

DIRECTORATE FOR CHILDREN AND
FAMILIES

**Missing From Home & Care
Procedures and Guidance**



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Appendix 1 – MFH Flowchart

MFH & Care Procedures

These procedures set out the Manchester procedures when a child is reported missing from home or care. They should be read in conjunction with the standardised Greater Manchester procedures 'Children Missing from Home and Care', accessible on Triax.

Police

When a child is reported missing from a Manchester address (non-Manchester residents are included) the police update the Missing from Home Spreadsheet, each working day morning with all the missing reports received on children during the previous day (or weekend). The spreadsheet includes the date and time the child was reported missing, last seen and returned. It also states who made the missing report and contains the text of the Safe and Well Check along with any other relevant police recording.

The spreadsheet of missing reports follows two pathways; going to the Manchester Contact Centre and to the Missing from Home Team. (see flowchart)

Contact Centre

The **Contact Centre** will,

- If a child is identified as Looked After by another Local Authority, the Contact Centre officer will notify the responsible authority and close the Contact down with no further action. This would be done by sending an email to the child's social worker. If there is no email recorded on the system, the Contact Centre will attempt to call the person who reported the young person missing to identify the correct Local Authority and social worker, and then record the details on the system and send an email. If the LA/SW cannot be identified by making this call the contact will be passed to the MASH for further screening.
- If the young person is open to a Manchester Social worker this will be sent directly through to the social worker as a MFH Notification.
- If the young person is not open to Children's Services and is a Manchester resident then the Contact will be passed to the MASH team for screening.

MASH

The **MASH** screening social worker will check if the young person has been missing for a period of 24 hours or more, or if this is their 3rd missing episode in one month. If this is the case then the case will be sent straight for a CAFA or S47 (risk dependent).

If the young person does not meet the above criteria, the social worker will use their professional judgement to assess whether a young person may be at significant risk, due to

other factors such as age, time of night missing/returned, specific circumstances or other vulnerabilities. This will be sent through the CAFA pathway with a clear rationale.

Should the young person not be deemed at significant risk, the screening social worker will complete multi-agency checks and can make a recommendation for No Further Action or to Early Help for support.

This process will take place within the MASH timescales (e.g. within one working day a decision regarding how to progress the case will be made. In special circumstances, and with managerial approval a case may be held up to 72 hours to ensure the right information is gathered).

Complex Safeguarding Hub

In the parallel process, the police MFH reports are received by the Complex Safeguarding Hub who lead on the coordination of IRIs. Here they will be allocated an Independent Return Interview (IRI) by the lead team manager or senior social worker. If a child is Looked After, the IRI will be carried out The Children's Society; otherwise a MFH Support Worker based within the Complex Safeguarding Hub will undertake the IRI unless the child is already allocated a Complex Safeguarding Social Worker in which case they will do it. Allocation of IRIs works on the principle of continuity of relationships for a child. The IRI provides an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their home.

The interview should be carried out within 72 hours of the child returning to their home or care setting. This should be an in-depth interview carried out by someone not involved in caring for the child, who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge. Information from IRIs should inform assessment and planning for a child and to support this a representative from the Complex Safeguarding Hub will attend each MFH panel to ensure the child's voice is part of those discussions.

Any significant concerns from the MFH interview should be shared directly with the allocated social worker, and as intelligence with the police. If there is no allocated social worker and concerns are raised it would be the responsibility of the Independent Interviewer to re-refer back to the Contact Centre, clearly highlighting any safeguarding concerns. Once the new referral has been made including the additional information the MASH will make a decision about how to progress the case, and if statutory involvement is required.

The return interview will be uploaded to MiCare in the 'absent/missing from home - return meeting' episode.

There are some circumstances under which an IRI will not be offered. These are when;

- The child is reported missing but is in the care of their parent (e.g. parent fleeing DV with their children and reported missing by the perpetrator).

- Non-Manchester Resident; if a child is reported missing from a Manchester school or hospital, but does not live in the area. The Local Authority where the child resides will be notified by the Contact Centre.
- If the child is Looked After by another Local Authority, the Contact Centre will inform the placing authority, which is responsible for the delivery of an IRI.
- A child has been sectioned under the Mental Health Act
- If a S47 enquiry is taking place consideration will take place as to whether the IRI is appropriate and a decision will be taken by a team manager in consultation with the allocated social worker.

LAC

When a Looked After Child is reported missing from care, the carers will notify the Contact Centre immediately. The Contact Centre worker will create a MFH Notification which goes to the team incoming work folder of the allocated social worker. It is imperative that carers follow this process as opposed to speaking to social worker direct so that all missing episodes are recorded consistently. If a carer contacts the social worker directly they should be directed to also inform Contact Centre or the social worker will need to create a contact and MFH notification on the child's record.

The allocated social worker, or duty social worker will contact the placement at the first opportunity to gather further information, ask the child or young person if they want to speak to their social worker and consider issues of risk for the child or young person.

LAC placed out of area

If a Manchester Looked After Child who is placed out of the local authority area goes missing from care, local MFH procedures must be followed in addition to Manchester's procedures. If the child or young person goes missing 3 or more times in a month or for a period of 24 hours or longer, the child should be presented at MFH panel with input from the local police force or a MFH strategy meeting should be held at the placement or a suitable local venue, including an officer from the local police force and other involved professionals including the placement or foster carer and supervising social worker, the school and any others involved.

Missing from Home Panel

MFH Panels meets fortnightly in each locality and the Permanence Service. MFH panels are chaired by a service manager and have standing attendance from a range of partners including GMP, Health, Youth Justice, Safeguarding Unit, Education, PRU, Early Help, Complex Safeguarding, Children's Society and ICTA. There will be local variations to reflect other key services operating in the area.

Children should be referred to the MFH Panel by social workers when they meet the triggers as set out in the GM Children Missing from Home and Care procedures. The MFH Panel is a forum for partnership information sharing, risk assessment and safety planning. If there are immediate safeguarding concerns usual child protection processes should take place and a strategy meeting held. Decision making around this should take place with the service manager who chairs the panel. Responsibility for chairing the meeting will lie within district. If there are concerns for a child outside of the panel review arrangements this will be considered by the Service Manager who will make a decision as to whether to chair one or whether or not the matter can wait until the next panel.

IROs and CP chairs would not ordinarily chair the MFH strategy meetings as the Service Manager for the locality would already be overseeing the case.

The following is guidance for social workers attending panel;

- Social worker to attend in the timeslot allocated with a case summary, including CP history. A full chronology is not expected, but an understanding of the current concerns and past experience is.
- Team manager to attend if the social worker is unavailable.
- Social worker should obtain an update from partner agencies (school, health etc) which can be shared verbally with panel. Partner agencies are welcome to attend for the MFH panel slot to contribute to the discussions.
- The social worker should come prepared to discuss, what's working well, what we are worried about and a danger statement. It is understood that this may be in a very rough draft form from MASH if the case goes to Panel quickly. This will be updated by the Panel as a whole following the information being shared.
- Young person's wishes and feelings - these could be provided from the MFH interview or from another professional who knows the child.

- The minutes from the MFH Panel are to be shared with partner agencies within one week.
- The chair will set a review date if necessary within 6 weeks. This will continue to be reviewed until the MFH worries associated with the young person have been addressed.

Vulnerabilities:

While any child or young person who is missing from home or care is at risk, there are some Children who are particularly vulnerable. These include children and young people with;

- Mental health difficulties
- Suicide risk / self-harm
- Medical condition requiring medication or treatment
- Physical or learning disability
- Alcohol and drug use
- Identified involvement with Child Sexual Exploitation
- Difficult relationship with carers
- Domestic abuse in the home
- Parental alcohol/substance use

There are particular concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual and criminal exploitation. Missing children may also be vulnerable to other forms of exploitation, to violent crime, gang exploitation, or to drug and alcohol misuse. Consideration around risk or evidence of exploitation will be given in MFH Panel supported by attendance from Complex Safeguarding Hub social workers. Information will be shared and collated within MFH panel to help all agencies understand particular local risks, patterns and themes which will then inform the wider response to exploitation in our communities. A social worker from the Complex safeguarding Hub will be allocated where there is any concern a child is at risk of or being exploited.

Additional Resources:

These procedures have been developed from the 2014 Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or Go Missing From Home or Care.

For the full guidance please see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachmentdata/file/307867/StatutoryGuidance-Missingfromcare3.pdf>

Flowchart on Roles and Responsibilities, 2014

<https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachmentdata/file/271820/Flowchartwhenachildgoesmissingfromcare.pdf>

Child Sexual Exploitation:

<http://www.itsnotokay.co.uk/>

Young People Affected by Gangs:

<http://greatermanchesterscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/psgchypgangact.html>

Further information on MFH and links:

<https://www.manchestersafeguardingboards.co.uk/practitioners-landing-page/practitioners-01/key-themes/missing-home-care/>

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