



Safeguarding Children who go Missing from Home and Care

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Introduction

This safeguarding protocol should be read and implemented where necessary, by all practitioners and managers working with children or young people who go missing or are at risk of going missing from home or care. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a key duty for all agencies and practitioners and requires effective joint working between them. When a child goes missing or runs away they are at risk. This protocol sets out the steps for all organisations in the county should take to prevent children from going missing and to protect them when they do go missing.

Relevant Guidance

[Statutory Guidance On Children Who Run Away Or Go Missing From Home Or Care](#) (January 2014).

It also complements [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#) and related statutory guidance:

- ❖ [Child sexual exploitation: definition and guide for practitioners \(2017\)](#)
- ❖ The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volumes on care planning and review
- ❖ [Statutory Guidance](#) released by the College of Policing detailing the APP (Authorised Professional Practice)
- ❖ [Keeping children in education](#)

Scope of the protocol

The protocol is designed for:

- All children living within the boundaries of Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton Borough;
- Children looked after by the Local Authority placed within a children's home or foster home within the Local Authorities boundaries; and placed out with by the three local authorities
- Children looked after by the Local Authority who are living with parents or relatives and who are subject to a care order;
- All young people for whom Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton Borough have continuing responsibilities under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.
- All young people (16-21) who are placed within the county in supported accommodation/ semi-independent accommodation who go missing and / or absent from placement without authorisation.
- All young people aged 16 to 18 who are in care of Luton Borough Council placed in semi-independent accommodation who go missing from their placement and / or absent from [placement without authorisation.
- All young people who are subject of a Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 who are open to 14 plus team and are supported to access semi-independent accommodation.

The Local Authority retains responsibility for children looked after placed outside the Local Authority boundaries. In these cases, there is an expectation that the placement provider will comply with this protocol.

Definitions used in this guidance

The terms below are used throughout this document with the following definitions:

Child: anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout this guidance.

Missing child: a child reported as missing to the Police by their family or carers.

Looked after child: a child who is looked after by a Local Authority under section 31 of the Children Act 1989 (full care order) or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

Responsible Local Authority: The Local Authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning.

Host Local Authority: The Local Authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible Local Authority's area.

Care leaver: an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.

Missing from care: a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g., school) and their whereabouts is not known.

Away from placement without authorisation: a looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the Local Authority or the Police.

Absconder: a child 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 or ASBO's or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings. A child in this category must be reported to the Police without delay. If an absconder is under the age of 16, the Police will treat the case as both a missing child and an absconder.

Truancy: a child who is missing from their place of education whether that be a school or alternative education.

Wanted Persons: They may be wanted for an offence, an absconder from lawful care such as a mental health facility, custody order or Absent Without Leave. On these occasions it is normal to treat them as wanted persons. There may however be circumstances where the person should be treated as missing. This is generally where they are considered to be at risk of harm by, for example their own actions or by a third party.

Migrant Children: (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children): Incidents of migrant children going missing from local authority care may be linked to modern slavery or sexual exploitation. These children are vulnerable and should be recorded as missing when they abscond. Op Innerste Protocol will be used for all children arriving in Bedfordshire to assist with the Missing Persons process.

Concern for Welfare: Some calls will be clear cut cases of missing persons. However, a vast number of calls will refer to a concern for welfare for a child. It is for the member of Police staff managing that first contact with the referrer to use their professional judgement to decide on the necessary response. An initial call may be recorded as a concern for welfare and a resource dispatched to deal in line with any initial risk assessment. If the initial investigation does not locate the subject and the on-going risk assessment process concludes that there is either still a risk or the risk is elevated

Transfer of Missing reports from other Force areas: Ownership of missing children reports will transfer to the relevant force where there is evidential proof that the missing person is believed to be within that force area. This does not prevent Beds Police supporting the owning force to complete actions to substantiate or negate the presence of the missing child. Continuous reviews will be completed to ascertain whether this is a sustained presence or a transitory presence.

Police definitions

During November 2016, the College of Policing released new guidance in relation to how missing people are categorised;

MISSING: Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed

Previously the Absent category applied was defined by “a person not at a place where they are expected to be”.

ABSENT is now included within the Risk assessment as no apparent risk.

The Police classification of a person as ‘missing’ or ‘absent’ will be based on on-going risk assessment.

Risk Assessments

Organisations should use the following definitions for assessing risks to the child/ young person.

- **High** - The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely. Serious harm: - Risk of serious harm has been defined as (Home Office 2002 and OASys 2006): ‘A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible.’
- **Medium** - The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.
- **Low** - The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but minimal.
- **No Apparent Risk (Absent)** - There is no apparent risk of harm to either the subject or the public

If the absence is considered to fall within the high-risk category the Senior Manager (within the organisation) or Duty Officer should inform the following without delay: -

- The Police;
- The parents (and anyone else who has parental responsibility);
- Relevant practitioners i.e. Social Worker, Team Manager, school staff.

Sharing Information

For obvious reasons, sharing of relevant information is vital. Sharing information about a child should, as far as possible and commensurate with their age, be with their permission. However, information can be shared with recognised agencies in the interest of the child’s welfare. Their welfare must take precedence over sensitivities concerning information about them. (Refer to the [Pan Bedfordshire Information Sharing guidance](#))

A key form is the Essential Information Form (Appendix 3) which should be shared with the police

In all the above circumstances, where the general expectations are not followed the decision making for alternative actions should be fully recorded. Whenever a child’s absence is considered high risk a joint action plan should be developed between the relevant organisations

All Agencies/ Members of the Public

The roles and responsibilities of agencies in respect of children who are missing or at risk of going missing are set out in the [statutory guidance](#).

If it comes to the attention of any agency that a child is missing, they must advise the parent/carer of their need to report this matter to the Police. They also need to advise the parent of the agency’s duty to ensure that the matter is reported to the Police and if necessary follow this up by contacting the Police to verify that the child has been reported missing.

Responsibility of Parents/Carers

Parents and those with parental responsibility are normally expected to have undertaken the basic measures as below, to try to locate the missing child if considered safe to do so. Anyone else who has care of a child without parental responsibility should take all reasonable steps to locate the child and ascertain their safety. Practitioners working with families should support parents and carers in taking the following necessary steps:

- Search bedroom/accommodation/outbuildings/vehicles;
- Contact known friends and relatives where a child may be;
- Visit locations that the child is known to frequent, if it is possible;
- Calling or texting any mobile phone held by child and leaving a message asking for contact;
- Checking Social Media to establish if the missing person has been online. Facebook/Snapchat/Instagram/Find my phone/Any other applications?
- Contact with school or school friends to gather any available information regarding the child's whereabouts.

Once the basic measures are completed it is expected that the Police will be informed without delay.

If there is any serious concern for the safety of the child at any stage, the Police should be informed immediately.

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

The level of Police involvement can be determined through professional discussion between the Foster Carers, Local Authority Social Workers, Fostering Provider, Social Workers and other relevant agencies may be required to ensure a sensible and timely provision of action and service.

The greater the risk to the child, the more the police will become involved.

The below table is from the National Fostering Network guidance on intervention: -

<p style="text-align: center;">NON INTERVENTION</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Level of Risk is Low and is Tolerable by the Parent or Carer</p> <p style="text-align: center;">So the parent or carer decides to wait for the person to return of their own accord.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">PARENTAL OR CARER INTERVENTION</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Level of Risk is Moderate and Unacceptable to the Parent or Carer</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The parent or carer accepts responsibility for searching for the vulnerable young person in order to bring them home. However, the level of risk does not justify police intervention at this time.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">POLICE INTERVENTION</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Level of Risk is High</p> <p style="text-align: center;">There is an urgent need to locate the vulnerable young person as there is an immediate real risk that they will suffer significant harm. The police have a duty to assist the parent or carer.</p>

Education sector (Schools / independent providers)

Children who are missing from school may also be missing from care or home and at risk. Education practitioners should follow the relevant [Children Missing Education Procedures](#).

If a member of staff in schools or independent provisions become aware that a child may be missing, they should try to establish with the parents or carers, what has happened. If this is not possible, or the child is missing, the Designated Child Protection Officer in the establishment should, together with the class teacher, assess the child's vulnerability, by completing the Risk Assessment and based on the assessment refer the child to the Police Missing Persons Unit.

If it comes to the attention of a member of Education staff that a child who was missing, has returned, that member of staff should establish whether Police or Children's Social Services were involved in returning the child to their home and if not, inform Police and/ or Children's Social Services.

Children who go missing frequently place themselves at risk and the child's safety must be prioritised over any requests to keep information confidential.

(please reference the relevant Risk Assessment/referral form reference)

Op Encompass Missing Alerts: The service will be integrated into the current Op Encompass provision which currently deals with children exposed to domestic abuse. The service will operate: -

- For schools/colleges for the 5-18 age groups
- Operate 7 days a week
- Uses a dedicated email address to complement the current Op encompass email - OpEncompass.missingpersons@beds.police.uk

Information is provided on:

- Disappearance and found circumstances.
- If the child has not been located their status will be shown as MISSING on the notification and the School/College will only receive the CYP's missing circumstances

Corporate parents (Looked After Children)

Looked after children are particularly vulnerable. Though the number of looked after children going missing is a small percentage of the overall number of children that go missing, it is disproportionately high compared with the children's population as a whole

Care planning and review

The starting point for safety is ensuring that the child/ young person's care plans reflect relevant risks. Where a child already has an established pattern of running away, the care plan should include a strategy to keep them safe and minimise the likelihood of the child running away in the future. This should be discussed and agreed as far as possible with the child and with the child's carers and should include detailed information about the responsibilities of all services, the child's parents and other adults involved in the family network. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) should be informed about missing and away from placement without authorisation episodes and they should address these in statutory reviews.

The Essential Information form (see appendix) should be completed and be made available to foster carers / care staff. The form provides a key starting point for the police and hence needs to be available easily and needs to be accurate (it should be updated regularly).

All agencies/ foster carers with care of a child young person, must before reporting to the police or EDT as a missing person, take reasonable steps to locate the young person e.g. –

- Search bedroom/accommodation/outbuildings/vehicles;

- Contact known friends and relatives where a child may be; refer to Essential Information form for whom to contact.
- Visit locations that the child is known to frequent, if it is possible;
- Calling or texting any mobile phone held by child and leaving a message asking for contact;
- Checking Social Media to establish if the missing person has been online. Facebook/Snapchat/Instagram/Find my phone/Any other messaging services /apps
- Contact with school or school friends to gather any available information regarding the child's whereabouts.

There will be the odd occasion where it may be inappropriate to do so but this should be considered as part of care planning,

All missing looked after children will be considered high or medium risk.

During the period a child is missing, the Social Worker should be in daily contact with the Police, the child's placement and family if possible. Where the child is placed in another authority area, the Social Worker should inform that authority and where possible work with them to recover / locate the child and as far as possible in accordance with these procedures. A 6 meeting should be convened to review the actions to be taken alongside partner agencies in the area where the child is placed.

The Social Worker will contact the child's school / place of education and local hospital in case they have, or can obtain information about a child's whereabouts. Local hospitals should be contacted in respect of any admissions. Any such information should be passed on to the Police.

A strategy meeting should be held if a child or young person goes missing for over 24 hours or a child or young person goes missing for three occasions in 90 days.

Where an absence lasts over 24 hours, a senior Manager should consider whether an alert should be sent to other Local Authorities.

Young People

Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that a lot of young people who are placed in their care placement by a local authority go missing during out of hours, making it all the more crucial for staff in the placement to work together with EDT on such incidents.

It is a common practice that should EDT have involvement with a missing person who is placed by the three Councils they will inform and provide information to the relevant Children's Social Care Team for action as soon as day time services resume.

Where the staff have concerns about a young person going missing or absence without authorisation and all relevant enquiries have been carried out without success in locating or contacting the young person, staff will contact EDT to assess the young person's needs and make appropriate arrangement for the young person's safety.

Where appropriate, the relevant social work team will send an alert to EDT where young person with whom they are working has run away or gone missing from Placement when it is made aware during day service. This alert may need to include specific plans should the young person be found e.g. arrangements for a return to a named placement.

Looked after children who are away from placement without authorisation

Sometimes a looked after child may be away from their placement without authorisation. While they are not missing, they may still be placing themselves at risk because of where they are. For example, they may choose to stay at the house of friends where the carer has concerns about risks of sexual exploitation. The Police may not consider this child as

missing or absent, but all appropriate action to protect the child and seek their return should be taken and those with responsibility for the child/young person should be informed.

Out of area placements

This protocol applies to children placed in Bedfordshire from other Local Authorities. A notification process for missing and away from placement without authorisation episodes should be agreed between responsible and host Local Authorities.

The Essential Information Form is important in this context as it allows the police to contact the relevant police to check known addresses out of county.

Responsibilities of the Police

Upon receiving a report of a child being missing from home, the Police will carry out enquiries (which are proportionate to the perceived risk) aimed at locating the child as soon as possible.

Bedfordshire Police must log all occasions when a child is reported missing to the Police. The log (STORM – System for Tasking and Operational Resource Management) must remain open only until the COMPACT (a software system that support and efficiently manage the many processes associated with missing persons) based missing person report is opened. However, in high-risk cases the log will remain to allow for the co-ordination of resources. Once no longer required for this purpose the STORM (System for Tasking and Operational Resource Management - Command & Control system) will be closed, at which point the COMPACT record will be used. COMPACT (Missing Persons Case Management System) missing person reports should be created as soon as possible. The missing person or child's PNC (Police National Computer) will be updated with a Missing Marker and consider adding a Countylines marker.

A risk assessment will be carried out for each individual on every separate occasion they are reported missing to the Police. This risk assessment, usually conducted by the initial Investigating Officer, and subsequently confirmed or revised by a Supervising Officer, will form the basis for the subsequent investigation into the child's disappearance.

The reporting person will be required to answer a number of questions (as per appendix B) to assist to determining the correct risk level and provide additional information about risk factors in the case on the missing person form (F424). After considering the available information, the Police will decide the risk level to be assigned to the case. This will be high, medium or low. Bedfordshire Police, in line with ACPO Guidance, have decided that no case involving a child under 18 years will be classified as a low risk.

If the child is a LAC child, then the essential information Form will be required to enable to police to identify fast track actions and priority enquiries to complete.

Once the initial attending officer has completed golden hour enquiries, a handover is provided to the CMIT team (CSE, Missing Investigation Team) who take responsibility for searching for the missing person. An allocated OIC (Officer in Case) will continue to research intelligence of police and partner's records as well as re-visiting the home address, known associates and frequented locations.

The Police are responsible for the ongoing risk assessments which are completed every 24 hours by a Detective Sergeant, 72 hours by a Detective Inspector and 28 days by the Detective Chief Inspector.

The Police will notify the relevant Children's Social Care of all missing children recorded on COMPACT within 24 hours of the child being reported as missing. The relevant Police Officer will also notify Children's Social Care if there is further information on a particular case or if the Officer has concerns that need further assessment.

In the event of a continuing missing episode good communication and close cooperation is essential to ensure that any significant concerns are identified and appropriate safeguarding action is taken. When a child has been absent for a period of 48 hours the Police should update Children's Social Care of any significant developments at least every five days thereafter or earlier, if deemed appropriate.

Circumstances where Police locate child not reported as Missing

Where the Police locate a child who they believe may be missing, although not officially reported, assessment and enquiries based on the child's account of the circumstances will be made. These will include checks of Police and partner systems as well as enquiries at the home address. In the event that a missing child has not been reported by parents/carers, this should trigger further enquiries and assessment by the Police and other relevant agencies in accordance with safeguarding procedures.

If enquiries identify risk factors at the home address, safeguarding procedures will be implemented. If the Police decide not to return the child to the home address options should be discussed with Children's Social Care to identify suitable responsible adult(s) and/or accommodation, (Emergency Duty Team to be contacted after hours) before placing a child elsewhere; Intelligence checks must be completed by Bedfordshire Police in respect of the proposed carers and address.

Specific Issues

Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Whilst this protocol is concerned with young people up to the age of eighteen, there is a requirement to provide differentiated services for some vulnerable young people and young adults up to 21 years of age where they are care leavers. Young adults with learning difficulties and / or disabilities need to be assessed in line with vulnerable adult's protocols.

For children and young people with disabilities there needs to be consideration of their individual needs and vulnerabilities and the appropriate agency to provide this information in addition to parents/ carers. In terms of communication and information sharing, an advocate may be required who is familiar with the young person's individual communication needs. This will be essential if they have limited understanding due to learning disabilities, or for example very specific learning difficulties due to Autism.

In terms of vulnerability the young person may have additional or complex health needs, and/or a life-limiting condition, so time will be of the essence in locating them.

Children at risk of criminal and/or sexual exploitation

For those children for whom the risk of criminal and/or sexual exploitation has been identified, the child protection procedures in respect of child criminal and/or sexual exploitation must be followed. The outcome of these assessments will be reported to in the child's record and identified at the child's looked after children review where safety planning needs to be considered.) For further guidance and information click on these links [Pan Beds Interagency Child Protection Procedures](#), [Bedfordshire Against Violence and Exploitation \(BAVEX\)](#), [Violence Exploitation Reduction Unit \(VERU\)](#).

Forced marriage

All practitioners should be mindful of the issues of Forced marriage. 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. For further guidance click on this [link](#).

Looked after children who may have been trafficked from abroad

Some looked after children are unaccompanied asylum seeking children or other migrant children. Some of this group may have been trafficked into the UK and may remain under the influence of their traffickers even while they are looked after. Trafficked children are at

high risk of going missing, with most going missing within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours. Unaccompanied migrant or asylum seeking children who go missing immediately after becoming looked after should be treated as potential victims of trafficking.

Police and Children's Social Care will need to work in close co-operation with the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) and immigration staff familiar with patterns of trafficking into the UK. Immigration staff who specialise in trafficking issues should be able to advise on whether information about the individual child suggests that they fit the profile of a potentially trafficked child.

Provision may need to be made for the child to be in a safe place before any assessment takes place and for the possibility that they may not be able to disclose full information about their circumstances immediately. The location of the child should not be divulged to any enquirers until their identity and relationship with the child has been established. Proportionate safety measures that keep the child safe and take into account their best interests should also be put in place to safeguard the child from going missing from care or from being re-trafficked.

'Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked' provides practical guidance for agencies which are likely to encounter, or have referred to them, children and young people who may have been trafficked. Where it is suspected that a child has been trafficked, they should be referred by the Local Authority into the UK's victim identification framework, the **National Referral Mechanism (NRM)**.

A flowchart for Unaccompanied Asylum seeking children is set out in **Appendix 4**.

When a child is found

It is the responsibility of the parent or carer to contact the Police and confirm that the missing child has returned. If the whereabouts are known or suspected, it is the responsibility of the parents or carers to arrange for the child's return. In exceptional circumstances, in the interests of the safe and speedy return of the child, the Police may agree to requests from parents or carers to assist. The Police should not unreasonably withhold assistance in cases involving local recovery and transport missions for vulnerable children.

Police 'safe and well' check

Once the child has been located, the Police will carry out a Police safe and well check. It will not be conducted over the telephone. The purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm; where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against them. This will lead to the Police closing the missing person report on COMPACT and the case being cancelled on the PNC. This is not a return interview. (The Police will notify Children's Social Care of the return of the child and any relevant information).

If it is apparent, on the return of the child, 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 has occurred whilst they were absent, then the Police will instigate further enquiries. This is vital for the protection of the child and for the speedy recovery of evidence.

In such circumstances, the missing child's 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. The Police should advise parent or carers if they become aware of the location of a scene of any crime committed against the child, or 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.

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, a referral must be made to Children's Social Care in accordance with child protection procedures.

All children reported as missing to the Police will be reported to the relevant Children's Social Care for screening and a decision regarding future interventions. The Risk assessment tool (Appendix 2) can be used to support assessments of children who go missing. For contact details see in Appendix 1.

Return to Placement (corporate parents)

A professionals meeting should be considered and organised where appropriate within a reasonable timescale following the child's return to agree what support is needed and to ensure that the reasons the child had for going missing are fully considered.

The child should be told: -

That we would expect him / her to talk to an independent person or an appropriate friend or person the child trusts about the absence;

On return the child's medical condition should be discussed and an offer made to arrange medical attention where it is appropriate;

All unauthorised absences and missing episodes should be recorded and a full report of their circumstances made available for the child's next Looked After Review. Regular or persistent absences should be discussed with the IRO with a view to an early review being called if necessary.

Return Home Interviews

Key Points:

Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing states that when a child is found they should be offered an independent return interview (DFE, 2014:14)

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) suggests that return interviews are "relevant to all missing persons" regardless of age (NPIA, 2010:55)

The key benefits of return interviews are to identify people at risk; understand the risks and issues faced whilst missing; reduce the risks of future episodes of missing or running away; and equip people with the resources and knowledge of how to stay safe if they choose to run away again (DfE, 2014: 15-16).

The Department for Education (DfE) describes return interviews as in-depth discussions and their purpose is to 'identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered... understand and try to address the reasons why the child or young person ran away, help the child feel safe and understand that they have options to prevent repeat instances of them running away [and] provide them with information on how to stay safe if they run away again, including helpline numbers' (DfE, 2014:15)

Guidance states that it is advantageous for these to be conducted by an 'independent person'; that is, someone not directly involved in the care of the child or young person

A Return Interview should be conducted after each episode of the child having been reported missing. The interview should be conducted within 72 hours (i.e. 3 working days) of the child's return.

It is noted that unauthorised absences or late returns will not necessarily constitute a missing episode and as such discretion can be used to define the nature of the absence. Periods of absence of any sort should be fully considered in a child's review.

Child protection procedures should be followed where there are safeguarding concerns.

It is acknowledged that a returning child may well share different parts of their experience with different people. It is the responsibility of all agencies therefore, to attend to issues of immediate safety, future support and safeguarding needs, and information-sharing in a way which respects and safeguards the child.

The purpose of the interview is:

- To better understand the reasons why the child went missing;
- To explore the circumstances which led to the missing episode(s);
- To inform future prevention strategies;
- 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 with appropriate and proactive strategies such as the use of the harbouring warning notices under the Child Abduction Act;
- To identify and address any harm the child has suffered - including harm that may not have already been disclosed as part of the safe and well check.

The interview will be recorded and a copy held or recorded on the appropriate child's record.

In addition to helping to identify specific areas of concern for individual children who run away or go missing, when aggregated and analysed alongside information from other sources (such as school absence figures and time and duration of the missing incident), the data from return interviews can be used help to identify patterns of behaviour and 'hotspots' of activity and risk in local areas (DfE, 2014:18). DfE statutory guidance emphasises that such information sharing is essential and return interview data should be included in regular reports to the lead member for children's services and reports from the local authority to the relevant Safeguarding Children Partnership (2014:18).

Where a return interview leads to a disclosure that needs a specific action, the matter should be followed up by the relevant agencies. In the interest of openness and transparency, the child should be informed.

Multi agency issues

Response to Escalating Concerns - Children Missing from the Community

Where there are concerns in relation to a child going missing, including escalating concerns in the event of repeat missing episodes, Children's Social Care, in conjunction with the Police will agree the next intervention under Early Help/ Child in Need or Child Protection procedures. It should be noted, however, that the volume of missing episodes is not the only reason to launch an intervention or to escalate the level of intervention. The following are examples of other reasons to initiate 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 child.

It should be noted that if any one agency or professional has increased or serious concerns for a child's well-being or safety, they should call a multi-agency strategy meeting, regardless of the number of missing episodes.

Where the case is "open" or known to a lead professional (i.e. Early Help), the referral from the Police will be forwarded to the lead professional or key worker who is responsible for ensuring that the return interview is completed. The parent or carer will be encouraged to support this process with the child, and the child should be seen alone wherever possible in order for the child's view's to be recorded in the return interview.

Any subsequent meetings should try to identify those factors which influence and encourage or offer distraction/ disruption from running away for the young person concerned.

Media communications

It is for the Police to advise the media regarding a child missing from the care of the Local Authority. A decision to publicise by press and/or television must be made with the responsible Head of Service and the Assistant Director (advising the Director of Children's Social Care) in conjunction with the Communications Team in each authority this decision may be taken within 24 hours.

Appendix 1 Contact Information

If you believe that a child is at immediate risk this should be reported without delay to the Police. For emergencies use 999.

Children's Social Care;

Bedford Borough Council

Integrated Front Door - 01234 718700 or referral portal childandfamilies.bedford.gov.uk

Central Bedfordshire

The Access and Referral Team on 0300 300 85 85 or via email:

AccessReferral@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Luton

MASH on 01582 547653 or via email: mash@luton.gov.uk

Emergency Duty Team (outside office hours and at weekends) –0300 300 8123

Reporting a Child Missing from Home - Reports are expected to reach Bedfordshire Police by normal public reporting methods, using the following number 101

Other useful address and contact information

NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre provides specialist advice and information to practitioners who have concerns that a child may have been trafficked. Phone 0808 800 5000 Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm; email help@nspcc.org.uk; or web http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/research_wda48228.html

Appendix 2 - Eastern Safeguarding Project

Guidance for assessing vulnerability and risk factors to inform decision making for children/young people who /go missing. This risk factor framework is to be used by Police, Social Care, Children and Young People Services, Education /Learning and Partner Agencies.

Completion of the framework is to assist any existing risk assessment based on levels of concern and not necessarily the period of time that the person is missing. The framework is to be used flexibly and to gather evidence to support professional judgement and best practice.

Risk factors					
	Factors to be considered	Details and circumstances	High Risk	Medium Risk	Low Risk
1	Is the person vulnerable due to age or disability/medical condition or any other similar factor?				
2	Behaviour that is out of character is often a strong indicator of risk; are the circumstances of going missing different from normal behaviour patterns? Any history of missing?				
3	Is the young person suspected to be subject of a significant crime in progress e.g. abduction?				
4	Is there any indication that the person is likely to commit suicide? History of harm and/or self-harm?				
5	Is there a reason for the person to go missing? Circumstances at the time of disappearance?				
6	Are there any indications that preparations had been made for an absence?				
7	What was the young person intending to do when last seen e.g. going to the shops or catching a bus and did				

	they fail to complete their intentions?				
8	Are there family or relationship problems or recent history of family conflict and/or abuse? History of harm?				
9	Are they the victim or perpetrator of domestic violence? History of harm?				
10	Does the missing person have any physical illness or mental health problems? State of mind/body.				
11	Are they the subject of a Child Protection Plan?				
12	Previously disappeared and suffered or was exposed to harm?				
13	Belief that the person may not have the ability to interact safely with others or in an unknown environment? Resilience of young person to changing circumstances and/or learning disability. Communication and language considerations.				
14	Do they need essential medication that is not likely to be available to them?				
15	On-going bullying or harassment e.g. racial, sexual, homophobic or local community concerns or cultural issues etc.?				
16	Were they involved in a violent and/or racist/homophobic incident immediately prior to disappearance?				
17	School/college/university/employment or financial problems?				

	Reported as missing from education or home educated?				
18	Drug or alcohol dependency?				
19	Other unlisted factors which the officer/practitioner or supervisor considers should influence risk assessment? – For example: Is there reason to believe the child is being trafficked? Is the child from another Local Authority? They are a Looked After Child/young person?				

Appendix 3 - Essential Information form



Essential Information Sheet

Personal Information			
Forename:		RECENT PHOTOGRAPH (insert in space below)	
Surname:			
Nick-name:			
DOB / Age:			
Country of Birth:			
Gender:	Male / Female	Photo attached:	Y/N
		Date Photo Taken:	_/_/_
Who has Parental responsibility:		Consent given for Photo to be used for Media: Y/N	
Asylum Seeker:	Y / N	First Language:	
Ethnic Origin:		Level of spoken English:	
Ethnic Appearance:		Level of written English:	
Accent :			
Description of person			
Height:		Hair style:	
Build:		Hair Colour:	
Glasses:		Marks/Scars/ Tattoo's/Piercings:	
Eye Colour:		Right or Left handed :	
Disability – Learning/ Physical:			
Typical Jewellery Worn:			

Typical clothing worn: (for example, hoody, jeans, jogging bottoms, cap)	
Last seen wearing:	
Contact/ Personal Details	
Mobile Phone Number:	Make / Model: Network:
(Provide usernames for each type of account if possible)	
Facebook:	Twitter:
Snap Chat:	What's app:
Other apps used:	
Current Residential Address:	Previous Residential Address:
Post code:	Postcode:
Dates: From _/_/_ To _/_/_	Dates: From _/_/_ To _/_/_
Type of address : (please select)	Type of address : (please select)
Care home Y/N	Care home Y/N
Foster parents Y/N	Foster parents Y/N
Supported living Y/N	Supported living Y/N
Home with parents/guardians Y/N	Home with parents/guardians Y/N
Favoured Address: (please provide details of where the frequently attend and who's address it is)	
Postcode:	Occupied by:
Bank Details	
Bank Name :	Name on account :
Sort number :	Account Code :
Legal status and Professional contacts	
Current Legal Status (S31, S20):	Placing Authority:

Legal Orders:	
Professional Contacts	
Social Worker: Name Telephone Number: Email Address:	After School Worker: Name Telephone Number: Email Address:
YOT Worker: Name Telephone Number: Email Address:	Placement Key Worker: Name Telephone Number: Email Address:
Curfew times:	

Medical Conditions / Contact	
Health Centre: GP: Address: Tel:	Disability: Medical conditions:
Current Medication:	Essential Medical Information:
Education	
School Name and Address: Special Educational Needs:	School Contacts Head teacher: Safeguarding Lead: Teacher:
Transportation to School / place of education:	
Taxi company:	Phone number:
Driver:	Passenger Assistant:
Times:	
Risks / Background information	

Current Risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (please refer to CSE screening tool)**High
Y/N**

(Explain reason for risk level identified)

**Medium
Y/N**

(Explain reason for risk level identified)

Low Y/N

(Explain reason for risk level identified)

**None
identified**

(Explain reason for risk level identified)

Provide details of associates / friends:**Background Information informing risk assessment outcome:****Date last risk assessment completed:****Identified patterns in behaviour around previous missing/absent episodes:****Behavioural Characteristics:****Please use this space to provide any additional information that you feel may be relevant in the event or a missing/absent episode:**

Other identified/possible risks (if relevant please provide explanation in space provided below)		
Drugs	Y/N	
Alcohol	Y/N	
Mental Health	Y/N	
Self-Harm	Y/N	
Violence	Y/N	
Gangs	Y/N	
Radicalisation	Y/N	
FGM (Female genital mutilation)	Y/N	
HBA (Honour Based Violence)	Y/N	
MDS Modern Day Slavery	Y/N	
Other: Please specify		

PERSONAL CONTACTS	
Specify whether contact is open, supervised or forbidden and enter special arrangements wherever required.	
FAMILY :	
Name:	Name:
Relationship:	Relationship:
Contact Details:	Contact Details:
Address:	Address:
Contact Arrangements:	Contact Arrangements:

Name:	Name:
Relationship:	Relationship:
Contact Details:	Contact Details:
Address:	Address:
Contact Arrangements:	Contact Arrangements:

ASSOCIATES / FRIENDS:	
Name:	Name:
Relationship:	Relationship:
Contact Details:	Contact Details:
Address:	Address:
Contact Arrangements:	Contact Arrangements:
Name:	Name:
Relationship:	Relationship:
Contact Details:	Contact Details:
Address:	Address:
Contact Arrangements:	Contact Arrangements:

Last Update – below section to be completed each time any information on the form is updated			
By who:	Date:	Time:	Updated form submitted to:

Appendix 4 Flowchart of UASC

