

Children Missing from Home

SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER

This local procedure is intended as a supplement to existing procedures, should be read in conjunction with the [London Child Protection Procedures Manual, Children Missing from Care, Home and School Procedure](#).

RELEVANT GUIDANCE

[Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care \(DfE, 2014\)](#)

[ACPO Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons \(2013\)](#)

RELATED CHAPTER

[Children Missing from Care Procedure](#)

[Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation Procedure](#)

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1. Definitions

Note:

Missing children / young people will be classified by the police as either 'missing' or 'absent' after a risk assessment has been carried out by police call handlers. Please be aware this does not mean local procedures on notifications are in anyway altered. Please remember, in order to promote the safety of the absent / missing person, you are required to support the police call handlers by offering them all the information you have available; for more detail see: [ACPO Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons \(2013\)](#).

In practice, where a child goes missing, there are three categories of absence:

1.1 Absent without Consent

Some children absent themselves for a short period and then return: often their whereabouts are known. They are not considered at risk and usually they are testing boundaries.

Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed either on purpose or unwittingly. This kind of boundary testing activity is well within the range of normal teenage behaviour and does not come within the definition of “missing” for the purposes of this procedure. These children should be regarded as children “who are absent without consent”.

When abduction is suspected, this procedure will not apply and the situation should be dealt with and referred to the Police as a criminal matter.

1.2 Missing

A child is missing where his or her location is unknown and/or the reason for his or her absence is unknown and there is cause for concern because of the child’s vulnerability or there is a potential danger to the public.

1.3 Absconded

This category would apply to a child for whom the police have the power to arrest e.g. where bail conditions have been breached. Children in this category may be actively avoiding contact with the authorities. It should be recognised that children who fit this criteria may also be vulnerable and at risk.

1.4 Deciding Which Category

If a child informs their parent/carer where s/he is going before leaving home and if his/her whereabouts are known and if the child does not return home at the stated time, a telephone call should be made by the parent/carer to ascertain whether the child is at the given address. If the child is there and s/he states that s/he is not returning to the home, this may not be desirable but it is not a matter for the police unless the carer has reasonable cause to believe the child would otherwise be likely to suffer **Significant Harm**. If the parent/carer is in doubt and has concerns for the safety of their child, they should contact the police.

Any child who is 12 years old or younger should automatically be considered at higher risk and classed as missing or absconded. They must be reported to the police immediately.

In responding to and managing an individual child’s absence from home, professionals from all agencies, including police, schools and CYPS, should beware of dismissing the potential significance of multiple absconding episodes by a young offender. Often such children are immediately labelled as “the problem” and insufficient consideration is given to considering why they are persistently absenting themselves.

The CYPS lead for Missing from Care (MFC) and Newham Police Missing Person’s Unit are available to consult with professionals who have concerns about any child who may be missing, and can support professionals in making a determination as to whether a child is missing or absent without authorisation. This can be done prior to making a formal missing person’s report. Professionals who wish to consult about a child can do so by contacting the CYPS MFC lead situated in CPRT and/or Newham Police Missing Person’s Unit. If a professional is clear that a child is missing, there is no need to have an initial consultation, and a missing person’s report should be filed in the first instance.

2. Multi-Agency Policy Statement

There is an expectation that parents/carers will make a report to police if their child is missing. Failure to do so may be a **Child Protection** issue and professionals should consider a referral to Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) Safeguarding Service, in such circumstances.

To ensure a local response that minimises the frequency of children and young people going missing from home, and deals sensitively and effectively with children and young people when they return, there needs to be clarity about expectations of professional practice with respect to:

- Information Sharing;
- Confidentiality;
- Response to a returning child/young person;
- Involvement of the media.

2.1 Information Sharing

For agencies to assess risk, identify and locate missing children/young people and undertake effective debrief, the expectation is that Police, Schools and CYPS will share all relevant information about the missing child. Information shared between agencies should include:

- Name, gender and date of birth;
- Ethnicity, first language and any other communication needs;
- Description of the child, including clothing and any significant marks;
- Street name or alias;
- A recent photo;
- Family address/es;
- Address/es of known friends or acquaintances;
- Any previous episodes of being missing;
- GP and dentist details;
- Legal status;
- Any previous links other agencies;
- Efforts made already to locate the child/young person;
- Any circumstances thought to increase risk;

- Most recent completed risk assessment.

2.2 Confidentiality

All agencies should be clear with a child at the outset of contact that:

- Sharing information about him/her will, as far as possible, be undertaken with his/her permission; it should be made clear, however, that this may not always be possible;
- The amount of information shared will be kept to a minimum and only relevant information will be shared;
- Where there are sufficient concerns about levels of risk to the child, or other children, the [London Child Protection Procedures](#) will be initiated.

2.3 Response to a Returning Child

The aim of the return interview is to give the child/young person the chance to think about and reflect on why s/he ran away or went missing, and to help find ways of dealing with any problems identified.

In **all** circumstances, a returning child will be offered a return interview. It is important to understand the difference between a police 'safe and well check' and a return interview. The Police will interview all children when they return. The interview consists of a simple series of questions. The police safe and well check does not constitute a return interview and thus cannot replace it. Details of the safe and well check will be provided on the Merlin pack. Following this the allocated social worker (or whoever the child wishes to speak with) will also meet with the young person on their return and offer to see them alone and/or outside of the home environment to explore why they went missing and their experience. Guidance states that this must be done within 72 hours of the child's return. A return interview form will be completed with this information, saved onto CareFirst and shared with the child's network. In Newham the allocated social worker leads on arranging/completing the return interview. If the child wishes to speak to someone independent this is someone independent to the child's care. When saving the Return Interview form please ensure the form is saved in the correct place by accessing the following when in the child's record: Assessments > Assessment Questionnaires> Questionnaire context: Child> Assessment Type: CYPS – Missing Episode Return Interview. Once completed there are 2 stages to the closure process: firstly by the social worker, the form then needs to be reassigned to a manager. The manager must then close the form after quality assuring the content. Please note both stages must be followed in order for the form to be shown as complete.

It is recognised that in some high risk cases a child may go missing numerous times in a short period. In these cases it is advisable to cluster missing episodes in one return interview. Newham's local policy dictates that this can be done for **a maximum fortnight period where there are 3 or more missing episodes**.

For more detailed guidance please refer to the document entitled 'Return Interviews fact sheet' found in the Appendices section below.

2.3.1 Children Not Resident in Newham

Whenever a child who has gone missing from another local authority comes to the notice of any professional in Newham, it is essential to assure the child's safety in the first instance and then gather information about their circumstances. All information should be passed to Newham Police who will take the lead role in returning the

child to their home authority. In returning a child to their home authority, Police will undertake a risk assessment and liaise with relevant agencies in the child's home authority.

2.4 Involving the Media

Any decision to contact the press about a missing child should not be made until a discussion with the named Local Authority and Police lead officers has been undertaken and the child's parents/carers have been consulted.

2.5 Training and Support

Newham Safeguarding Children Board is committed to providing training to professionals in order for them to develop the necessary skills to assess and support child who run away or go missing.

3. Local Procedures

Please note: these procedures are not intended to replace, **London Child Protection Procedures Manual, Children Missing from Care, Home and School Procedure**, but rather provide supplementary local guidance.

3.1 Agency Notifications

In most circumstances, information about missing child will be reported to police in the first instance. In all circumstances, where police receive information about a missing child, they will notify **Children's Triage** which will carry out a risk assessment and reach a decision as to the level and type of response required.

Once received by Children's Triage, the police information will be logged onto CareFirst. If already allocated in the CYPS, the child's social worker will be notified.

If a child is an open Early Intervention, **Child in Need** or is a **Child Protection** case, any reported period of missing from home for more than 24 hours needs to be notified to the line manager of the allocated worker and the Children Missing from Education (CME) officer if the child is of school age. If a child has a **Child Protection Plan**, the Chair should also be informed and the plan reviewed. If the episode extends to 72 hours, the Service Manager/Operations Manager (Early Intervention) must be notified. The Service Manager/Operations Manager will review the case within 48 hours to determine what action should be taken by the service to safeguard the child and support the family. If the child is still missing by day 5, the service manager must inform the Deputy Director, Children's Social Care or Head of Early Intervention and Youth and Strategic Lead for Early Intervention.

When a child goes missing from another local authority and comes to the attention of any professional in Newham, Newham Police should be notified on the same day. In this circumstance, Police will be the lead agency and will liaise with relevant agencies in the child's home authority to facilitate their return.

Agency notifications must be given when a child is missing and also returns home.

3.2 Assessment

A child going missing or running away from home can be an indicator of a number of risk issues. As such, careful assessment of concerns is important. When a child comes to the attention of services as a result of going missing or running away, professionals should consider what type of assessment is required to address the concerns. Possible assessments include:

- Assessment by CYPS Early Intervention Service;
- CSC Assessment;
- **Section 47 Enquiries.**

Decisions about which type of assessment is most appropriate will be made by the multi-agency network via Children's Triage for new referrals, and by the allocated social worker and team manager for cases already allocated.

3.3 Strategy Meeting

The London Child Protection Procedures (LCPP) requires a **Strategy Meeting** held within 28 days for any child who is missing from home. In Newham, risk led decisions are made about children missing from home, which may result in the need for strategy discussions/meetings to take place more swiftly. LCPP timescales for strategy meetings where there is concern around significant harm will always be adhered to.

For those children that are open to social care a strategy meeting is to convene if the child has been missing for 24 hours or more. A risk assessment record for use within strategy meetings is provided within the Appendices.

3.4 Children with Child Protection Plans

Children who have a **Child Protection Plan** or who are subject to a **Section 47 Enquiry** need additional action to that required for other children. This includes:

- Informing the Principal Manager for CPRT and allocated Child Protection Chair, as well as the local Clinical Commissioning Group's Designated Nurse;
- Ensuring a Strategy Meeting is arranged - as soon as practicable and in any event within 7 days. Representatives from both the Missing Persons Unit and Child Abuse Investigation Team should attend the strategy meeting, as well as other practitioners involved with the child;
- Where a child with a Child Protection Plan has gone missing with/without their family, the social worker or Team Manager must implement the London Notification of Missing Children/Persons Procedure.

3.5 Missing Children Who Come to the Attention of Agencies other than Police

Missing children may come to the notice of other professionals/services including schools, health services and the voluntary/faith sector, prior to coming to the attention of police.

In all circumstances where a child comes to the notice of agencies other than police, professionals must adhere to their own internal agency safeguarding policies as well as the **London Child Protection Procedures Manual, Children Missing from Care, Home and School Procedure.**

3.6 Longer Term Missing Persons

The appropriate service manager should formally review all cases (Early Intervention, Child In Need and Child Protection) where children have been missing for six months or more and should satisfy him/her on the actions taken to recover the child.

The Police will notify the National Missing Persons' Bureau 28 days after a child goes missing.

All Police missing persons' files will remain "live" until the person is traced or until the Divisional Commander (police) is satisfied that all lines of enquiry have been exhausted. S/he will then forward the file to the Assistant Chief Constable who will take the decision to close the file or otherwise.

Where the Assistant Chief Constable has made the decision to close the file, the Force Intelligence Bureau will be responsible for bringing forward the file on persons who remain missing for review by the Detective Superintendent 12 months after the file closure date.

3.7 Monitoring and Reporting

On a quarterly basis, the designated manager for missing children will report to the Newham Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB) information about patterns of absence among children, including:

- Action plans for minimising incidents of missing children;
- Incidences of missing persons' episodes;
- Geographic patterns;
- Any Child Protection implications;
- Any practice and/or procedural issues;
- Sexual exploitation.

These procedures will be monitored by the NSCB Sub-Group for Children Missing Home, Care and Education, on an annual basis.

Appendices

[Click here to access Appendix 1: Missing Child Risk Assessment Record.](#)

[Click here to access Appendix 2: Children Missing from Care and Home: Return Questionnaire.](#)

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