes	No	
24	Does the child lack 'risk awareness'?	Yes	No	
25	Is the child thought likely to be running to	Yes	No	

	someone risky?		
26	Did they leave in untypical clothing or circumstances (e.g. taxi)?	Yes	No
27	Is the child likely to have little/no money/suitable clothes?	Yes	No
28	Might the child be in possession of anything that could put them or others at risk (e.g. a weapon)?	Yes	No

\*You may not be able to answer 'yes' or 'no' in relation to all these factors. If you know, or strongly suspect something to be the case answer 'yes'. If you do not know leave the question blank.

Overall, the higher the number of 'yes' responses circled the higher the risk for the young person. However, in some instances a single factor may put a particular young person at high risk.

Risk Assessment compiled by:

Details:

Date compiled:

Review date/s:

**Appendix 3**  
**Unauthorised Absence / Missing Person/s**

**INFORMATION ON YOUNG PERSON FOR STAFFORDSHIRE POLICE.**

<b>Surname:</b>	<b>Forename:</b>
<b>D.O.B.</b>	<b>Ethnicity:</b>
<b>Gender:</b>	<b>Date:</b>

<b>Home Address:</b>
----------------------

<b><u>Description</u></b>		
<b>Height:</b>	<b>Eye Colour:</b>	<b>Hair Colour:</b>
<b>Build:</b>	<b>Glasses?</b>	<b>Facial Hair:</b>
<b>Accent:</b>	<b>Hair Style:</b>	
<b>Photograph available: Yes/No</b>		

<b>Clothing at time of disappearance:</b>
<b>Last seen with:</b>
<b>Time &amp; Date last seen:</b>

**Distinguishing Features (scars tattoos etc):**

**Previous history of going missing: Yes/No**

**Details:**

**Known acquaintances:**

**Relevant medical information:**

**Circumstances of increased risk:**

**Immigration & nationality status(if relevant):**

Completed by:

Signed:

Date:

## **Appendix 4 – Independent Return Interview**

### **Guidance for staff completing the interview**

It is a statutory requirement that all young people who have an episode where they are reported as missing should have an independent interview before or on their return to their placement. The interview should be conducted by someone who isn't their carer or parent. If the young person is in residential care, it should also be conducted by someone who is independent of the home.

The following are some guidelines to adhere to when conducting the interview:

- The young person should be informed that they will be expected to talk to someone about their absence and who this person will be.
- The interview should be conducted within **72 hours of their return**.
- Identify and deal with any harm the young person may have come to. Issues relating to health should be attended to immediately.
- Encourage the young person to talk about the reasons **why** they ran away.
- Discuss ways to help it not happening again.
- For Looked After Children, it is the responsibility of the residential unit manager to ensure the interview has taken place.
- For young people in the community it is the responsibility of the Police and Children and Lifelong Learning to ensure the interview takes place.
- For children in foster care it is the responsibility of the placing social worker.

The following people may act as the independent person could be:

- A teacher
- School nurse
- Connexions
- Youth or YOS worker
- Voluntary sector practitioner
- Police officer who the child knows and trusts.

## Independent Interview Form



Young Person's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Date reported missing \_\_\_\_\_

Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person conducting the return interview:

Why did you go missing? Did anything happen that made you want to leave?

Did anyone hurt or abuse you or threaten to harm while you were missing?  
Are you afraid of anyone?

What happened while you were gone? Where did you stay, who did you meet? Who bought you home?

What might have made you safer while you were gone?

What can be done to support you now? Do you need to talk or see someone?

What are the chances you'll go missing again?

Is there anything we can do prevent you from going missing again?

If you agree with everything that's been written, please sign here:

---

Let the staff do the next bit.

Child Protection referral? YES/NO

If yes, who made the referral? \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Workers: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 5 - Sample of Staffordshire Police Child Abduction Warning Letter**

Date:

Dear

RE: DOB :

I am writing on behalf of Staffordshire Police, with regard to the above named child.

I understand that the above child has been associating with you and has been with you in your care.

Please note that the child is in the lawful control of \_\_\_\_\_, their lawful parent/guardian. \_\_\_\_\_ does not agree to the child remaining with you.

Please note that under the Child Abduction Act 1984, it is a criminal offence for a child to be removed from, or kept from the lawful control of someone who has, or is entitled to have, the lawful control of the child. The offence may be committed even where the child willingly leaves the person with lawful control and stays away from them. You would therefore be at risk of prosecution if the child is found in your care again. This is a serious offence which carries a maximum sentence of 7 years imprisonment on indictment.

In order to avoid the risk of prosecution and to help safeguard the welfare of the child, I would be grateful if you could telephone the Area Communications Room on 0300 123 4455 should the child return to you.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact on 0300 123 2345.

Yours sincerely

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have received a copy of this Notice

Date..... Time..... Signature.....

[www.staffordshire.police.uk](http://www.staffordshire.police.uk)



Date :

Dear

RE:

DOB :

I am writing on behalf of Staffordshire Police, with regard to the above named child.

**CHILDREN WHO GO MISSING FROM CARE AND HOME AND  
VULNERABLE MISSING FAMILIES  
REVISED AND APPROVED – DECEMBER 2009**

I understand that the above child has been associating with you and has been with you in your care.

Please note that the child is in the lawful control of \_\_\_\_\_ their lawful parent/guardian.  
\_\_\_\_\_ does not agree to the child remaining with you.

Please note that under the Child Abduction Act 1984, it is a criminal offence for a child to be removed from, or kept from the lawful control of someone who has, or is entitled to have, the lawful control of the child. The offence may be committed even where the child willingly leaves the person with lawful control and stays away from them. You would therefore be at risk of prosecution if the child is found in your care again. This is a serious offence which carries a maximum sentence of 7 years imprisonment on indictment.

In order to avoid the risk of prosecution and to help safeguard the welfare of the child, I would be grateful if you could telephone the Area Communications Room on 0300 123 4455 should the child return to you.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact \_\_\_\_\_ on 0300 123 44 55.

Yours sincerely

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have received a copy of this Notice

Date..... Time..... Signature.....

[www.staffordshire.police.uk](http://www.staffordshire.police.uk)



## **Appendix 6 – Police Abduction Flow Chart**

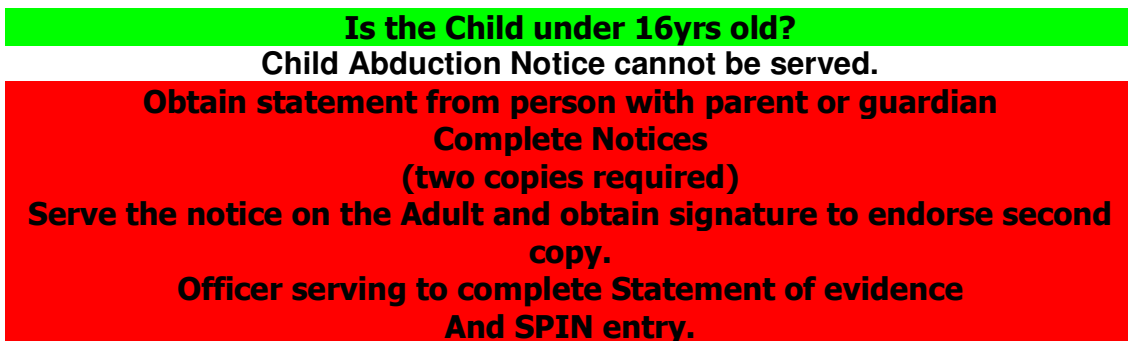
The Child Abduction Act 1984 states that it is a criminal offence for a child to be removed from, or kept from the lawful control of their parent or guardian. This includes where a child willingly leaves their parent/guardian and stays away from them.

This is an extremely useful piece of legislation. There have been several instances recently where this piece of legislation has been used.

Namely children/young persons, missing from home who are visiting and associating with adults; children/young people in relationships with adults and adults believed to be grooming children and young people.

Once a Child Abduction Notice is served, the adult can subsequently be arrested under the Child Abduction Act 1984, should they be found in the company of the child.

The below flowchart shows the procedure for serving such Notices:



## Appendix 7

### Responding to Children and Young People Who Go Missing from Placement

Child doesn't return within agreed time.

Start recording.

Carer should make reasonable search

On admission risk assessment states planned action should a young person fail to return. Review with each episode.

Medium Risk

High Risk

#### **Unauthorized Absence**

#### **Absconded**

Report to case holding social worker

Possible action taken by Police against adult in community.

#### **Missing**

Senior staff to assess risk. Consider factors

Report to Police, Social Worker, parent and Ofsted

Child Located and returned home

Young person receives Independent Return Interview.

Plan agreed to minimize risk of child going missing/absconding

Complete SW140 in full.

## Appendix 8

### Scaled Intervention Action Plan

Young person goes missing

Young person offered an Independent Return Interview on return

**After 3 episodes within 90 days:** Young Person, Advocate, Parent/Foster Carer/Residential Staff, Social Worker, Police officer and person who conducted the Independent Return Interview meet and identify factors causing the absence. Action plan updated.

Possible action against member of the community.

Senior team to take further action.

Meeting held with Assistant Chair – to include Missing Person Champion and relevant agencies.

Meeting held under Significant Harm Guidelines

**After 5 episodes within 90 days:** Team Manager, Young Person (where appropriate), Advocate, Parent, Foster Carer/Residential Staff, Deputy Police Superintendent, Manager of Residential Services/Family Placements, Social Worker, Representatives from Health/Education, and person who conducted Independent Return Interview meet and seek to reduce future episodes. Action plan updated.

**After 9 episodes within 90 days:** Independent Review Officer, Young Person (as appropriate), Advocate, Parent/Residential Staff/Foster Carer, Manager of Residential Services/Family Placements, Police Missing Persons Coordinator, Social Worker, Representatives from Health/Education to meet for a Strategy Meeting. Also to review effectiveness of previous actions.

If the young person continues to be reported Missing, the Head of Service to discuss the case.