

## Missing from Care

### 1. Introduction

Blue Mountain Homes recognise during times of crisis heightened behaviours we understand the risk of children going missing can increase with controlled measures and planning Blue Mountain supports children and young people to voice their wishes and feelings following the PACE MODEL to lower the risks.

The Children in our care may have range of behaviour, learning disabilities and difficulties –and can find the world they live in challenging at times, the children and young people may become anxious and distressed this can be down to their associated Learning difficulty or Trauma they have experienced.

Blue Mountain Homes promotes children and young people to access activities within the local community within the ‘planning and prevention’ strategies.

All children must have a Placement Plan and completed Philomena Protocol which takes account of any risk of the child going missing. The Individual safety and support plan should incorporate measures to reduce or prevent the child becoming absent, and information that would help facilitate the location of the child should they go missing. As part of the referral, placement and ongoing planning process, consideration must be given to the risk of the child becoming missing. If there is a risk, a plan must in place to lower or prevent it. If there is a risk that a child may run away or go missing, staff should do their best to help them understand the risks and dangers involved and make them aware of how to seek help if they do run away. The Care Plan and the Placement Plan include details of the arrangements that will need to be in place to keep the child safe and minimise the risk of the child going missing from the Home.

### 2. Care planning and prevention.

- The Care Plan – (the local authority document) should give information about how the child will be kept safe from going missing holistically by all involved.
- The Placement Plan – written to the child should provide information to the child about how we will keep them safe from going missing, if applicable.
- The Individual Safety and Support Plans should be completed for all children for whom there is concern that they may run away. The distance to family and friends should be considered as a risk factor. The Individual Safety and Support Plan should be updated after any missing incident and should be regularly reviewed. The plan should detail possible places or persons associated with episodes of going missing and should be referred to whenever a child goes missing or runs away.
- The child should be provided with advice about access to an independent Advocate and the child's views considered.
- Statutory reviews should consider any absences and revise strategies to prevent repeat absences and/or missing incidents and the Care Plan should be revised accordingly.

The home will be initiative-taking in providing an environment which promotes a feeling of security that aims to minimise the likelihood of the child going missing. Staff will work with children to educate them about the risks of going missing, help them where possible to identify trigger points and give them other alternatives in these circumstances. The competence and support needs of staff in responding to missing from care issues should be considered as part of their regular appraisal and supervision.

Staff should know when to try to prevent a child or young person leaving the Home and should do so through dialogue, **Staff** should not try to restrain the child should they be intent on leaving, or in any other circumstances, unless it is necessary to prevent injury to the child or others, or serious damage to property.

On a day-to-day basis, staff should be alert to signs or indications that a child may be likely to run away or become missing. If staff suspect that this may happen, they should take any actions already agreed with the child's social worker or do what they reasonably and safely can to reduce or prevent the child from leaving - this includes circumstances where a child is refusing to return to the Home.

If there is a serious risk e.g. the child is behaving in a violent manner or threatening to damage property, the Home should contact the police.

### **3. Specific Risks**

Children and young people are vulnerable they may be at risk of

- Grooming
- Trafficking
- Risk of Radicalisation
- Themselves
- No understanding of consequence or Danger

### **4. Action to be taken if a child is missing.**

When a child or young person is missing, if there is an immediate serious risk to the child or others, the police should be called first This reporting will be in line with the local Philomena protocols. Every child or young person who lives at the Home will have their own Philomena profile, which can be found on each child or young person's file and this to be shared with the local police.

The manager/social worker should decide whether to notify the parent(s) and, if so, who should do so.

All notifications and consultations must be recorded.

When a child does go missing this may constitute a 'Notifiable Event' - see Notification of Serious Events Procedure.

At no time should the home pass any information to the press. All information should only be shared between the local authority, police and the Home.

Actions to be taken during the time whereabouts of a child are not known.

Whenever the whereabouts of a child are not known, preliminary checks should be conducted to see if the child can be located. For example, if a child were supposed to have returned home from school but has not arrived within the normal journey time, checks could include finding out if there are transport delays, phone calls to the child, phone calls to the school to see if the child has been delayed etc. If

these initial checks fail in locating the child or there are still concerns that, despite contact being made with the child they are at risk, the individuals and agencies listed below should be informed.

It is clearly important that a deadline is set at the outset of these initial checks so that they do not continue beyond a reasonable timeframe. What timeframe is reasonable should be based on an assessment of the risks relating to the individual child. In some cases, there might be particular reasons to be worried for the child's safety immediately and the agencies detailed below should be contacted straight away – this in conjunction with on-going attempts to contact the child and find out why they are not where they are supposed to be.

The individuals and agencies who should be contacted when a child is missing or they are away from placement without authorisation:

- The local police.
- The authority responsible for the child's placement – if they have not already been notified prior to the police being informed; and
- The parents and any other person with parental responsibility, unless it is not reasonably practicable or to do so, or would be inconsistent with the child's welfare.

As a minimum requirement, all reports should include the following information:

- The child's name/s; date of birth; status; responsible authority.
- Where and when they went missing.
- Who, if anyone, they went missing with.
- What was the child wearing plus any belongings such as bags, phone etc.
- Description and recent photo.
- Medical history, if relevant.
- Time and location last seen.
- Circumstances or events around going missing.
- Details of family, friends and associates.
- Updated Individual Safety and Support Plan

## **5. Immediate strategy**

Following initial discussions between the allocated children's social care worker and the police, they should agree an immediate strategy for locating the child and an action plan. This to include a range of actions to locate and ensure the safe return of the child, including:

Arrangements for attempts to be made to contact the child daily by, for example, calling their mobile phone or the phones of friends or relatives that they may be with.

Visiting their parents' address/es and of any friends or relatives with whom they may be staying.

Police should consider requesting a trace on the child's mobile phone and/or any travel card.

Within 3 days, a missing from care meeting/ telephone discussion between relevant parties should take place and include the police, the child's social worker and the provider. The action plan and Individual Safety and Support Plan should be reviewed and updated.

If there are 3 episodes missing's within 90 days, then a missing from care meetings/discussions should be held at least monthly to update the action plan and share information;

## **6. Out of Area Placements**

If children placed out of their local authority area runs away, this Missing protocol should be followed, in addition to complying with other processes that are specified in the Missing policy of the host local authority. It is possible that the child will return to the area of the responsible authority, so it is essential that liaison between the police and professionals in both authorities is well managed and coordinated.

### 6.1 Children who are Away from Placement without Authorisation

Sometimes a child may be away from their placement without authorisation. While they are not missing, they may still be placing themselves at risk (e.g. they may be at the house of friends where there are concerns about risks of sexual exploitation). The Home or social worker should take reasonable steps to ascertain the wellbeing of the child including, when appropriate, visiting the location. However, if there is a concern the child may be at significant risk of harm to themselves or to others then police should also be notified in order that appropriate safeguarding measures can be taken. This should not be confused with reporting a child missing.

### 6.2 Actions when the Whereabouts of a Child are Not Known

Whenever the whereabouts of a child are not known, preliminary checks should be conducted to see if the child can be located. For example, if a child were supposed to have returned home from school but has not arrived within the normal journey time, checks could include finding out if there are transport delays, phone calls to the child, phone calls to the school to see if the child has been delayed etc. If these initial checks do not succeed in locating the child or there are still concerns that, despite contact being made with the child they are at risk, the individuals and agencies listed below should be informed.

## **7. Once the Child or young person returns home**

The Home should take the following steps when a child returns after such an event:

Assess the child's immediate needs i.e. offer something to eat, does the child need a shower/bath and a clean change of clothes? Is there any need for medical treatment?

Explain to the child that they do not want them to go missing, but they will be welcomed back to the household;

Try to gain an insight into the young person's absence and what can be done to minimise its recurrence, although it is acknowledged that the point at which the child returns may or may not be the best time to try to discuss the reasons why the child has gone missing.

Inform all relevant professionals i.e. police (unless they returned the child), the child's social worker and the independent reviewing officer that the child has returned.

Should there be any suspicion that the absent without consent episode is linked to an abusive incident, the Safeguarding Children and Young People and Referring Safeguarding Concerns Procedure should be invoked.

Arrangements should have been made for Safe and Well checks and Independent Return Review interviews:

#### Safe and Well Checks

Safe and well checks are carried out by the police as soon as possible after the child has returned. Their 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.

Where a child goes missing frequently, it may not be practical for the police to see them every time they return. In these cases a reasonable decision should be taken in agreement between the police and the Home regarding the frequency of such checks bearing in mind the established link between frequent missing episodes and serious harm, which could include gang involvement, forced marriage, maltreatment or abuse, bullying or sexual exploitation. The assessment of whether a child might run away again should be based on information about:

Their individual circumstances.

Family circumstances and background history.

Their motivation for running away.

Their potential destinations and associates.

Their recent pattern of absences.

The circumstances in which the child was found or returned.

Their individual characteristics and risk factors such as whether a child have learning difficulties, mental health issues, depression and other vulnerabilities.

#### Independent Return Review

On their return the child must be seen alone by an independent person usually independent of the Home and the placing authority.

An exception maybe where a child has a strong relationship with a member of staff or their social worker and has expressed a preference to talk to them, rather than an independent person, about the reasons they went missing and the Home must work with the placing authority (child's social worker) to create a strategy to keep the child safe in future.

The independent return review is an in-depth interview and should be conducted by an independent professional (e.g. a social worker, teacher, health professional or police officer, not involved in caring for the child and who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able). The child should be seen on their own unless they specifically request to have someone with them. The child should be offered the option of speaking to an independent representative or advocate. The IRO should be informed.

The responsible local authority should ensure the return review interview takes place, collaborating working closely with the host authority where appropriate. The independent return interview should take place within 72 hours of the child being located or returning from absence, it should preferably take place in a neutral place where they feel safe. Delays in return interviews may mean a loss of valuable information or evidence.

The interview and actions that follow from it should:

- Identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered – including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the 'Safe and Well check'– either before they ran away or whilst missing.

- Understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away.
- Help the child feel 'safe'/understand that they have options, to prevent repeat instances of them running away.
- Understand what the child would like to see happen next whether short term and/or long term.
- Gather the parents' or carers' views of the circumstances, if appropriate.
- Provide the child with information on how to stay safe if they choose to run away again, including helpline numbers.
- It is especially important that the independent Return Review interview takes place when a child:
  - Has been reported missing on three or more occasions.
  - Is frequently absent without authorisation.
  - Has been hurt or harmed while they have been missing.
  - Is at known or suspected risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking.
  - Is at known or suspected risk of involvement in criminal activity or drugs.
  - Has contact with persons posing risk to children; and/or

Has been engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence.

- If an independent return home interview is not offered or arranged by the responsible local authority, the Home will challenge this and, if necessary, will take appropriate steps to escalate concerns.

Follow up.

The local authority children's social care services, police, home and other agencies involved with the child should work together to assess the child and:

- To build up a comprehensive picture of why the child went missing.
- What happened while they were missing.
- Who they were missing with and where they were found; and,
- What support they require upon returning home.
- Whether a statutory review of the care plan is required.

Where children refuse to engage with the interviewer, parents and/or carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence they may be aware of. This should help to prevent further instances of the child running away and identify early the support needed for them.

Blue Mountain Homes Recognise Children and young people with communication difficulties may not voice their feelings and wishes, Blue Mountain support all children and young people to have a voice will adapt the children and young people key worker sessions and debrief accordingly to the needs of the child or young person. Blue Mountain can support the children and young people to do this by:

- Using visual aids
- Social Stories
- Symbols
- Visual expressions "happy or sad"
- Staff to ensure they are communicating effectively with the children / young person.
- Allowing processing time
- Use of Makaton or BSL

**8. Working together to protect the children and young people.**

**Local PCSO**

**Local Police – 101 or 999**

**Lado – [CPMduty@derby.gov.uk](mailto:CPMduty@derby.gov.uk) Telephone: 01332 642376**

**Ofsted – 0300 123 4666**

Event child or young person is missing – Philomena protocol to be followed. And inform DSL, on the on-Call Duty, Registered manager, police.
On return staff are to complete children and young person debrief
Staff responsibility to complete Incident report and missing person paperwork to be completed alongside staff debrief
Social worker, parents where appropriate and IRO to be informed
Leadership team to review the Individual risk assessment, Philomena protocols and Safety plans.