

## **Missing Children**

### **STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS**

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

- [Regulation 11 - Independent fostering agencies—duty to secure welfare.](#)
- [Regulation 13 - Behaviour management and children missing from foster parent's home.](#)

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards

- [Standard 5 - Children Missing From Care.](#)

### **Relevant Guidance**

[Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care \(DfE\)](#)

### **RELATED GUIDANCE**

- [Child Sexual Exploitation \(CSE\)](#)
- [Extremism and Radicalisation](#)
- [Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership \(in Reading\) Missing Children Procedure](#)

BFFC's IFA must ensure that you are fully aware of and know how to implement the Missing Children protocol relevant to your local authority. Please refer to local resources where you will find links to those local authorities' procedures that are relevant to BFFC's foster carers. It is essential that you familiarise yourself with the protocol to make sure you are fully aware of and understand the process that needs to be followed should a child in your care be missing.

At the time of a child coming to live with you, BFFC's IFA will share the information available to them about the child, including whether there is a history or risk of a child or young person going missing whilst in your care. Risk assessments will be completed as well as the individual safer care plan. Strategies to minimise the child or young person going missing will be discussed and agreed as well as expectations of the foster carers when the child or young person goes missing.

The care and support you provide to children should minimise the risk of them going missing and reduce the harm that may occur if they do go missing. Children should be educated about the dangers and risks of leaving the foster home without permission and should be made aware of where they can access help if they consider running away.

Children who go missing from their foster homes will be protected to the best of the agency's ability and should receive positive support upon their return. There should be well-coordinated responses to missing incidents that aim to reduce harm or the risk of harm. A

clear plan of urgent action should be in place to protect the children and minimise further harm or risk.

As part of your training when becoming a foster carer and supervision discussions with your social worker you will be made aware of the measures you can take to prevent a child from leaving without permission according to current legislation and government guidance.

As the foster carer, it is likely that you know the child and young person, their networks and usual whereabouts best and therefore it is expected that you take appropriate action to find missing children, including working alongside the police when necessary, and to protect children who are absent from the foster home without consent but whose whereabouts are known.

If a child is absent from the fostering home and their whereabouts are not known (i.e., the child is missing), you must follow your local authority's Missing pro from home protocols.

In cases where a child goes missing and there is a concern for their welfare, or at the request of a missing child, the agency should make sure that a private meeting (independent return interview) between the child and the responsible authority to discuss the reasons for their disappearance takes place upon their return. BfC's IFA will also work with the responsible authority and you to determine what actions should be taken to prevent future incidents. Any concerns regarding you as the foster carer or the placement will be addressed in conjunction with the responsible authority. If appropriate, parents should be informed of incidents when their child has been or is missing.

## Definitions

There are a range of definitions used concerning missing children across agencies for the purposes of referrals, risk assessment and recording of data.

**Missing Child:** A child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.

**Missing from Care:** A child looked after who is not at their placement or the expected location (e.g., school), and their whereabouts are unknown.

**Away from Placement Without Authorization:** A child looked after whose whereabouts are known but who is not at their placement or the expected location, and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.

### The police consider a child missing when:

- The child's whereabouts cannot be established.
- There is concern for the child's safety or risk of harm.
- A child is absent when they are not where they are expected to be, but there is no apparent risk.

## **Planning and Prevention**

**Placement Planning:** Placement planning should consider the risk of a child going missing and include measures to reduce or prevent such incidents. The care plan and placement plan should address strategies for preventing unauthorised absences and minimising risks if a child does go missing.

Risk assessments should be conducted, taking into account factors such as distance from home and any triggers that may contribute to a child running away. The views of the child should be sought and considered, and access to an independent advocate should be provided.

Regular reviews should be conducted to address any absences, revise prevention strategies, and update care plans accordingly.

### **Prevention Strategies:**

Foster carers should create a secure and supportive home environment for children, promoting attachment and positive relationships. Children need to be educated about the risks and dangers of running away, including the potential consequences and available support services.

There may be a variety of reasons for the young person going missing and it is through communication and engaging with the young person, that you are most likely to understand and deal with the issues that make them go missing. This could include peer group issues, family contact or other reasons. On the other hand, the young person might not be used to people being concerned about their whereabouts and they might not understand that you are trying to keep them safe and look after them.

If a young person has gone missing whilst with you or before, you should look out for signs or patterns of behaviour that usually happen before they go missing. This may help you talk to them to prevent them from going missing. You should be aware of what measures you can take to prevent a child from leaving without permission. The use of persuasion and your relationship is the most powerful tool that you have to prevent them going and you will find that the best thing that you can achieve is for them to want to come back.

Restrictive measures, such as physically restraining a child, must not be used unless there is an immediate threat to the child's life.

### **Specific Risks**

Care plans should consider specific risks associated with children going missing, including trafficking, grooming, protecting children at risk of radicalisation, sexual exploitation, and involvement in offending behaviour. Strategies will be developed to address these risks and ensure the safety and well-being of the child.

## **What to do when a child in your care is missing?**

If a child in your care is missing phone the **police non-emergency number: 101**

Then inform the child's social worker **and** your social worker **in** office hours, EDT on 01344 351999 (Mon-Fri 5pm-9am & 24 hours Saturday – Sunday and Bank Holidays) **and** BfC's IFA on 0118937 3866 **out** of office hours:

If a child is in immediate danger contact the **police on 999**.

We recognise that a child or young person being missing is a difficult time for all, however, it is essential that you keep all involved up to date throughout the time period that the child or young person is missing until their return home. For example, you might find the child or young person in the community, they might contact you over the phone informing you where they are, etc.

As a foster carer for BfC's IFA, you are also required to complete an incident form within the set timescales.

Please refer to the Local Resources page for the Missing Person Protocol for your local authority area and familiarise yourself with it.