



South Yorkshire

POLICE

South Yorkshire Children Missing From Home and Care Protocol 2023

For review: June 2025

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Going missing should be treated as an indicator that a child may be at risk of harm and is often one of the key vulnerabilities linked to Child Exploitation. The

safeguarding of children is paramount. A missing person report should be recognised as an opportunity to identify and address risks, as well as understand the root causes for going missing. The reasons for a child going missing may be complex and linked to a variety of social, geographical or family issues.

When a child is reported missing, the primary responsibility is to safeguard that child. The College of Policing recommend three key factors are considered in a missing person investigation:

- Protecting those at risk of harm
 - Minimising distress and ensuring a high quality of service to the families and carers of missing persons
 - Prosecuting those who perpetrate harm or pose a risk of harm when this is appropriate and supported by evidence.
- 1.2. Missing person strategies and responses should focus on multi-agency working. The primary focus of multi-agency work should be on preventing a child from going missing again, as this reduces the risk of harm. It is important to understand the reasons why children go missing. A greater understanding will enable more effective prevention strategies to be implemented. By applying preventative approaches at strategic and tactical levels partnerships will help safeguard children as well as reduce the number of missing incidents.
- 1.3. Doncaster, Sheffield, Rotherham and Barnsley Councils and South Yorkshire Police have a joint responsibility to respond to all incidents of children who go missing from home or care and are committed to working together to safeguard all such children.
- 1.4. This protocol fulfils these organisations' statutory duty to have a Missing from Home and Care protocol. It sets out:
- The roles and responsibilities of services, parents, families and carers
 - How the risk to the child will be assessed
 - What the response will be
 - How information will be shared
 - How repeat missing incidents will be prevented
 - Additional arrangements for looked-after children.

This protocol is to be read and interpreted in conjunction with: *Working Together To Safeguard Children 2018 (a new Working Together document is currently in consultation stage)*, *National protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers (Nov 2018)* *Care Standards Act 2000*, *Children's Act 2004*, *Children's Home Regulations (Quality Standards) 2015*, and the *Statutory Guidance On Children Who Runaway or Go Missing From Home or Care (Jan 2014)*.

- 1.5. To supplement the protocol each Local Authority has more specific procedures on how these roles are carried out including escalation processes with regard to their local structures.

2. Glossary and definitions

- 2.1. There are a number of definitions across statutory guidance and protocols relating to children who go missing or are not where they are expected to be. These are simplified and set out below for easy reference:

Term	Definition
Child	A person who has not yet reached their eighteenth birthday. 'Child' should be taken to mean 'child or young person' throughout this guidance.
Missing person	Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located and their well-being or otherwise is confirmed. All reports of missing people sit within a continuum of risk from 'no apparent risk (absent)' through to high-risk cases that require immediate, intensive action.
Looked-after child	A child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a Care Order or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
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 no concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.
Responsible authority	The local authority that is responsible for a looked-after child's care and care planning. When the child is placed out of area, also known as the "home authority", "originating authority" or "placing authority".
Host authority	The local authority into whose area a looked-after child is placed, if not in the responsible authority's area. Also known as the "receiving authority".
Care leaver	Someone who has previously been a looked-after child for a period of time. Their entitlement to support depends on the duration they were looked after, and how long ago this period was and their current circumstances.
Hidden missing child	A child who is or has been missing but has not been reported to the police.

3. Before reporting a child missing

- 3.1. When a child appears to be missing their family members or carers are expected to make all appropriate efforts to locate them and return them home, or at least establish that they are safe.
- 3.2. The child only needs to be reported to the police as missing if their whereabouts cannot be established.
- 3.3. If the whereabouts of a child is known and there is a concern that they are at risk or may pose a risk to others this will be reported as a concern related incident, not a missing episode.

4. Who needs to know when a child goes missing

- 4.1. Where a child is missing they should always be reported to the police.
- 4.2. In non-emergencies, reports to police should be made by dialling 101 and asking to report a missing child.
- 4.3. When a missing child is reported to the police this is automatically notified to the host children's services via automated email.
- 4.4. Pro-active reporting should be encouraged in areas where it is known that children are less likely to be reported as missing. Examples are children who go missing from education, and trafficked children.
- 4.5. When a looked-after child goes missing their carers should report this to the police in the area in which they live and the responsible authority. If relevant, the responsible authority will inform the host authority in whose area the child lives and if appropriate, the child's parents and anyone else with parental responsibility. If the police make the host authority aware of a missing young person in their area, the host authority should also ensure the responsible authority is notified.

5. During the missing episode

- 5.1. The initial assessment and categorisation of risk on reported missing children rests with the police. The police must take cognisance of all available information and intelligence. As the missing episode progresses all key

stakeholders will be involved in sharing information and concerns that will influence risk assessments throughout the missing episode.

5.1.1. On receipt of the 101 call, the call handler asks the following questions of the person making the report of a missing child.

- ☐ Has this person previously been missing?
- ☐ What is the specific concern in this instance?
- ☐ Is this behaviour out of character?
- ☐ Is this person vulnerable for any reason?
- ☐ Does this person have any physical illness, disability or mental health problems?
- ☐ Does this person require any essential medication / medical treatment?
- ☐ Does the person pose a risk to themselves or others?
- ☐ Is there any history of self-harm or suicide?
- ☐ Is the person suspected to be the victim of a crime?
- ☐ Are they currently known to the sexual exploitation service?
- ☐ Are they at risk of criminal, sexual or county lines exploitation?
- ☐ Under 18s only. Are they subject to a Child Protection plan?
- ☐ Is the person a victim or a perpetrator of domestic abuse?
- ☐ Does the person take drugs or alcohol?
- ☐ What was the person intending to do when last seen? And they fail to complete their intentions?
- ☐ Is it possible that the person may not have the psychological ability to interact safely with others in an unknown environment?
- ☐ Do they have School/College/University/Employment or Financial problems?
- ☐ Do they have a mobile phone? (If so, take number/service provider)
- ☐ Do they use social network sites? (If so, take account names)
- ☐ Do they have access to transport?
- ☐ Have they access to money / bank account? (If so, take bank details)
- ☐ Have they taken any belongings / luggage with them?
- ☐ Is there any other information relevant to their absence?
- ☐ Does the person have a passport? If so, can it be located?

5.1.2. The police call handler uses the totality of the information given in the initial report to assign a risk category:

High risk: “The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely”. 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 risk: “The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious”.

Low risk: “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”.

College of Policing guidance states children can be categorised in one of these four ways, ***however the Statutory Guidance states that the police will prioritise all incidents of missing children as medium or high risk***. It is unlikely that a missing child will ever be categorised as ‘no apparent risk’.

- 5.1.3. It should be noted that, where a child is ‘wanted’ (e.g. for breach of bail or on warrant without bail), they still fall under this risk assessment process and will be categorised and responded to in the same way. ‘Missing’ status should not be removed due to the child being ‘wanted’.
- 5.1.4. The report is immediately passed to the relevant response policing team, where a Sergeant will consider the overall circumstances, consider local intelligence, and verify or change the risk category as required.
- 5.1.5. Risk assessments and categories are reviewed throughout the missing episode based on any new information. Ongoing missing child cases are also reviewed through local daily tasking processes.
- 5.1.6. Risk assessments for missing children will be reviewed in response to new information or changes in circumstances with the minimum requirement for risk assessments for all missing children to be reviewed every 8 hours by the Duty Inspector.

5.2. **Sharing information**

- 5.2.1. When a missing report is reported the appropriate team in Children’s Services is automatically notified by email.
- 5.2.2. In addition, the South Yorkshire Police missing persons system automatically shares a daily list of missing children, including their risk category, with the local children’s services.
- 5.2.3. Each Local area has different provisions for collecting information held on the child and sharing it with the police to aid their investigation; and each authority holding relevant information about the missing child should be proactive in sharing this.

5.3. **Responses**

- 5.3.1. Police response is based on the assessed risk category. In brief:

- **Missing – high risk:** This category usually requires the immediate deployment of police resources. Action may be delayed in exceptional circumstances, such as searching water or forested areas during hours of darkness. A member of the senior management team must be involved in the examination of initial lines of enquiry and approval of appropriate staffing levels. Such cases should lead to the appointment of an investigating officer and a police search advisor. In consultation with the missing child's family / carer or responsible authority there should be consideration of a press / media strategy and / or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be in place where appropriate. The Missing Person's Bureau should be alerted without undue delay. Children's services must also be notified immediately.
- **Missing – medium risk:** This category requires an active and measured response by the police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.
- **Missing – low risk:** Proportionate enquiries should be carried out to ensure that the individual has not come to harm.
- **No apparent risk (absent):** Actions to locate the subject and / or gathering further information should be agreed with the informant and a latest review time set to reassess the risk.

5.3.2. South Yorkshire Police Missing Persons investigators monitor and evaluate all reports of missing children on the missing from home system. During a missing episode they will liaise with partner agencies and ensure that necessary information is shared.

5.3.3. Certain groups face specific risks if they go missing, such as children with learning difficulties who may have little understanding of their actions or the risks to them, previously trafficked children who may be at risk of returning to exploitation or children in care. Children and adults with markers linked to FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) or Child Exploitation (CE) also need to be considered in relation to missing children. Such factors need to be taken into account in the assessment of risk, with liaison with Children's Social care and partner agencies. For previously trafficked children, responses will include liaising with the UKVI and referral to the National Referral Mechanism.

5.3.4. Managing a missing episode is not solely the responsibility of the police; a multi-agency response should be presented. All agencies involved with the child and / or their family should be alerted to the fact that the child is missing, actively seeking to make contact, and share relevant information between them. This could include both children's and adult social care, early or specialist intervention services, youth offending teams, educational establishments, children missing from education teams and health agencies.

- 5.3.5. If it is a child's third missing episode in 28 days or the number of hours a child has been missing exceeds locally agreed thresholds then a multi-agency missing strategy meeting must be held. The period of time for which a child is missing, before a strategy meeting is convened, should not exceed 72 hours. If a missing child has a multi agency core group meeting, this meeting is appropriate to serve as the multi agency missing strategy meeting and should be held within 2 working days of when the trigger is met. If the child is still missing, the strategy meeting will consider what plans need to be put in place for their return. If there are concerns of significant harm from any single missing episode, Child Protection procedures need to be instigated.

6. When a child returns

6.1.1. Prevention interviews and notification of return.

- 6.1.2. Prevention interviews (previously known as safe and well checks) should be carried out by police officers as soon as possible following the return of a child who was categorised as missing. The prevention interviews can provide an important opportunity to identify ongoing risk factors that may affect the likelihood of the child going missing again. They will not be treated as administrative procedure to close a missing incident. The police will record the child's demeanour, their physical state, any disclosures about where they have been and what they have done, and any other factors that may be relevant later and will also consider any forensic opportunities, such as the recovery of mobile phones and clothing.

- 6.1.3. The child's return is automatically notified to the relevant children's services via a system email. Details from the police 'found report' are included in these notifications.

6.2. Independent Return Home Interviews

- 6.2.1. When a missing child is found they must be offered an Independent Return Home Interview. South Yorkshire Police pass details of missing children to the four Children's Services for the purpose of carrying out interviews in line with their protocols. The four Local Authority's then arrange and carry out these independent return home interviews and share that information back with the police to inform current and future safeguarding arrangements' and to identify (and respond to) root causes to missing episodes.
- 6.2.2. In line with the Statutory Guidance only the child as the subject of a missing episode has the right to refuse a Return Home Interview. There may be occasions during the Prevention Interview conducted by South Yorkshire Police when the child discloses they have been a victim of an offence, or there is evidence of abuse, which instigates a police led investigation. In such circumstances South Yorkshire Police will notify the relevant Children's Services as soon as possible and convene a strategy meeting to agree the safeguarding and investigative response.

- 6.2.3. The independent interview should be carried out within 72 hours of the child's return by a person not involved in the child's care planning. They should have the necessary training and skills to carry out such interviews and be able to follow up any actions required. Interviews should be held in a neutral place where possible and in a place where the child feels safe.
- 6.2.4. Before carrying out the interview, the interviewer will obtain as much information as possible about that child and their situation. This involves reviewing the circumstances of the latest missing episode; checking to see if the child has gone missing before; and making checks on relevant databases to see if they are known to services.
- 6.2.5. Each area has different provisions for carrying out Return Home Interviews and follow up, but there is a common purpose, namely to understand and address the reasons for going missing – the push and pull factors; identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered; and to help the child understand their options as an alternative to going missing again. This information will be gathered through open, probing questions, which are recorded and retained in line with local procedures.
- 6.2.6. If the child declines the opportunity of an interview, or cannot be contacted despite persistent efforts, the allocated return interview officer can still record information they have gained through their attempts, such as conversations with parents/carers and the child's appearance and demeanour. However, the source of and evidence for this information should be clear, and clearly distinguishable from the voice of the child.
- 6.2.7. In open social care cases, Return Home Interview forms should be shared with the South Yorkshire Police Missing Persons Investigators and with any professionals working with the child and/or their family, in order to reduce repeat missing episodes, subject to local protocols.
- 6.2.8. In other cases, essential safeguarding information gained from the Return Home Interview must be shared and the full Return Home Interview form stored and shared according to local protocol.

6.3. Ongoing assessment, response and information sharing

- 6.3.1. A missing episode should not be seen as an isolated incident and will almost certainly be symptomatic of other issues in the child's life. It may also be related to occasions when other children have gone missing in terms of common 'push' or 'pull' factors. It is important to assess and link all available information to create the full picture, both for individual children and for networks in order to tackle the underlying issues and prevent future missing episodes.
- 6.3.2. Child protection procedures apply if there are concerns that the child is "in need" (as defined in Section 17 of the Children Act 1989); "is suffering or is likely to suffer serious harm" (as defined in Section 47 of the same Act), or another circumstances where there is a safeguarding or wellbeing concerns

for a child; a referral to the relevant children's social care department must be made.

This will prompt consideration and decision on assessment and action in accordance with '*Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018*'.

6.3.3. Irrespective of any other procedures underway, a multi-agency missing young person strategy meeting needs to be held if one or more of the following conditions are met:

- The child has been missing for 72 hours or more
- The child has been missing three times or more within a 28-day period
- The child is deemed to be at risk of significant harm as a result of their missing episode(s); or
- There is any other pattern of behaviour which causes concern

6.3.4. Each area has different provisions for arranging missing strategy meetings (see local procedures), but they should always involve a South Yorkshire Police missing persons investigator, a representative from every service involved with the child, as well as any person that would likely be involved in work to prevent future missing episodes and stabilise risk. It may also be relevant to invite the person who completed the most recent Return Home Interview, particularly if the child engaged well and/or disclosed new information.

6.3.5. South Yorkshire Police in conjunction with local authorities has agreed to use the Philomena Protocol. This protocol requires a "multiagency trigger plan/find me plan" to be completed by the provider for any child who has or it is believed will be subject to multiple missing episodes, or where there is thought to be a risk of them going missing and coming to harm. The purpose of this plan is to direct initial enquiries when a child goes missing. It will include information such as key people in the child's life; any known contact numbers, social media profiles and addresses of interest; recent missing episodes, where they were found and with whom; and vulnerabilities and risks, including any sanitised police intelligence that can be shared, and any ongoing criminal investigations. The plan is retained and updated by the provider and is handed to police when a missing report is made. The police shall share the plan with the host authority police force when a child is placed out of area to allow an appropriate response to any missing episodes in the host area.

6.3.6. Local authorities shall have responsibility for recording details of the young person's history and specific circumstances of missing reports. This information should be readily accessible and available to assist police and others to find a missing child. This information will also be shared with host authorities, when a child is placed out of area.

6.3.7. Where a particular risk or concerning behaviour is identified, the officer identifying this risk or completing the found report will refer those concerns via a vulnerable child referral, which goes to the relevant children's social care department.

- 6.3.8. If additional needs are identified through the Independent Return Home Interview or other information sharing, the Return Home Interview provider, missing persons investigator or other lead professional may make further referrals to services that can support the child and/or their family.
- 6.3.9. In addition to responses to individual cases, the Return Home Interview providers also collate intelligence across the interviews in order to identify common themes, any 'hotspot' areas, and any links between missing children and adults with whom they are spending their time.
- 6.3.10. This type of intelligence will be shared at regular meetings in each local area between the Return Home Interview provider, South Yorkshire Police missing persons investigators and children's services. Where there is a more urgent concern; this information will be shared immediately via the MASH.
- 6.3.11. South Yorkshire Police will ensure that all relevant police powers are used robustly when dealing with perpetrators involved with children who go missing. Arrest and other positive approaches will be taken towards any adult found with a missing child in which it is suspected criminal offences may have been committed. The Protecting Vulnerable People team in each area collates information about suspected perpetrators and coordinates further action to mitigate risk they may pose.

7. Additional arrangements relating to looked-after children

7.1. Prevention and planning

- 7.1.1. Appropriate placement is a key factor in preventing looked-after children from going missing and particularly whether the child feels that their views about placement are being listened to and taken seriously. A placement to which the child objects, especially one at a distance from their home, friends and family, should only be made when absolutely necessary to meet their other needs.
- 7.1.2. The placement plan for a child should wherever possible be completed by the Local Authority prior to a placement been made, or within 5 days of the placement been made. This plan should include the views and roles of all interested partners to ensure that not only the child's needs are put first, but also allows all interested partners to advise on the suitability of the placement and ensure appropriate plans are initiated to manage any potential missing episodes.
- 7.1.3. The receiving placement, whether an independent care home; semi-independent provision or a home managed by the local authority or foster placement must assess suitability for placement against the needs of the child and in context with existing resident group and their individual needs (impact assessment). The assessment will consider suitability and safety of a placement for the young person with regard to knowledge, skills and experience of the staff, the placement location, other residents and the placement resources to fulfil the requirement of paragraph 3.1 of this protocol.

The Philomena Protocol has been embedded across South Yorkshire since 2021 and forms a key part of the wider partnership expectation to minimise risk of harm to missing children and improve the response to it; should it occur.

- 7.1.4. Where there is a possibility that a looked-after child will go missing, their placement plan will include a strategy to minimise this risk, and set out the response if they do in line with the Philomena Protocol. The child's social worker, carers and Police will involve the child in developing this strategy, helping them to understand the risks and dangers involved and making them aware of how to seek help if they do go missing. Where a child is placed outside of the responsible authority's area, this strategy should be shared with the host authority at the time of placement, with a local contingency plan agreed.
- 7.1.5. The Local Authority who has parental responsibility for the child will maintain a single record of information that will be used in the event of them going missing. This will be known as a "history document". This includes recent photographs of the child; details of family members, friends and associates, and key professionals involved with the child; medical information; any known risk taking behaviour and vulnerabilities; and a summary of previous times they have gone missing and what happened then. This shall be a "live" document that is updated every time anything changes. This information will be included on a Philomena Protocol missing incident form and this will be shared with police and other agencies without delay if the child goes missing so that there can be a quick and appropriate response. This document shall be shared at any future placement meeting to ensure the principles of this section are fulfilled.
- 7.1.6. Each Children's Service area shall share the list of children placed into their area by another local authority and where a risk is identified with South Yorkshire Police. This allows South Yorkshire Police to cross-reference it with missing reports (and other safeguarding concerns) and liaise appropriately with the responsible local authority and relevant police forces.
- 7.1.7. Each children's services has responsibility to identify children who are subject to repeat missing episodes. Multiple missing episodes are classed as 3 (or more) in any 28 day period. The child's needs and placement must be reviewed at the 'multi-agency missing young person strategy meeting' to ensure the provisions in place are appropriate and are not detrimental to the child or safeguarding plan. A repeat missing preventative plan must be agreed.
- 7.1.8. To support Children Homes managers, each area will have processes in place to ensure locality assessments (yearly) for established homes and new assessments against proposed homes involve all partners to allow informed risk assessments to take place and the development of risk management strategies (*The Children's Homes and Looked After Children (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2013*).

7.2. Before reporting

- 7.2.1. When a looked-after child appears to have gone missing carers are expected to make all appropriate efforts to locate and return them home, or at least establish that they are safe.

This should be balanced against other factors that may increase the risk such as antecedent behaviour, a trigger incident or out of character behaviour that creates concern for the immediate safety of the child or another person, and /or there is an agreed multi agency Missing Management Plan which indicates due to a child's vulnerability the police should be contacted from the outset of a missing occurrence, there is an expectation that a child's carer undertakes all reasonable actions to contact, locate and where possible arrange for a child's return.

- 7.2.2. If the child's whereabouts is known, a missing person report is not necessary and the child should be categorised as "away from placement without authorisation". This does not need reporting to the police unless there are immediate safeguarding concerns. In these circumstances, South Yorkshire Police will respond in line with a 'concern for a child' incident and not record a missing report.

7.3. Reporting

- 7.3.1. When a looked-after child goes missing, their carers should report this to the police in the area in which they live and the responsible authority. If relevant, the responsible authority will inform the host authority in whose area the child lives; and, if appropriate, the child's parents and anyone else with parental responsibility.

- 7.3.2. If a looked-after child is away from their placement without authorisation, this needs to be reported to the responsible authority.

- 7.3.3. In addition to the initial police response to manage any safeguarding issues, If the whereabouts of a looked after child was known and there were concerns that they were at risk, or may have posed a risk to others, then a strategy meeting shall be convened to agree a course of action to mitigate any future risk.

- 7.3.4 If a child is reported as missing and the police question the appropriateness of the report, the police should engage with the reporting person to discuss actions taken and the concerns held. Professional disagreement regarding as to whether a report is warranted or not, should not result in the concerns held around the child being delayed and the priority should remain to ensure their safety.

- 7.3.5 The Local Safeguarding Children Partnership Missing Children Escalation pathway should include a pathway whereby the carer/

child's social worker can immediately escalate the matter to the Senior Police Officer on duty who has operational command responsibility, where the carer/ child's social worker believes there is concern for the immediate safety of the child or another person and the police have refused to respond or deploy an officer.

7.3.6 Where the carer or responsible local authority has not undertaken reasonable action to establish the child's whereabouts, and there is no concern for the immediate safety of the child or another person that warrants immediate police intervention, the police may delay the police response to enable the carer or responsible local authority to undertake reasonable action to establish the child's whereabouts and to give the child reasonable opportunity to return of their own accord.

7.3.7 On occasions where the carer is unable to undertake action to locate the child due to exceptional circumstances, the police may need to act in the best interests of the child. Once professionals are assured of a child's wellbeing, where required, the police and the reporting agency should arrange a follow up conversation to discuss any concerns about the carer being unable to undertake action and/ or the basis of any other disagreement. If there are ongoing concerns regarding agency action or inaction, these should be escalated via the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership Missing Children Escalation pathway.

7.4. During a missing episode

7.4.1. During a missing episode, responses to looked-after children generally follow those for all children as set out in section 5.3 above. However, all agencies will take into account the extra vulnerabilities that looked-after children (and care leavers) tend to have, and adjust their risk assessments and responses accordingly. As highlighted above any assessment around the risk of child exploitation should be taken into consideration, as this is a key indicator to what the current view is around the level of risk posed from a multiagency perspective.

7.4.2. The police will maintain a close liaison with the carers and children's services team responsible for a missing looked-after child, consulting them on any decision as they would for the family if the child was not looked-after. This includes gaining prior approval before taking any steps to publicise a child as missing (e.g. on social media).

7.4.3. The carers and children's services team responsible for a missing looked after child will continue to try to locate or make contact with the child and to persuade them to return home proactively.

7.4.4. Where a child placed outside the responsible authority is missing, there needs to be close liaison between the responsible authority and host authority as the

child may be in either area. The responsible authority should ensure the relevant children's services team in the host authority is aware of a missing episode, and vice versa. This should also happen between the responsible and host police missing police officers.

- 7.4.5. If a looked-after child is away from their placement without authorisation, their carers should make proportionate attempts to persuade them to return home. In circumstances (i.e. if there are concerns for the safety of staff or the child), police assistance might be needed to recover the child. The child should not be reported as missing unless their whereabouts are unknown (3.3 and 7.2.2).

7.5. After the child's return

- 7.5.1. Looked-after children who have returned after a missing episode must be offered an independent return interview, as outlined in section 6.2 above.
- 7.5.2. It is the responsible authority's responsibility to ensure this happens, but it will often be more practical and useful for someone from the host authority region to carry it out if the child is placed out of area. The four South Yorkshire authorities have an agreement that they may, therefore, share these arrangements for children placed within another South Yorkshire authority area should resources allow.
- 7.5.3. Within South Yorkshire the underlying principle of work across borders in relation to missing young people is one of co-operation and best practice will be followed in relation to sharing information in relation to specific vulnerabilities.
- 7.5.4. At the point of discussing a placement the host authority will initiate a conversation with the responsible authority to agree who is best placed to complete the independent return interview and how information and actions arising will be shared.
- 7.5.5. It should be noted that, as the interviewer should not be someone directly involved in their care, this precludes a child's usual social worker or carer(s). However, if a child expresses a clear preference to talk to their social worker or carer rather than an independent person, this should be facilitated and the information collected and submitted on a return interview form in the usual way.
- 7.5.6. Independent reviewing officers for looked after children should be informed by the responsible local authority of all missing episodes and away from placement without authorisation events. This ensures that cases can be reviewed, and that care plans are revised in response if necessary.
- 7.5.7. Child protection conference chairs should be informed by the responsible local authority of all missing episodes and away from placement without authorisation events where a child is subject to a child protection plan. This ensures that child protection plans are revised in response if necessary.

7.5.8. All information collected about missing children identifies if they are looked after and, if so, if they are placed outside the responsible authority. This allows patterns and trends to be analysed separately by these factors.

8. Information and information sharing

8.1. The four areas complete a quarterly data return, to enable comparison and to allow South Yorkshire Police to aggregate a countywide data set. This is a subset of information collected in each local area, but extracts the data that is most readily comparable across the county.

8.2. This comprises numbers of:

- Missing children and episodes
- characteristics such as age group, looked-after status and duration of episode
- triggers for strategy meetings and strategy meetings held
- independent return interviews required, offered and carried out
- reasons for missing episodes as identified in independent return interviews

8.3 Data will be shared regularly with South Yorkshire Local Safeguarding Partnership Children's Boards and the South Yorkshire Senior Governance Group for children who go missing from home.

9. Signatories

9.1. This protocol is signed and accepted by the lead people in each organisation:

Organisation	Name and role	Signature
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council	Carly Speechley Executive Director – Children's Services	
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council	Riana Nelson, Director of Children's Services	
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council	Monica Green Assistant Director, Children's Social Care	

Sheffield City Council	Sally Williams – Director of Children and Families Service	
South Yorkshire Police	Sarah Poolman Assistant Chief Constable South Yorkshire Police	

