



# Breakaway

## Missing child policy

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<b>Version:</b>	1:3
<b>Date:</b>	April 2024
<b>Review Date:</b>	April 2025

### Policy Summary:

Regulations 12 - 2 (a) (i), 34 - 4 (a) (b), 5 (a) (b), 6, 40 - 4 (b) of the Children's Homes Regulations 2015

The Children's Act 1989 & 2004



A hands-on approach to help children in Slough be

..... Safe, Secure and Successful

## **1. Policy Aim**

That children feel secure and safe during their stays at Breakaway and that Breakaway minimises the risk of children going missing.

## **2. Policy**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This policy recognises that children who go missing from Breakaway place themselves at risk of significant harm due to their age, learning difficulty/ physical disability.

The reasons why children go missing from care are varied and complex and are likely to reflect their learning disability, home circumstances and experience of care.

The circumstances of each episode of a child going missing must be fully assessed as must the overall picture of a series of such episodes.

The care and support provided to the children and the security of the building minimises the risk that they will go missing.

This policy seeks to reduce the risk to children by the way in which 'missing' episodes are managed, both in terms of understanding the child's behaviour and in developing preventative strategies.

### **2.2. Definition**

For the purposes of this policy 'child' describes a child from 6 to 17 years of age. A child is to be considered 'missing' if he/she absconds from the Breakaway building/grounds, absconds whilst out in the community, if on a group activity and breaks away from the group and becomes 'lost', where the absence causes concern for their safety or there is potential danger to the public.

Absences which cause concern are those where staff or carers have no indication that a child is likely to return within a short space of time or where there is immediate concern for the child's safety. The degree of concern will be determined by the age of the child, level of learning difficulty/physical disability and past history, if any, of absconding or periods of missing from care.

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

## **3. Procedure**

During the assessment period of receiving a child into the care of Breakaway, the allocated Keyworker will ensure that the child's past history is known and is recorded in their 'This is Me' (care plan) and Risk Assessments are put in place which will be shared with all staff, parents/carers and will be uploaded onto the child's case file on ICS.

In assessing the significance of a child's absence, all staff will apply the above definition and, in addition, take the following into consideration:-

- Guidance already agreed and incorporated within the child's 'This is Me' (care plan)
- The age, level of understanding, level of learning/physical disability of the child
- The legal status of the child
- Previous behaviour patterns
- Emotional state of child's perceived risk
- Whether the child is perceived as running to someone/somewhere or running from a situation.

### **3.1 Preventing a Child going Missing**

If at any point information is received to suggest a child might go missing, their 'This is Me' (care plan) must:-

- a) Describe the degree of risk of the child going missing
- b) Detail the level of supervision and support the child will receive during their stay.
- c) Assess the likely level of risk to the child if they go missing.

Include a risk assessment to minimise the opportunity for them to go missing.

Detail the parents' views on what action should be taken if the child goes missing.

Consideration should be given as to what discussion there should be with the child about the actions that will be taken if they go missing.

Children should be made aware of the policy both through discussion at Children's Meetings, written information, as appropriate, given their age and understanding.

### **3.2 Responding to an Incident where a Child is having a Short Break at Breakaway**

Breakaway has a written step-by-step procedure for action to be taken when a young person goes missing from the unit. In summary, this states:-

- Following a, prompt, thorough search of the unit to ensure the child is not on the premises; staff should inform the child's social worker (or the duty social worker if they are not available)
- Inform the child's parents/carers
- Inform the Police
- Inform the Emergency Duty Service on 01344 315999 if out of hours
- Inform the Manager/ Team Leader (contact details in Business Continuity Procedure/Address Book)
- Complete the child's Missing Child Reporting Form
- Inform the Director of Children's Services (contact details – 01753 690901) and the Chief Executive of Slough Children First

### **3.3 Information to be Made Available to the Police**

When informing the police that a child is missing, the following information should be made available immediately:-

- Full name, age, and a description of the child and what they were wearing
- where the child was last seen and with whom
- when they last had medication and when it is next due (if applicable)
- mood, behaviour
- level of understanding i.e. no awareness of danger
- the degree of learning difficulties/physical disability
- family address as may be trying to get home
- Subsequently, if the young person remains missing, it will be helpful to supply to everyone concerned:-
  - a recent photograph
  - any previous history of absconding,
  - the name and address of the child's GP
  - any circumstances which increase the risk to a child should be drawn to the attention of the police

### **3.4 Informing the press**

It is for the Police to inform the media regarding a child missing from the care of the Local Authority. This may be arranged at local level, by direction of the Director (or nominee). A decision to publicise by press and/or television will only be made in consultation with the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive of Slough Children First and with prior warning, in order to allow the parents to be informed.

### **3.5 Recording**

Throughout the process identified within this policy, a full record must be kept of all actions taken and messages received and given. An incident form must be completed with chronology of events and submitted to management for processing. This form is then uploaded onto ICS.

All messages received and given to be put on ICS by the Shift Leader/ Team Leader/ Manager as is the Missing from Care Reporting Form.

### **3.5 All Absences from Breakaway Give Rise to Concern**

All children who access Breakaway, due to age, vulnerability due to their learning difficulty/physical disability give rise to concern, therefore, the Director of Children's Services, the Chief Executive of Slough Children First and the Duty Inspector on call (Police), or their nominee would be informed as soon as the child went missing. The Director of Children's Services, the Chief Executive of Slough Children First and the Duty Inspector on call will then decide on further action and consider the need to inform the Divisional Crime Manager (Police).

Possible actions are a risk management meeting, or a strategy meeting if there are grounds for a Section 47 Child Protection enquiry. These will be decided following consultation with the Director of Children's Services, Chief Executive of Slough Children First and the Duty Inspector on call.

Any unauthorised absence lasting for 8 hours should continue to be reported to the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive of Slough Children First by the Manager/ Team Leader/ Shift Leader or the Line Manager of the allocated Social Worker.

The Director of Children's Services will report the child to the Missing from Care Department. The Department is part of the National Missing Persons Helpline, a charity which provides a service to members of the public when a person goes missing. It has a comprehensive national database of missing persons and case workers experienced in providing support, practical advice and assistance to families, carers and social workers.

Missing from Care Department

Telephone: 020 8392 4527

Fax: 020 8392 4529

Email: [mfc@missingpersons.org](mailto:mfc@missingpersons.org)

### **3.7 Planning For Return**

The Manager or Team Leader in consultation with the child's parents/carers and the Police, where appropriate or where possible, should commence contingency planning for when the child is located. Factors to consider (usually following a longer absence) are:-

- Determining the most appropriate way to ensure child is 'listened to'
- How best to ensure the child has access to rights and advocacy services
- Identifying ways in which the child can meaningfully participate in the plan
- Whether the child will continue to receive short breaks at Breakaway or whether alternative respite may be preferred/more suitable

- Whether the Police wish to interview the child, depending on level of understanding, before he/she is returned to Breakaway/home.
- Who will be an appropriate 'Person' to talk to the child after his/her return to Breakaway/home, more than likely the child's Social Worker.

The Police will co-operate in the plans developed by Breakaway to return a child.

Transportation of a child back to Breakaway: Child being transported home will be agreed at the time between the Police, Breakaway, Parents/Carers/Social Worker.

### **3.8 Risk Assessment Meeting**

The same level of consideration must be given to all children who go missing from care. Each missing episode should be subject to the same level of assessment, even in situations where the child absconds frequently. It is important to recognise the potential seriousness of this behaviour.

When a child is going missing repeatedly the child's Social Worker, Breakaway Manager and the Police must consider the need for a Risk Management meeting. The decision about when to hold a meeting will be made on the basis of:-

- The child's age and maturity,
- Previous behaviour patterns
- State of mind/ perceived risk
- The effectiveness of strategies to prevent further episodes.

The Risk Management meetings should involve the child's allocated Social Worker and their Manager, the Manager of Breakaway, the child's parents/carers and any other relevant professionals. The Social Worker/their Manager should chair this meeting.

- The purpose of the meeting is to increase the understanding of the child's behaviour: -
- Ensure a consistent and coherent response by parents/carers and all involved agencies,
- Clarify the role of each agency.
- Put strategies in place to prevent the behaviour.

### **3.9 Communication**

Should a child's absence continue, and after all professionals and the child's parents/carers have been informed, Breakaway Manager/ Team Leader will inform all Breakaway staff. The child's school will also be informed in case they have any information regarding his/her whereabouts. Any such information must be passed to the Police.

### **3.10 Return of the Child**

If the child returns on their own, the Manager/ Team Leader/ Shift Leader must inform the Police and the child's social worker if within working hours or the Police and the Emergency Duty Team (01344 315999) if out of hours as soon as they have returned.

The child's parents and any other professionals informed of their absence should also be advised of the child's return as soon as reasonably possible.

If the child discloses, on their return, that they have been harmed while they were missing (e.g. physically or sexually abused) then this information must be shared immediately with their social worker – if within working hours, or the Police and the Emergency Duty Team (01344 315999) if out of hours. In addition, on the child's return, their medical condition must be discussed immediately and medical attention sought, if this is

appropriate. The circumstances of the child's return will influence who has the discussion with the child in the first instance, e.g. Breakaway Manager/ Team Leader/ Shift Leader, parents/carers, social worker or Police.

If the child has not disclosed any information that needs immediate investigation or attention, they should be positively encouraged to talk about their reasons for going missing reasonably soon after their return. Children should always be advised that they can have access to an independent advocate and support and should they indicate that this is what they want then the child's keyworker to contact the relevant services.

It is a requirement that the child has a return to care interview which is to be carried out by an independent person. This should be as soon as possible after their return. If they return late at night it may be more appropriate for the visit to be the following day. This visit needs to take place within 48 hours of the child's return. Initially contact needs to be with the **Slough Children First's CSE & Missing Specialist on 01753 875835** who may carry out this interview or, in turn, they may go through The Young People's Service who have a pool of trained staff to undertake the return to care interview. If contact cannot be made with the CSE and Missing Specialist then contact can be made directly with the Young People's Service on **01753 875510**.

The child's Social Worker must visit the child as soon as possible and, at the outside, within 72 hours of their return.

### **3.11 Children who go Missing during an External Activity**

The Manager/ Team Leader/ Shift Leader will:-

- Notify the local police
- Notify the child's parents/carers
- Notify the child's Social Worker or Emergency Duty Team (01344 315999) if out of hours
- Notify the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive of Slough Children First
- Other children on the activity to be returned to Breakaway as soon as possible
- Institute a local search if staffing levels permit

### **3.12 Children who are Abducted**

The Manager/Team Leader/Shift Leader will:-

- Notify the local police
- Notify the child's parents/carers
- Notify the child's Social Worker or Emergency Duty Team (01344 315999) if out of hours.
- Notify the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive of Slough Children First
- If on an external activity other children/staff to return to Breakaway as soon as possible.

Ongoing communication regarding the missing child will be maintained between the home and the police local to where the absence occurred.

### **Longer Absences**

In the unlikely event that a child is missing for 7 days, a strategy meeting must be held, attended by involved professionals from Slough Borough Council, Slough Children First and Divisional County Manager (Police), or his/her nominee, together with other appropriate staff from both agencies. At this meeting these senior officers should elicit a clear statement of the actions being taken in respect of the absence and should satisfy themselves that all that should be done is being done.

A missing child should be reported to the Police National Missing Persons Bureau 14 days after going missing by the Divisional Family Unit.

The Director of Children’s Services and Chief Executive of Slough Children First should formally review all cases where children have been absent for six months or more and should satisfy themselves on the actions taken to recover the child.

Whilst the child remains absent, their case should be identified as open and should be reviewed at six monthly intervals by an officer at Assistant Director Level. The child should continue to have an allocated Social Worker as the channel for day to day communication

All Police missing persons files will remain “live” until the person is traced or until the Divisional Commander is satisfied all lines of enquiry have been exhausted. They will then take the decision to file or otherwise and inform Slough Borough Council and Slough Children First of the action taken.

Where the Divisional Commander has made the decision to file, the divisional Family Unit will be responsible for bringing forward the file on persons who remain missing for review by the Divisional Crime Manager 12 months after the file date.

**Appendix:**

**CHILD GOES MISSING FROM CARE OF BREAKAWAY:**

NAME OF CHILD		D.O.B.	
DATE		TIME	
DETAILS OF EVENTS PRIOR TO GOING MISSING:			
WHAT ACTION WAS TAKEN (search, additional staff called on duty to assist, details of c/yp given to?)			
HAVE THE FOLLOWING BEEN INFORMED			Please <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
PARENTS/CARERS			YES <input type="checkbox"/>
MANAGER/ASSISTANT MANAGER			YES <input type="checkbox"/>
POLICE			YES <input type="checkbox"/>
SOCIAL WORKER			YES <input type="checkbox"/>
EDT (IF OUT OF HOURS)			YES/NA <input type="checkbox"/>
HAVE DETAILS BEEN PUT ON ICS			YES <input type="checkbox"/>
DETAIL FURTHER ACTION			
NAME OF PERSON COMPLETING FORM			
SIGNATURE			
DATE			