

# Children's Homes Local Policy and Procedure

## Missing from Care

Relating to;

[Children's Homes Quality Standards 5, 7](#)

[Children's Homes Regulations 2015- Regulation 12](#)

Brunswick Place Statement of Purpose

[Children Act 1989](#)

[Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care \(2014\)](#)

[Children and Young People Missing from Home and Care Joint Protocol Staffordshire](#)

[Safeguarding, CSE and CCE Policy and Procedures](#)

Children In Care Information Pack 2021 (including Philomena Protocol)

# Missing from Care

## 1. Overview

Often when a young person comes to reside in a Children's Home they can be distressed, upset, emotional and anxious and could then leave site without the authorisation or support of the staff on duty. They may have a history of going missing from their family or from care and will need robust support plans around them to support them to remain safe.

Young people rarely go missing from care if ALL of their needs are being met and if the environment offers security and is stable. On occasions young people can be influenced by outside pressures and we have to be aware of the pressures placed on them whilst they are in our care - these may disrupt a seemingly settled period and could be an isolated occurrence or lead to a pattern of going missing from care.

## 2. The Guiding Principles

- The safety of the young person is the prime objective.
- As the Local Authority we have a duty to care for the wellbeing and safety of the young person
- Young person Protection procedures will be observed in respect of the young person where young person exploitation (CSE) and young person criminal exploitation (CCE) may be a factor.
- The objective is to locate and return the young person to a safe environment.
- Notification to the Police will only take place in clearly defined circumstances according to the young person's PSP
- Staff will work closely with all professionals involved with the young person to ensure their safety and welfare
- The views and wishes of the young person are to be considered
- Understanding the circumstances to the young person going missing
- Understanding the individual risks of the young person when they go missing

## 3. Definitions of Missing and Risk Categories *(taken from the Children's Missing from Home and Care Joint Protocol – Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent 2018 and Children In Care Information Pack 2021)*

**Missing Person-** Any young person whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located and their well-being or otherwise confirmed

**Missing Young person** –A young person/young person reported missing to the police by their family or care staff. A missing young person will be defined as one where the missing episode has been reported to the police and recorded on the Police database

**Young person away from Placement-** A Looked After Child (young person) who is not at their placement whose whereabouts are *known* but are not at their placement or a place where they would be expected to be, and the residential care team have concerns for their welfare

**Missing from Care –** A Looked After Young person who is not at their placement, or the place where they are expected to be and their whereabouts are *unknown*

**Repeat Missing Person –** A young person who has been reported missing on more than one occasion within the previous 12 months

**Long-Term Missing Person –** A young person who has been reported as missing for at least 28 days

### **Risk Categories:**

All reports of young people sit within a continuum of risk from No Apparent Risk through to High Risk this may change throughout the period of missing depending on the information shared with the police

**High Risk –** There is a risk of serious harm to the missing young person or members of the public (suicide, significant threats to self-harm, significant mental health risks, violence, criminal activity, CSE, CCE)

**Medium Risk –** There is a risk of harm to the young person or members of the public which is assessed as likely but not serious

**Low Risk –** The risk of harm to the young person and members of the public is assessed as possible but Minimal

**No Apparent Risk –** There is no risk of harm to either the young person or members of the public

## **4. Early Risk Assessment**

- Pre-Planning – referrals, impact assessment, chronologies, past history
- In the preparation of a Personal Support Plan and Care and Support Plan, pre-placement discussion and consider the vulnerability and associated risks of a young person going missing.

In cases where there have been previous concerns about the young person going missing, the Personal Support Plan / Care and Support Plan will include:

- The likelihood of the young person going missing

- The level of supervision/support offered to the young person
- The parents and allocated Social Workers advice on what action they feel should be taken if the young person goes missing
- The level of risk presented if the young person is missing
- Reference to Philomena Protocol missing paperwork saved to file.

Where regular 'Missing from Care' incidents are anticipated, Carers and Social Workers may wish to consider the involvement of the local Police at the pre-planning stage.

All professionals involved should be aware of dismissing multiple incidents of missing from care by a young person, thereby labelling the young person as 'the problem' and failing to analyse the underlying cause for going missing. The risk of CSE and CCE to be considered at this point and shared with Staffordshire County Council MACE team.

## **5. Response and Actions**

In assessing the significance of a young person's absence, all staff will apply the relevant definitions and in addition, take the following into consideration:

- Guidance already agreed in the young person's Personal Support Plan and Care and Support Plan
- The age and maturity of the young person
- The legal status of the young person
- Previous behaviour patterns/history of going missing/self-harm
- The vulnerability of the young person due to any mental or physical condition
- Whether the young person is perceived to be running to, or from, someone or a situation (gangs, grooming – any form of exploitation)
- State of mind at time of going missing
- Whether the young person is at risk of sexual exploitation (CSE)
- Whether the young person is involved in criminal activity (CCE)
- The time of day, and the local area

### **Risk Assessment/Notification of Absence**

**The level of concern will be affected by additional factors such as:**

- History of self-harm
- Physical or mental disabilities
- Particular circumstances at time of 'Missing from Care'
- Young Person's state of mind
- Legal Status
- Risk of CSE and CCE
- If there is more than one young person who has gone missing/absent

- Where there is a high level of concern, the Police and young person's Social Worker/ EDS, parents and those with parental responsibility are to be informed. The staff should at all times attempt to locate the young person by searching the local area, or last place seen. The Police are requested to deal with young person as 'vulnerable missing person', care staff will share with the Police exactly what the risk are at that time which leads to the high level of concern
- Young people who fall within the category of "young person away from placement or missing" and will have been reported to the Police as missing, must be the subject of continuous risk assessment. During their absence, circumstances may change. In this phase staff will take all reasonable and practical steps which a good parent would take, to establish the whereabouts or destination of a young person, or the location of any persons with whom he/she is likely to be associating and arrange for those places to be checked.
- If the location of the young person is known or suspected, then it is the responsibility of care staff to return the young person. If, however, there are thought to be specific issues of safety or public order difficulties involved in returning the young person, the appropriate action should be agreed with the Police and Social Worker.
- Care staff should remember that responsibility is not absolved when they have reported a young person missing to the Police and that they are required to keep searching for the young person.

### **Reporting Route**

When reporting a missing young person, the following information, where known, should be made available.

- A full description of the young person
- When the young person was last seen and with whom
- A recent photograph – taken from the young persons pen picture on file
- Family addresses
- Any previous history of missing episodes
- The legal status of the young person
- The name and address of the young person's GP
- Circumstances which increase the risk to a young person should be drawn to the attention of the Police, e.g., contact with a potentially dangerous adult – CSE, CCE
- Parents or those with Parental Responsibility are to be contacted and advised that the young person is missing – and must be kept up to date with any information
- The young persons Social Worker and if out of hours the Emergency Duty Team (EDS) are to be informed – and kept up to date with any information
- The Registered Manager or On Call Manager to be advised – and kept up to date with any information

## **Record Keeping**

Care staff will keep a full record in the home of all actions taken to include, times, dates, actions taken, individuals informed, telephone conversations. This will be recorded in the homes missing file and a copy kept on the young person file. This record will be checked and signed by the Registered Manager.

## **Action by Agencies**

Where a young person's absence continues overnight, those responsible in each agency for the review of the case will consider the need for a strategy meeting to discuss further enquiries and contingency plan in the event of the young person's return.

- Assessment of new information coming to light -risk assessment review
- Action by the respective agencies to seek the whereabouts of the young person
- Transport arrangements
- Interview by police/Social Worker or Catch 22 (return home interview)
- Identification of an appropriate person to talk to the young person on return
- Matching assessment if they have been or are missing with another young person from Brunswick Place

## **The Return**

- On returning, care staff must attend to the young person's needs and ensure that they are offered care, food and a warm, safe return and check whether or not they need to go for a medical check-up.
- Parents, all relevant agencies and others informed of the missing young person should be advised of the young person's return without delay.
- As soon as possible, the Registered Manager/Duty Officer will meet with the young person to discuss the missing incident and to ascertain that the young person is safe and well following the incident. The manager will also discuss strategies with the young person to reduce further incidents of going missing.

## **In particular, an assessment should consider the young persons:**

- Explanation of the absence
- Physical symptoms, suggestive of physical or sexual assault
- Possession of large amounts of money or expensive items (CSE, CCE)
- Where such an assessment raises cause for concern over the young person's future welfare, the young person should be interviewed by an appropriate person. This person may be independent and not directly associated with the day to day care of the young person (Catch 22, Social Worker, Police)

- In Staffordshire the completion of return interviews is delivered by Catch 22 who is the commissioned provider. Catch 22 conducts all return interviews for young people up to 18 years of age. Catch 22 will have been alerted by EDS to the young persons missing status and they will either make direct contact with staff to come out and complete the interview with the young person or, will contact those with Parental Responsibility to visit the family home on the young person's return.
- In appropriate situations, an inter-agency meeting will be required to review the young person's needs and care plan. This is particularly important in the case of multiple instances of a young person going missing. This is referred to as Scaled Intervention (missing meetings)

## **6. Multi Agency and Scaled Intervention Meetings**

In Staffordshire there are scaled intervention (missing) meetings for any young person open to Children's Social Care whether Child in Need, Child with a Child Protection Plan or Care Leaver. Staffordshire Police, Children's Social Care, Health, and other relevant partners operate an escalating system of interventions to reduce the likelihood of a young person repeatedly going missing.

At a local level, the Police and Staffordshire County Council (the Social Worker) should meet at an operational level to discuss the management of missing young people according to information collated at a Police Divisional level.

### **The Meetings**

- Scaled Intervention Meetings will take place in the event of repeat episodes of young people going missing and should be held within 5 working days. This meeting should be chaired by the young persons allocated Social Worker
- After 3 missing episodes within a 90-day period. The young person, their parents, the Social Worker and the relevant Police Officer, Keyworker, should all meet and agree a plan of action. This meeting should explore what are the "push" and "pull" factors for the young person. What are the welfare concerns? Is there any evidence or suspicions there maybe CSE or CCE and that the young person is being exploited? Has the young person been discussed at MACE, has a matrix been completed, are the Police able to implement any disruption tools?
- After 5 missing episodes within a 90-day period a meeting should be convened to include the Social Workers Team Manager, and advocate for the young person, the parents, the Police Missing Persons Coordinator, the Registered Manager and the IRO if the young person is LAC. All professionals at this meeting will be discussing risk management and further actions that can be taken regarding the safety and on-going welfare of the young person.

## Appendix 1 Procedures for staff when young person go missing from care

### Procedure

1. Take steps to ensure that the young person is actually missing and not simply hiding within the home or grounds. If he/she is late back, could there be a legitimate reason for the delay - is action needed at that moment in time?
2. Only after consideration has been given to the 'risk', i.e., the age of the young person, time of day/night, events prior to leaving/non-return, as well as checks with family and known associates should initial contact be made with the Police to notify them of the absence and forward completed Philomena protocol paperwork where possible.
3. Staff will attempt to notify the young person's Social Worker, EDS, Parent/Guardian as soon as possible.
4. Every effort will be made to locate the young person and ensure their return at the earliest possible time.
5. On return, the Police and all those notified under Point 3 above will be informed of the return.
6. Care will be given to striking a balance between ascertaining the reasons why the young person absented themselves and our desire to ascertain their whereabouts, and a genuine and demonstrable concern as to their physical and emotional suffering.
7. The detailed records need to be completed during and following the absence period being retained for later scrutiny by the Registered Manager.

### 'Missing from Care checklist

1. Make a note of the time and place of 'Missing from Care'.
2. Do a local search of surrounding area. If you see the young person do not endanger them i.e. by chasing them across dual carriageways, etc, try and maintain dialogue with them and keep them in sight.
3. Report to local Police - wherever you are, give description and contact number for the home.
4. If off-site, then at the first opportunity contact the home and speak to the Duty Officer.
5. If on site, call the Police. You should ask for the control room. To make your report to them you will need name, date of birth, clothing worn and where the young person 'Missing from Care' home address is. Give your name and ask for the operator's name (usually a code). Record the time, name, case number and action.
6. Complete the Missing Person form. Fill it in, in as much detail as possible



7. Contact the Social Worker or EDS. and inform them of the time the young person went 'Missing from Care'. Ask for the name of the operator, they may get a Duty Social Worker to call back  
When Police come for the Missing Person form, ensure that they go through it completely.  
Record the officer(s) name, number and time of collection.  
Complete a Missing Report, recording details, 'phone calls, etc.  
On the Young Person's daily record all 'phone calls regarding 'Missing from Care' and also record in log-book all calls, and incident report number.

## **Return**

Reception back into the home should be welcoming and comfortable; we want the young person to stay and not be 'Missing from Care' again immediately. Check with them that they are all right, if they have any immediate medical needs and offer food and drink.

Discuss any anxieties with the young person. It is not appropriate at this stage to discuss sanctions this should be discussed at a later stage. Try to put the young person at ease - they will expect people to be angry with them. The young person requires security and comfort. This should be readily available. It has to be recognised that 'Missing from Care' incidents can be seen as part of the young person's behaviour pattern.

Always consider the "push" and "pull" factors for young people who go missing, they could be involved with gangs where there is pressure from the gang to go missing and engage in harmful activities such as crime and substance abuse (CCE). They could have been groomed by adults or other young people and be being sexually exploited by others (CSE)

## Appendix 2 Guidelines for to be discussed with Young People

### What will happen if you go missing?

\* **What is meant by ‘missing’?**

You are missing if you go away from where you are meant to be without permission and fail to tell people where you are going or who you are with.

\* **What will happen if you are discovered missing?**

People responsible for you will ask your friends, contact relatives and may search your room for clues of your whereabouts. The police may be notified where there is concern for your safety.

\* **What happens if you can't be found after some time?**

Your name and description will be given to other police forces and your photograph may be shown in newspapers. A search may be needed if you disappear in worrying circumstances.

\* **What happens when you are found?**

If the care staff, Social Worker or your parents find you, he or she will transport you home. If the police find you, they may arrange for you to be collected. In some cases, the police will return you, particularly if you have been ordered to stay at a particular place by the courts.

\* **What happens when you return?**

You will be spoken to, to find out the reason for your disappearance. This is a chance for you to tell someone what is troubling you. You do not have to speak to someone from the home; you can choose to speak to someone other than one of your carers or Social Worker.

\* **Will anything else happen?**

If you are injured or unwell, you will be checked by a doctor or nurse. Your keyworker will talk to you about going missing. If you have deliberately run away, the people responsible for you will meet to discuss ways in which such incidents can be prevented by looking at reasons for your actions.

**REMEMBER** You will always be allowed to use a telephone in private. If you are worried about something and just want to talk, the national YOUNG PERSONLINE number is 0800 11