



Children Looked After, Missing from Care Protocol

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1. Introduction

1.1 This guidance has been produced to advise Placements and those Social Workers who are case holders for any Child Looked After who goes missing.

1.2 This guidance is written in conjunction with local, Greater Manchester and national policies and will support understanding of the process and how it is applied in Bolton.

1.3 The process is to safeguard Children Looked After who go missing and to inform care planning.

1.4 Compliance is in accordance with agreements signed at the start of the placement with residential placements.

2. When a Child/Young Person goes Missing

2.1 When a child or young person is not where they are supposed to be, prior to reporting them as missing the responsible adult is expected to take proactive steps to trace the young person prior to contacting the Police. This would include actions like:

- Physical checks of the residence or where they might be hiding
- Physical checks of the garden, garage, sheds, grounds, and surrounding areas
- Attempts must be made to contact the person directly, via mobile phone, text or social networking sites
- Contacting family and friends to ask if they are there
- Any other likely place they would be at

2.2 If the person is found via the above actions, they should not be reported as missing to the Police unless there are significant safety issues with the child being there. In such circumstances, the reporting individual should contact the police and request a 'Concern for Welfare' address check.

2.3 If a child is located but does not wish to return, the police may be requested to assist in their safe return, however the individual **must not** be reported a missing simply to ensure police involvement in the return of a child.

2.4 If the child is not found via the above actions, placement will report to the local Police that the child or young person is missing and provide the information that would assist the Police in locating them. If the child is at immediate risk of harm, ring 999, otherwise all other missing reports should be called in on 101. The police have confirmed that logging online is not appropriate for missing reports – these must be made by calling.

2.5 For all missing reports, the Placement must inform mfh@bolton.gov.uk (any time of day or night). Also, if it is during the day, they need to notify the child's social worker (or duty team). If out of hours, EDT should be informed. The info needed for notification is listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

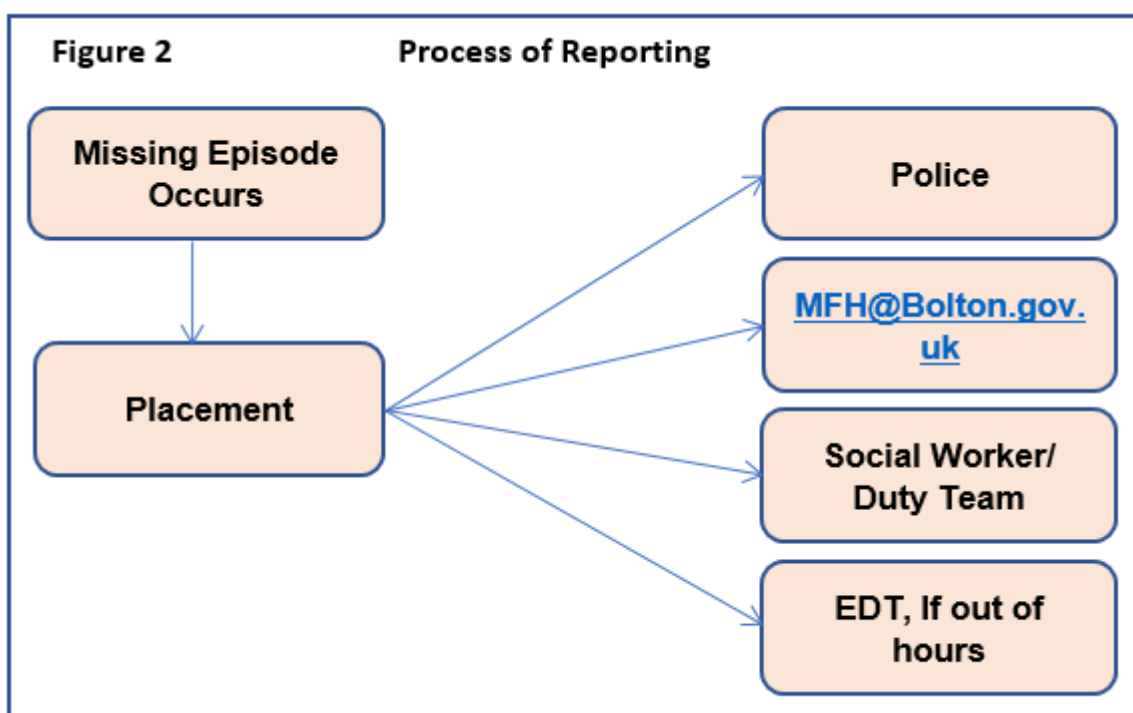
Notification to Local Authority of Child / Young Person going missing

1. Name of Child
2. Date and Time they went missing
3. Date and Time it was reported to the Police
4. Summary of circumstances leading to the missing episode
5. What do you think is the intent of the child/ young person going missing, where they are likely to head, if known?
6. Nominated person and phone number for contact and discussion

2.6 If the child or young person goes missing out of hours, a report should be sent through to EDT. EDT will then have the up-to-date information should further discussions/arrangements be required with the Police and placement.

2.7 All info about children reported missing is recorded on our system, we need this first to identify a pattern of missing for the child and make sure that the correct support is offered, but also to be able to report our response to managers and inspectors. Info such as the date and time of the missing episode and the circumstances/reasons for the missing episode are needed. Later, return information will be added.

Figure 2.



3. Once the Child / Young Person has Returned.

3.1 When a child returns or is found, placements must immediately contact everyone as before: Police, Missing from Home email, Social Worker, and EDT if out of hours. As before, date and time of return, where they were found, any circumstances need to be shared. See Figure 3.

Figure 3

Notification to Local Authority of Child / Young Person Returning to Placement having been Missing

1. Name of Child
2. Date and Time they went missing
3. Date and Time they returned to placement
4. If not directly returned to placement, where were they found
5. Any commentary provided by the child/young person as to their activities
6. Any alterations in care made by the placement to reduce the likelihood of further missing episodes

3.3 The process will not be completed with the return of the child or young person to the placement. There is a statutory requirement for a Return Interview to be conducted with the child or young person within 72hours of them returning.

4. Independent Return Interviews

4.1 Following an episode of missing there is a requirement for an Independent Return Interview to take place within 72hours if the child or young person agrees. The choice must always be given, even if the child has previously refused. If the child is placed outside of Bolton, the Missing from Home Coordinator can arrange for the independent service to offer a telephone return interview. The social worker may prefer to complete this with the child, in this case, they should inform the MFH coordinator and send them a completed copy to be added to the missing record.

4.2 The Missing from Home Coordinator updates the system with return information and uploads the return interview to be accessed by social care services. The return interview is not usually shared with placements as return interview is offered confidentially and may include information about other children or adults. Any relevant information and changes to the care plan should be shared by the social worker with the placement.

4.3 The Social Worker should reflect on any additional information drawn from the return interview and integrate the learning in the Care Planning process. This should include actions to enhance the child's experience and reduce the risk of repeat missing episodes.