

Appendix 1 – Practitioners' Tool - Parent/Carers Guidance to Keeping your Child

Safe if they go Missing

Planning Ahead: Communication is Key - Parents and carers play a vital role in keeping children safe when they are away from home. Open conversations and good planning can help reduce risks and give your child confidence and support.

Before your child leaves home:

- Talk with them about how they will get home and who will pick them up.
- Make sure they know how and when to contact you if they are delayed or held up.
- Encourage open, supportive conversations—make it easy for them to share what they think or feel.
- For older children, ensure they have the means or guidance to get home safely.
- Let them know they will not be in trouble for being late or stuck—even if they have made a poor choice.
- Remind them they can call you anytime if they or their friends feel worried or unsafe.

If Your Child Is not Where They Were Meant to Be - **Not coming home on time can be normal boundary-testing, but it may also signal emotional distress, trouble or risk.**

If your child is late or has gone out without permission:

- Treat each incident individually—think about antecedent behaviour (things that happened before they went missing), out-of-character changes in behaviour or any possible triggers.
- Consider the level of risk and urgency – is their safety at immediate risk, is the safety of others at immediate risk?
- Let your child know you care and are actively looking for them.
- If the police become involved, reassure your child they are not in trouble—it is about their safety.
- Welcome them warmly when they return; see to their physical and emotional well-being.

Getting Extra Support

- **With a Team around the Child, an Early Help Wellbeing Plan and/or Safety Plans & Care Plans** where your child has a Social Worker.
- These plans include steps to take if your child goes missing, and who to contact.
- Plans can and should be updated as risks change.
- Involve your child in making these plans to ensure they are practical and relevant.
- Discuss possible triggers (e.g., wanting to see family or friends, issues with rules or routines) and work to find reasonable compromises where possible.

Reporting a Child as Missing to the Police - Parents are advised to report a child as missing to the police only when necessary, as unnecessary reports can affect their relationship with you, professionals, and the police, and may result in a police history.

Report your child as missing to the police at the point you become concerned.

You should report your child as missing if:

- You believe their immediate safety is at risk or there is an immediate safety risk to others, **and/or**
- You have a **Missing Safety Plan** that advises that immediate police intervention is required if they go missing.

The police will make a risk assessment of the situation and will advise and support you on the next steps to take. Always work with the police—they want what is best for your child, too. Although they expect **reasonable steps** will be taken to find your child before recording them as missing, unless the above criteria are met.

Reasonable actions to find your child include: -

- Check your home, garden, garage, shed, and nearby areas.
- Contact your child directly—call, text, use social media.
- Speak with friends and family to see if they have had contact.
- Visit places your child is known to frequent.
- Go to their last known or expected location.

Additional Steps - Keep a diary of missing episodes and your responses - Record triggers, behaviours and patterns that might help professionals understand and support your child - Take all concerns seriously.

Levels of Intervention Model

The levels of the Intervention Model are for guidance; although it cannot predict every occurrence, situations can improve quickly and deteriorate. Parents/carers should not be afraid to raise their concerns immediately with the police; they should feel free to call the police and ask for advice before reaching this level of concern, where the police will offer support before recording them as missing. Required.

No immediate intervention You are concerned about your child's safety based on the information you know about them and the circumstances of this incident. You decide to wait for your child to return of their own accord.
Parents/Carers Intervention You have some concerns and want to ensure that your child is okay, but at this time, you do

not have any reason to believe they are going to come to harm. You take reasonable steps yourself to locate them and check they are safe. Although your child is not where they are expected to be, you take parental responsibility for contacting and/or searching for your child to ensure their safety and return home. You agree that the circumstances and level of concern do not justify police intervention at the time.

Police Intervention

Based on the information you have about your child and the circumstances of this missing occurrence, you are worried about their immediate safety or the immediate safety of others.

There are serious concerns about the child's safety, and the police have a duty to assist.

Responding to Children Missing from Home and Education Flowchart

