

**NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE**

**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

**Guidance to Children and Families  
Professionals**

**Children and Young People who are  
Missing**

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### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 This guide is intended to help the Children and Families service respond appropriately when children/young people known to them are missing from their home or placement.

### **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 The 'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care' (Department of Health, January 2014) states -

'Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a key duty on local authorities and requires effective joint working between agencies and professionals. When a child goes missing or runs away they are at risk. Safeguarding children therefore includes protecting them from this risk. Local authorities are responsible for protecting children whether they go missing from their home or from local authority care

There are no exact figures for the number of children who run away, but estimates suggest that the figure is in the region of 100,000 missing per year. Children may run away from a problem, such as abuse or neglect at home, or to somewhere they want to be. They may have been coerced to run away by someone else. Whatever the reason, it is thought that approximately 25 per cent of children and young people that go missing are at risk of serious harm. There are particular concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual exploitation. Missing children may also be vulnerable to other forms of exploitation, to violent crime, gang exploitation, or to drug and alcohol misuse'

### **3.0 Related Guidance, Procedures and Protocols**

- a. Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, Department for Education, January 2014
- b. Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care. Flowchart showing roles and responsibilities when a child goes missing from care, Department for Education, January 2014
- c. Children and Young People who go Missing or Absent from Home or Care, Joint Protocol between North Yorkshire Police, North Yorkshire County Council (CYPS) and City of York Council – April 2015.
- d. Practice Guidance for Personal Advisors Working with Care Leavers who 'Go Missing' or are at risk of 'Going Missing'-to be updated August 2016
- e. CSE Practice Guidance. NYSCB.
- f. National Referral Mechanism form:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-trafficking-victims-referral-and-assessment-forms>

## 4.0 Children/Young People the Guidance Covers

Any child or young person who goes missing including:

- Children/young people not open to services.
- Children open to Prevention
- Children in need
- Children on a child protection plan
- Looked after children
- Care leavers.

## 5.0 Key Definitions: *Taken from the Joint Protocol between NYCC, NY Police and York City Council:*

Child: anyone who has not reached their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Missing child: a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.

Responsible local authority: the authority that is responsible for the young person's care and care planning.

Host local authority: the authority in which the young person is placed when placed out of the responsible authority's area.

Reporting individual: this is the person reporting the young person as missing

## 6.0 Missing Categories

6.1 When the police are informed of an incident they will decide whether they are going to treat the young person as 'Missing':

- Missing: anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or a risk of harm to themselves or another'.
- Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.

All reports of missing people sit within a continuum of risk from 'no apparent risk through to high-risk cases that require immediate, intensive action. (College of Policing)

## 7.0 Risk Assessment

### *The Risk Assessment Table*

The following table is used as a guide by the Police to an appropriate level of Police response based on initial and on-going risk assessment in each case. Risk assessment should be guided by the College of Policing [Risk principles](#), the [National Decision Model](#) and Police [Code of Ethics](#).

#### **No apparent risk (absent)**

There is no apparent risk of harm to either the subject or the public.

Actions to locate the subject and/or gather further information should be agreed with the informant and a latest review time set to reassess the risk.

#### **Low risk**

The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but minimal.

Proportionate enquiries should be carried out to ensure that the individual has not come to harm.

#### **Medium risk**

The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.

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.

#### **High risk**

The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.

This category almost always 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 (IO) and possibly an SIO, and a police search adviser (PoISA).

There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place where appropriate. The MPB should be notified of the case without undue delay. Children's services must also be notified immediately if the person is under 18.

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.’**

Where the risk cannot be accurately assessed without active investigation, appropriate lines of enquiry should be set to gather the required information to inform the risk assessment.

- 7.1 Where a child has learning disabilities, the level of risk will include a consideration of their level of development and functioning rather than their chronological age.
- 7.2 Each case is assessed on the information known at the time of the report to the police, the incident would be reviewed and reassessed if information changes.
- 7.3 Where a child or young person is determined to be MISSING
  - An officer will be allocated and NYP missing person procedures will be implemented. An investigation will commence which will be reviewed on a regular basis.
  - Enquiries will continue as required until the child or young person is located. A Police Supervisor will review action taken daily. Contacts with relevant agencies will be made and all information recorded by the Police.
- 7.6 If the caller is not happy with the classification allocated by the Police, they will need to provide more information that would change the classification as this is based on a standard risk assessment matrix. If the caller or another professional wishes to escalate this, they should ask to speak to the Force Incident Manager who is on duty 24 hours a day. The Force Incident Manager will then review the case and feedback a final decision.
- 7.7 NYCC Children and Families will assess the risks associated with missing incidents and plan accordingly to address the issues.

## **8.0 Responsibilities of the Reporting Individual**

## Before Contacting the Police

- 8.1 When a child or young person is identified as not being at a location they are expected to be at, the reporting individual (parent/ care provider / foster carer social worker etc) must take proactive steps to trace the child's whereabouts prior to contacting the police.
- 8.2 Such steps would include:
- Physical checks of the residence, including the child's bedroom and any other location the child may be hiding within the house / building
  - Physical checks of any garden, garage, sheds, grounds and surrounding area(s)
  - Attempting to contact the missing person directly, via mobile phone, text, or social networking sites (i.e. twitter / facebook etc)
  - Contacting the missing person's family and friends
  - Make reference to any risk assessments, care plans, placement plans or other planning documents that refer to the needs of the young person in particular the management of the risk that the child or young person may go missing.
- 8.3 If the child is located through such enquiries, they should not be reported as missing to the police unless there are significant safety issues with the child being there. If there has been no need to contact the Police, and the child is a looked after child (LAC), details of the incident should be recorded in full according to the appropriate CSC protocols and dealt with as part of the existing care plan.

## Reporting to the Police

- 8.4 Where such enquiries do not establish the whereabouts of the child or young person, the reporting individual should report the incident to the Police. For children and young people who reside within North Yorkshire, including children and young people placed by another Local Authority within North Yorkshire, this will be North Yorkshire Police. Unless, there is deemed a serious concern or risk of immediate harm which would require a 999 response, this should be done through 101.
- 8.5 It is the responsibility of the care provider to inform the family and social worker of a child being reported missing, in accordance with local arrangements. The care provider should record all incidents of missing/absence in order to build a picture of behaviour.



## **Location and Return of the 'Missing' Person**

- 8.6 If a non-looked after child is located, it is the responsibility of the parents/carers to return them to a safe place, unless Police Protection is deemed necessary.
- 8.7 When a Looked After Child (LAC), is located by the Police or others, it is the responsibility of the residential staff or foster carers to collect and return the child or young person to a place of safety, unless the circumstances pose a risk to them or to the child. In such circumstances, the Police may be requested to assist in returning the child or young person. However, it is noted that the Police only have powers to return a young person to care if they are subject to a Care Order or the circumstances are such that Police Protection is required.
- 8.8 Any known risks from the young person or their known associates should be recorded in detail and shared with key agencies where appropriate.

## **The Use of Police Protection Powers**

- 8.9 Where the child or young person is located by a Police Officer or a Police Officer attends the location of the missing and has reasonable cause to believe that the child or young person would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm, the Officer may take the child into Police Protection (Sect. 46 Children Act 1989) and return them to a place of safety – this may be the home address, the carer's, or other Local Authority accommodation or a place chosen by the Local Authority. A Police Station should not be considered an appropriate place of safety. Police Protection will not be used as a tool to simply facilitate the return of a child or young person.
- 8.10 When a child or young person is a Looked After Child and subject to a Care Order, the child or young person can be returned to their placement unless it would not be safe for them to do so. If any information is disclosed in the course of the missing episode that suggests that it would not be safe to return to the placement, this will be discussed with the responsible Local Authority (or their out of hours provision) to establish an immediate course of action, including identifying an alternative place of safety. Police Officers will also consider markers on an address that indicate Child Protection concerns or history.
- 8.11 Transport of the child or young person back to the placement (or place of safety) is dependent upon who located the child or young person. The following expectations for Looked After Children are:
- If physically located by North Yorkshire Police, the child or young person is to be returned by the Police to their placement (or place of safety);
  - If physically located by another statutory agency (Social Worker/EDT/ Care provider, including foster carer), the locating agency / individual must return the child or young person to their placement (or place of safety)

- If physically located by family / friends, the carers are to advise them that the missing child or young person should be returned to their placement (place of safety) at the earliest opportunity and assist them in doing so if necessary
  - If located by other means (e.g. telephone), the responsible Local Authority should facilitate the collection and return of the missing child or young person to their placement (or place of safety).
- 8.12 When a child or young person is reported missing from a placement and is accommodated under Section 20 Children Act 1989 (where the Local Authority cares for the child with the consent of those with parental responsibility and does not have parental responsibility itself), the Police have no power to return the child or young person to their placement (or place of safety) without their consent. In such circumstances, the child or young person should be actively encouraged to return. If the child or young person refuses to consent, the Police will assess whether there are safeguarding concerns for their welfare and/or the circumstances (or location) at which they have been found.
- 8.13 Where necessary, attending officers may consider the use of Police Protection powers. If there are no grounds to exercise Police Protection, the locating Officer(s) must:
- Conduct a Safe and Well Check (SWC);
  - Ensure the child is safe and advise them on how to return to their placement;
  - Notify the carer of the child or young person's location;
  - Update fully and close the report.
- 8.14 If the care provider agrees for the child to remain where located, this decision is to be recorded in both the Officer's Pocket Note Book (PNB) and on the Police Occurrence Log.
- 8.15 Where a child or young person is located by an agency or individual other than an agent of the Police, the following action should be taken:
- Immediately notify the carer of where the child or young person has been located.
  - Provide details of any concerns to the carer.
  - Agree with the carer an immediate action plan to safeguard the child or young person until such time as the carer can arrange for the child or young person to be collected.
  - Notify the Police of the individual's location and any concerns they may have in order that the Police can consider use of Police Protection powers and complete a Safe and Well Check (SWC).

## **9.0 Prevention Services**

- 9.1 North Yorkshire Police will inform the Safeguarding Unit if a child/young person has been reported missing. A further notification is received at the point that the child is found.  
If the child is not open to Social Care (either CP or CIN or LAC) the notification will be allocated to Children and Families Service – Prevention through the MFHC notification process on EHM.
- 9.2 If the case is already open to Prevention Service, on notification that a child is missing, a case note will be added onto EHM and an alert sent to the Family Outreach Worker and the local Prevention Referral tray advising that the child/young person is missing. On receiving the alert the Family Outreach Worker should try to directly contact the child/young person to determine their whereabouts and check that they are safe. If the Family Outreach worker becomes aware of the whereabouts of the child/young person they must notify the police using the telephone number 101.
- 9.3 If the case is not open to Children and Families Services action is not taken until the child is found.
- 9.4 At the point that it is identified that the child/young person has been found the safeguarding unit start the MFHC notification process on EHM. A task is created within the local allocation tray requesting the Team Leader Caseworker allocate a Family Outreach worker or Community Intervention Worker to undertake a return interview. (See 17.0 completing a return interview)
- 9.5 The allocated worker must contact the child/young person to arrange a time to undertake a return interview. Where appropriate it is asked that the worker interviews the child/young person on their own to be able to ascertain the reason that they went missing and ensure they are safe. However, the worker is also asked to involve the parent/carer in the interview process to gather as much information as possible relating to the incident.  
The interview must be recorded within the notification form on EHM and completed on the day of the interview. This should then be sent to the Team Leader Casework for authorisation. (Please refer to the associated EHM Missing guidance Appendix 4).
- 9.5 If the child/young person is unwilling to engage in the interview the parent/carer should be contacted and asked if they are willing to engage in the process. If the parent refuses to engage information should be gathered from other professionals working with the child/young person i.e. their school, to ascertain if the child is safe and is receiving appropriate support.
- 9.6 The return interview must be completed within the notification process on EHM, using the Signs of Safety (SofS) approach. The worker should assess possible risks associated with their missing episodes. Examples of other associated risks could be - misuse of alcohol, risk of Child Sexual Exploitation, offending or risk of offending. The return interview should have an outcome focussed action plan. Support should also be given to families to

help them understand their child's behaviour and how they can support them upon their return.

- 9.7 If there is more than one missing incident during the open MFHC notification each missing incident (missing and found dates) will be recorded within the open notification by business support within the safeguarding unit. Where a case is currently open to a Family Outreach Worker a case-note will also be added on EHM.
- 9.8 Workers are encouraged to complete the return interview directly into the live EHM notification form during their visit. If access is unavailable the return interview must be recorded on EHM by the end of the working day and the authorisation task should be assigned to their Team Leader to authorise. This will ensure that further missing incidents are not recorded on the open notification episode.
- 9.9 On all cases the worker must record the missing incident as a significant event within the chronology.
- 9.9 The Family Outreach Worker must alert their Case Work Team Leader if the missing episode raises specific concerns. The Team Leader should consider what next steps are required. If the child/young person is not open to the prevention service a referral to C&FS should be considered.

## **10.0 Children/Young People in Need**

- 10.1 A Social Worker undertaking a Child in Need assessment must consider the following:
- Has the child/young person ever been reported missing to the police?
  - Do the parents/carers talk about their child being missing?
  - Do the parents/carers believe their child/young person will go missing in the future?
- 10.2 This information must be incorporated within the assessment and using the Signs of Safety (SofS) approach, assess possible risks associated with their missing episodes. Examples of other associated risks - misuse of alcohol, risk of Child Sexual Exploitation, offending or risk of offending.
- 10.3 Every Child In Need (CIN) should have an outcome focussed CIN plan, where information on missing episode/s are recorded and how the child/young person will be supported, with specific actions to minimise the risks around the child going missing. Support should also be given to families to help them understand their child's behaviour and how they can support them upon their return.

- 10.4 The allocated Social Worker upon being informed that the child/young person has returned or been found following their missing episode, will make arrangements for another Social Worker (who is independent of the case) to visit the child/young person to undertake a return interview (see section 16).
- 10.5 If the parent/carer does not inform the Social Worker of the missing episode/s they need to address this issue with them.
- 10.6 The Social Worker (or if unavailable, a case support worker) must record the missing episode on LCS. (Please refer to the associated guidance).
- 10.7 The Social Worker must record missing episodes and key meetings held within the child/young person's chronology. Information about the young person's missing episodes should be included within the case summary.
- 10.8 The Social Worker must alert their Manager if the missing episode raises specific concern. The Manager should consider next steps and whether a CIN meeting should be convened sooner in order to further consider the missing episodes and plan appropriate interventions.

## **11.0 Children/Young People Subject to a Child Protection Plan**

Please refer to Children/Young people in need (Section 10) and adhere to relevant actions. The following must also be followed:

- 11.1 The Social Worker must alert the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to the young person being reported missing. The IRO can call an early conference if the missing episodes continue and there are risks to the child/young person.
- 11.2 Actions to prevent missing episodes should be identified and incorporated within child protection plans. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) has a responsibility to monitor these plans by tracking the case, ensure the plan is reviewed and that the actions have been carried out.

## **12.0 Looked After Children/Young People**

- 12.1 Social Workers must ensure that information about missing episodes are incorporated within the looked after plans and that carers have all the necessary information to enable them to respond to these incidents in an appropriate way.
- 12.2 The Statutory Guidance states:
- 12.3 *'Care plans should include a detailed assessment of the child's needs, including the need for the provision of an appropriate placement that offers protection from harm. Where a child goes missing from a placement, a statutory review of their care plan can provide an opportunity to check that it*

*addresses the reason for an absence. The review should result in the development of a strategy to minimise a repeat of the missing episode’.*

- 12.4 Independent Reviewing Officers have the responsibility to monitor the plan by tracking the case; ensure the plan is reviewed and that the actions have been carried out. IRO’s can call an early review if the child/young person’s missing episodes continue and the risks to the child/young person remain.
- 12.5 The Social Worker must inform the IRO on each occasion when the child/young person has been reported missing.
- 12.6 The Social Worker to include missing episodes and key meetings held within the child/young person’s chronology. Information about the young person being or missing episodes should be included within the case summary.
- 12.8 The Team Manager must be informed which young people have been reported missing. The TM to undertake a regular audit of these young people, ensuring that all the relevant paperwork is in place.

### **Living in an In-House Foster Placement**

- 12.9 The Statutory Guidance states that *‘...foster carers should be trained and supported to offer a consistent approach to the care of children. This should include being proactive about strategies to prevent children from running away; and to understand the procedures that must be followed if a child goes missing.*
- 12.10 *The competence and support needs of .....foster carers in responding to missing from care issues should be considered as part of their appraisal and supervision.*
- 12.11 Foster carers must always try to locate a young person who is missing and return (if possible) the young person.
- 12.12 If the carer is unable to locate the child/young person and adhering to the risk assessment concludes that the situation is a concern, they must contact the fostering social worker to discuss the situation and decide on the best course of action. If this is out of hours they must contact the EDT.
- 12.13 If it is decided that the child/young person meets the missing criteria, then and only then should they be reported to the Police.
- 12.14 *‘If the decision is to call the police, the child/young person’s ‘parents and any other person with parental responsibility’ must be informed ‘unless it is not reasonably practicable or to do so would be inconsistent with the child’s welfare’.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (Department of Health, January 2014)

12.15 The carer must immediately inform the Social Worker (or if unavailable, team support worker) when the young person returns. If the child/young person has returned from a missing episode, the allocated Social Worker will make arrangements for another Social Worker (who is independent of the case) to visit to see the child/young person to undertake a return interview.

### **Living in an In-House Children's Home**

*12.16 'Children's homes staff ..... should be trained and supported to offer a consistent approach to the care of children. This should include being proactive about strategies to prevent children from running away; and to understand the procedures that must be followed if a child goes missing. The competence and support needs of staff in children's homes ..... in responding to missing from care issues should be considered as part of their appraisal and supervision'<sup>2</sup>*

12.17 The carers must always try to locate a young person who is missing and return (if possible) the young person (Refer to Section 8).

12.18 If the carer is unable to locate the child/young person and adhering to the risk assessment concludes that the situation is a concern, they must consult with the 'on call' Manager to discuss the situation and decide on the best course of action.

12.19 If it is decided that the child/young person meets the missing criteria, then and only then should they be reported to the Police, the carer should also contact EDT who will create a contact record to this effect on the child/young person's case file.

12.20 The carers must inform the Social Worker (or if unavailable a duty Social Worker) if the young person was reported as missing and when returned.

12.21 The allocated Social Worker will make arrangements for another Social Worker (who is independent of the case) to visit to see the child/young person to undertake a return interview.

### **Living in an External Placement**

12.22 The Statutory Guidance 2014 states: 'If children placed out of their local authority, run away, the local RMFHC' (Running away or Missing From Home or Care) 'protocol should be followed, in addition to complying with other processes that are specified in the policy of the responsible local authority'.

12.23 The Guidance goes on to state 'It is possible that the child will return to the area of the responsible authority so it is essential that liaison between the police and professionals in both authorities is well managed and co-ordinated. A notification process for missing and away from placement without authorisation episodes should be agreed between responsible and host local authorities.'

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<sup>2</sup> Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (Department of Health, January 2014)

12.24 The host local authority is required to contact the responsible local authority and the North Yorkshire Police Authority when a child/young person has been reported missing and when they were located.

The Social Worker when notified that their child/young person has been missing and located should record the information on LCS.

If the child/young person was reported as missing, the allocated Social Worker will make arrangements for another Social Worker (who is independent of the case) to visit to see the child/young person to undertake a return interview.

### **Out of Authority Placements within North Yorkshire**

12.25 When a child is placed within North Yorkshire as a Looked After Child from another authority they remain the responsibility of their case holding authority and will have a allocated Social Worker in that area. If they are reported missing North Yorkshire Police will act on the missing episode and will notify Children and Families Service as usual, however Children and Families are not responsible for completing the return interview as it is the responsibility of the Social Care team who hold the child's case.

12:26 The Social Custodian will receive the notification of the missing episode and the Safeguarding Unit will share this with the responsible authority via email.

## **13.0 Children/Young People Missing over 24 or 48 Hours**

- 13.1 If a child/young person open to Children and Families has been missing for more than **24** hours or is deemed particularly at risk, the Social Worker/FOW must inform the Group Manager and Head of Safeguarding who will then inform the Assistant Director (AD), by completing the Notification of Missing Young Person form (**Appendix 2**).
- 13.2 If the 24 hour or specific concern is reached outside normal office hours, the residential duty manager or fostering duty worker or (if they are not available) EDT have the responsibility to inform the AD (or agreed Senior Manager).
- 13.3 The AD (or Group Manager) should be kept informed on progress. If the concern is great the AD (or Group Manager) will make the decision whether to alert the Director of Children and Young People's Services. They will work with the police on whether the media should be used to assist locating the child/young person.
- 13.4 If the child or young person has not been traced within **48 hours**, a strategy meeting must be considered. This meeting must take place within **1 day** of the date of the decision to progress to strategy. Members of the meeting will need to consider:



- If the young person is thought to have travelled to another area whether to circulate their details to other local authority and other agencies in that area;
  - Notifying national authorities and agencies including social security, the benefits agency and child benefit agency;
  - If there is cause to believe that the child/young person may be removed from UK jurisdiction any legal measures to be taken.
- 13.5 Where a child is looked after, their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) may attend the Strategy Meeting. Each Strategy Meeting will consider whether a section 47 investigation should commence and whether a recommendation for an early looked after review should be held and it is the decision of the IRO to then convene this meeting.
- 13.6 Further to the Strategy Meeting, a Review Child Protection Conference must be brought forward for any child with a Child Protection Plan, remaining missing **for 7 days or more**.
- 13.7 When the child is located a Strategy Meeting between the agencies involved should take place to consider:
- Any immediate safety issues and whether to start a S.47 enquiry;
  - Who will interview the child if not part of a S.47 enquiry;
  - Who needs to be informed of the child's return (both locally and nationally)
- 13.8 If a child or young person has a child protection plan, Children's Social Care must consult with core group members to consider the effectiveness of the current plan, deciding and recording whether to hold a review child protection conference.

### Frequently missing children

- 13.9 When children go missing on a regular basis they should be considered as frequently missing and therefore the risks associated to this need to be explored.
- 13.10

Statutory Guidance states that:

*Repeatedly going missing should not be viewed as a normal pattern of behaviour. For example, repeat episodes of a child going missing can indicate sexual exploitation. In addition to strategies and issues already highlighted, the following should also be considered when dealing with this specific group. If a child has run away two or more times, local authorities should ensure a discussion is held, either with the child, their family or both, to offer further support and guidance. Actions following earlier incidents should be reviewed and alternative strategies considered. Access to and timeliness of independent return interviews should also be reviewed.*

13:11 All young people will have an outcome focused plan that works to minimise the risk and disrupt the missing episodes. This group of young people may need more frequent multi-agency meetings i.e. core groups, Child In Need Meetings, Planning Meetings to ensure appropriate information sharing, risk management and well-co-ordinated planning.

13:12 The Meeting will

- Analyse the reasons for the young person going missing
- Analyse any trends
- Assess the effectiveness of strategies already used
- Plan to reduce the propensity of missing
- Develop strategies to reduce missing episodes
- Address any other safeguarding issues

A monthly meeting will be chaired by a senior manager to consider those young people who have been missing on three or more occasions that month. (Please see TOR for this meeting)

#### **14.0 Children/Young People Who May Have Been Trafficked**

14.1 The Statutory Guidance states: 'Some looked after children are unaccompanied asylum seeking children or other migrant children. Some of this group may have been trafficked into the UK and may remain under the influence of their traffickers even while they are looked after. Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing, with most going missing within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours. Unaccompanied migrants or an asylum seeking child who goes missing immediately after becoming looked after should be treated as children who may be victims of trafficking'.

14.2 The assessment of need to inform the care plan will be particularly critical in these circumstances and should be done immediately as the window for intervention is very narrow. The assessment must seek to establish:

- relevant details about the child's background before they came to the UK;
- an understanding of the reasons why the child came to the UK; and

- an analysis of the child's vulnerability to remaining under the influence of traffickers.
- 14.3 In conducting this assessment it will be necessary for the local authority to work in close co-operation with the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) and immigration staff who will be familiar with patterns of trafficking into the UK. Immigration staff should be able to advise on whether information about the individual child suggests that they fit the profile of a potentially trafficked child.
  - 14.4 Provision may need to be made for the child to be in a safe place before any assessment takes place and for the possibility that they may not be able to disclose full information about their circumstances immediately. The location of the child should not be divulged to any enquirers until their identity and relationship with the child has been established, if necessary with the help of police and immigration services. In these situations the roles and responsibilities of care providers must be fully understood and recorded in the placement plan. Proportionate safety measures that keep the child safe and take into account their best interests should also be put in place to safeguard the child from going missing from care or from being re-trafficked.
  - 14.5 It will be essential that the local authority continues to share information with the police and immigration staff, concerning potential crimes against the child, the risk to other children, or other relevant immigration matters.
  - 14.6 'Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked' (gov.uk) contains practical guidance for agencies which are likely to encounter, or have referred to them, children and young people who may have been trafficked. Where it is suspected that a child has been trafficked, they should be referred by the local authority into the UK's victim identification framework, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).
  - 14.7 The National Crime Agency describes human trafficking as: Human trafficking is the movement of a person from one place to another into conditions of exploitation, using deception, coercion, the abuse of power or the abuse of someone's vulnerability. It is possible to be a victim of trafficking even if your consent has been given to being moved. Although human trafficking often involves an international cross-border element, it is also possible to be a victim of human trafficking within your own country.
  - 14.10 Social Workers need to remember that being trafficked does not mean one country to another or even one county to another, it could be from one house to another on the same street. With or without consent, a child travelling somewhere at the arrangement of someone else with the intent of exploitation, means they have been trafficked. If we are aware of this then we must share this with the police.
  - 14.8 The NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre (CTAC) provides specialist advice and information to professionals who have concerns that a child or

young people may have been trafficked. CTAC can be contacted at free phone number: 0808 800 5000 or by email [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk).

- 14.9 Any child/young person suspected of being trafficked either within the country or into the country should be referred to the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) using the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) form. The NYSCB one minute guide to trafficking also explains this process.
- 14.11 When a worker suspects that a child has been trafficked and therefore needs to consider a NRM referral, they should complete the Bedfordshire Risk Guidance tool and submit to the MAST for review. The MAST meeting will then make a multi-agency decision about whether or not a referral needs to be made. Rebecca Mauganai CSE, Missing and Vulnerability Coordinator can advise on these issues.

The NRM can be completed by a Social Worker or Police Officer amongst other agencies (Barnardos, Home Office etc).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-trafficking-victims-referral-and-assessment-forms>

The NRM provides support and access to resources, a 'reflection and recovery' period of 45 days, and a defence against prosecution for crimes committed whilst being trafficked.

The NRM can also be completed for trafficked adults but with their consent.

## **15.0 Care Leavers**

- 15.1 'Care leavers, particularly 16 and 17 year olds, may go missing from their home or accommodation and face the same risks as other missing children. Local authorities must ensure that care leavers live in "suitable accommodation" as defined in Section 23B(10) of the Children Act 1989 and Regulations 9(2) of the Care Leavers Regulations. In particular young people should feel safe in their accommodation and the areas where it is located. Local authorities should ensure that pathway plans set out where a young person may be vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking or going missing, and put in place support services to minimise this risk'.<sup>3</sup>
- 15.2 The move to independence must be agreed by the IRO. If the young adult has had recent periods of going missing and been assessed at risk during these periods, consideration must be given on how this will be managed during their independence.
- 15.3 Leaving Care Assistant Team Managers should review all the pathway plans of those young adults, where recent episodes of missing or CSE has been identified.

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<sup>3</sup> Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (Department of Health, January 2014)

15.4 The 'Practice Guidance for Personal Advisors Working with Care Leavers who go Missing or at Risk of Going Missing' states:

- The Social Worker must complete a Pathway Plan with the young person and clearly indicate whether there are concerns for the care leaver's welfare and how this is being addressed
- Personal Advisors (PA) should attend all Looked after reviews and establish a positive relationship with the young person
- Where it has been identified that the young person is 'at risk' of going missing or susceptible to exploitation, joint supervision arrangements with the PA, Social Worker and the Assistant Team Manager, should take place
- Following a 'At Risk assessment, a discussion will take place between the PA and their Manager to consider whether a particular care leaver should receive an enhanced package of support to help keep them safe
- If a care leaver moves to another area within North Yorkshire or outside, the PA will notify the local area leaving care team

## **16.0 Safe and Well Checks**

16.1 The Statutory Missing Guidance states *'Safe and well checks are carried out by the police as soon as possible after a child reported as missing has been found. Their purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them'.*

## **17.0 Return Interview**

17.1 A return interview must take place every time a child/young person is reported missing to the police (unless there are several missing episodes in quick succession, then the social worker or prevention worker can conduct one interview to cover those periods).

17.2 Within Social Care the child/young person will be offered an independent worker (not the allocated SW) to complete the interview. However should the young person state a clear preference to complete the interview with their allocated worker then this should be allowed to take place.

17.3 The return interview must take place within 72 hours of the child/young person being located.

17.4 The interview should take place in a neutral place where they feel safe.

17.5 The purpose of the return interview is to:

- Give the child or young person the chance to talk about why they ran away;
- Assess need including risk of future running away and look at possible prevention methods.

- Help the young person to find ways of dealing with their problems.
- 17.6 It is crucial that any information gained through this interview, is fed back to Police and any intervention meetings so that a picture is built up and any issues can be dealt with. Information sharing at this stage is vital for future safeguarding and gives assistance to the Police should future missing occurrences happen.
- 17.7 The child/young person will be given a Return Interview leaflet at each interview. See Appendix 7.
- A copy of the return interview should be sent to the North Yorkshire Police Safeguarding Hub by e-mail within 24 hours of the interview taking place. [MissingFromHome@northyorkshire.pnn.police.uk](mailto:MissingFromHome@northyorkshire.pnn.police.uk)
- 17.8 Teams are required to undertake return interviews on behalf of other teams where appropriate.
- 17.9 For cases open to Social Care, if the young person refuses the return interview then the Social Worker will record this using the 'return interview refused' case note found in the missing hub. The interview will then not take place but the police will be informed of this by the Social Worker emailing the police. (prevention see 17.12)
- 17.10 For cases not open to Social Care the FOW for Prevention will complete the return interview within the MFHC notification process. The interview will then be sent to the police.
- 17.11 For prevention cases or case not open to services, should the young person refuse the interview the notification will still be completed with all known/gathered information and shared with the police.

## **18.0 National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)**

- 18.1 **Looked after children/young people** to be provided with information about NYAS during the return interview process. This will be in the form of written information about the service and how this can be accessed.

## **19.0 Multi Agency Planning**

- 19.1 When young people have been reported missing this needs to be addressed as part of the current processes for that child/young person. Especially where a child has multiple missing episodes. This must be addressed within the child's plan and regular meetings. (see frequent missings)

- 19.2 For children/young people open to Prevention services this will be addressed under Multi-agency meetings. A child with multiple missing episodes will have a multi-agency meeting convened. When a child is not open to services and is missing more than three times within 6 months a children and families' referral will be made by the FOW.
- 19.3 Children open to Social Care will have the missing episodes and associated risks addressed within existing processes (CIN meetings, Core Groups, Child Protection Conferences and Looked After Reviews). At any point these can be convened earlier if required.
- 19.4 For Looked After children where there may not be a LAC review for some time the missing episodes and risks should be addressed within a multi-agency Placement Planning meeting.

## **20. Reporting on Missing**

- 20.1 Fostering managers meet quarterly to discuss which young people in foster care have been reported missing and what support has been put in place for the young person and their foster carers.
- 20.2 The Participation, Quality and Standards team report to Senior Managers and Elected Members every six months, on looked after children who have been reported missing to the police.