

CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE PROTOCOL

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

Serious issues often lie behind children going missing. These include problems at school, as well as the issue of trafficking. The most frequent reason given by young people who have gone missing is ‘problems at home’. Occasional runaways are seven times more likely to say they had been ‘hit a lot’ by their parents, and repeat runaways 17 times more likely. Children in care are particularly at risk of going missing and three times more likely to run away. 25% of missing children and young people reported mental health problems, with 5% citing mental health problems as the reason for running away. Young people with drugs and alcohol problems are at least four times as likely to run away as those without. *(Missing Children and Adults: a cross government strategy (December 2011) paras 3.6-3.10)*

Children in care go missing for different reasons, including being unhappy, missing family or not being able to participate in activities. Some young people also ‘run for fun’ – staff may know where they are and they come back. Other young people are running away from something intolerable. This could be bullying or abuse, a feeling that they are in the wrong placement or not feeling ‘listened to’. Some young people are running to where they want to be: back with family or friends. The evidence presented to the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into children missing from care also suggested there is a strong link between children in care who go missing and those being groomed or sexually exploited. *(APPG inquiry into children missing from care 2012, paras 5 and 7)*

Each instance of a child going missing should be taken seriously, both for issues that may have led to it and issues that may arise from it.

1. **PURPOSE**

To provide an agreed inter-agency framework for assessing and classifying the degree of risk when a child goes missing from home or care or when a missing child comes to agency notice.

To provide guidance on what responses different agencies will offer in relation to each level of risk

To provide an agreed list of measures to ensure that police ‘missing’ and ‘absent’ definitions are applied to children with due consideration given to their age, vulnerability and development factors.

1. **STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT**

The data and performance team gather information weekly about all children known to have gone missing, including from home, from education and from care. Lists are circulated weekly.

The Missing Operational Group (MOG) meets monthly, this multi-agency group leads, reviews and recommends actions in relation to children and young people who are ‘missing’ and ‘absent’.

1. **RELATED DOCUMENTS**

This procedure should be used in conjunction with the London Safeguarding Procedures on Children Missing from Care and Home and Education <http://www.londoncp.co.uk/chapters/ch_miss_care_home_sch.html>

The procedure follows [Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care) (January 2014). It also draws on the Children’s Homes Regulations 2001.

For guidance on children *missing from education*, please refer to the Tower Hamlets Guidance on Children Missing from Education (December 2013).

This procedure should also be used in conjunction with the [Tower Hamlets Missing Persons Notification Procedure](http://towernet/staff_services/businessareas/csf/children_socialcare/procedures_and_policies/#Childreninneed) which is available on the Children’s Social Care intranet procedures page under ‘Child Protection’.

1. **SCOPE**

This procedure provides a framework for missing children in following categories:

1. Children looked after
2. Children in need / in need of protection
3. Children not previously known to Children’s Social Care or closed cases
4. **DEFINITIONS**

### **Missing child:**

### Children whose whereabouts are unknown to statutory agencies including:

### Children in families who are victims of domestic violence and have to go into hiding suddenly

### Children in families who have disappeared without leaving a forwarding address

### Children in families who have gone on extended leave and have failed to return when due to do so

### **Missing:**

### Social Care: A child not where they should be, and their whereabouts are unknown.

### Police: Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be the subject of a crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.

### **Unauthorised absence:**

### Social Care: A child who, without authorisation, is in a known location but is not where they should be. Please refer to section 8,3, for more information

### Police: A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be and there is no apparent risk.

### **Missing from Placement / Care:**

### A looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g., school) and their whereabouts is not known.

### **Children Missing from Home:**

### A child or young person under the age of 18 who has run away from home or feels they have been forced or lured to leave, or whose whereabouts is unknown.

### **Children Missing from Education/Not in Receipt of Full-time Education**

### Previously the definition of a child missing from education (CME) referred to a child identified in the local area as not being on any school register.

### More recently, Ofsted has redefined children missing from education as children who are not in receipt of full-time education (defined as 25 hours education per week). This covers a number of categories of children including those formally recognised to be receiving programmes of alternative provision. The categories Ofsted has named are:

### Perm Excluded - Have been permanently excluded;

### Behaviour - Have particular social and behavioural difficulties;

### Mental Health - Have mental health needs and access CAMHS;

### Medical - Have medical needs other than mental health needs;

### Non-Attendance - Rarely attend school and have personalised learning plans as part of attempts to re-integrate them into full-time education;

### Teenage Pregnancy - Are pregnant or are young mothers of compulsory school age;

### SEND - Have complex needs and no suitable school place is available;

### Return from Custody - Are returning from custody and a school place has not been found for them;

### New Arrivals to UK/ESOL - Are new to the country and are awaiting a school place;

### GRT - Are from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller background and alternative provision has been made;

### CME - Have moved from another area and a school place has not been secured; this may include children who are looked-after;

### Elective Home Education – children whose parents choose to make their own arrangements to educate them at home or otherwise;

### Children who do not attend well enough.

### **Tower Hamlets Missing Children Register**:

### An electronic database to help locate children aged 18 or younger who have gone missing from the borough and, once they have been found, refer them on to the appropriate agencies. Missing children from other local authority areas are recorded and checked against the Register.

### The Register records and logs the details of the child concerned and also has an active information-seeking and information-sharing component which links up with local Tower Hamlets agencies and London-wide databases.

The **Framework-I Notification of Missing or Absent** Tower Hamlets Child form can be used for both missing and absent children.

1. **MISSING PROCESS MAP**

The flowchart below sets out the procedure for responding to children under 18 years who are ‘missing’ or ‘absent’ from home or care. It outlines the required safeguarding processes for every allocated child.

**Tower Hamlets**

**Parent or Carer** identifies that a child or young person is missing

**Parent** report to **Police**

**Carers/Placements** report to **Police** and inform **EDT**

**Police** to complete Merlin and send copy immediately to **LA MASH Inbox** who forward to **Missing Persons Inbox**

**EDT** send evening missing log to Missing Inbox on daily basis

**Initial Police Investigation**

Police conduct safe and well check, finalise Merlin report and send copy immediately to LA Missing Inbox

Missing Coordinator updates Frameworki and allocates RHI to TCS or MASH Team Member

TCS or MASH Team Member return RHI conducted within 72 hours to Missing Inbox

Missing coordinator uploads RHI onto Frameworki and finalises the episode

Social Worker puts case note on FWi confirming that they have read RHI and will also evidence on Framework-i their response and interventions to any concerns raised in RHI document

**Missing Coordinator** sends copy of RHI to other parties involved with planning interventions with child or young person

Ongoing Dynamic Risk Assessment with LBTH Missing Coordinator and Missing Police Team

**Missing Coordinator** puts details of missing episode on to Frameworki and, if open to CSC informs allocated Social Worker of missing episode.

If not open to CSC – MASH open contact and Missing Coordinator puts missing episode on FWi.

**Young Person not located**

**Missing 24 Hours**

**Open to CSC –** Team Manager conducts strategy discussion within 24 hours

**Not open to CSC -** Referred to Assessment Duty Team and allocated worker conducts strategy discussion within 24 hours

**Missing 3 days**

**Open to CSC –** Team Manager conducts strategy meeting within 72 hours

**Not open to CSC -** Referred to Assessment Duty Team Manager and allocated worker conducts strategy meeting within 72 hours

**Child missing 5 days or more**

Weekly strategy discussion/meeting until child is located

5 day missing child notification completed and sent to **Divisional Director**

**Missing Process Map**

**January 2018**

**Young Person is located**

1. **WHEN A CHILD GOES MISSING**
   1. **Risk Assessment**

A risk assessment should be completed for every child we are working with for whom a missing episode would raise particular concerns, especially children at risk of sexual and/or criminal exploitation.

The risk assessment should be updated at least every three months or when circumstances require it. This will guide carers and social workers as to what action to take. The risk assessment must be made available to the carers at the start of the placement for looked-after children and to parents for children not looked-after.

Where there is concern that a child may go missing, the risk assessment should be used to assess:

1. Child’s view on current placement/stability of their relationships at home
2. Level of supervision / support that care staff propose to provide for the child
3. The degree of risk to the child if they go missing
4. The views of parents/ carers on their child’s needs and the action that
5. needs to be taken if their child is missing
6. Consideration of any external influences which may result in a child going missing

For details of the factors that should be considered as part of the risk assessment, please refer to **Appendix 1 – Missing Person Risk Assessment**.

It should be explained to the child that actions will be taken if he/she absents him/herself without permission. Where appropriate, the child should be given a copy of the risk assessment. The risk assessment should be on the child’s file in all agencies working with the child.

The risk assessment should be reviewed and, where appropriate, updated on every occasion a child is missing.

Where a child is not known to the police or there is limited information available, a joint assessment should be undertaken with multi-agency partners at the earliest opportunity to inform a review of the risk level. **Extreme caution should be exercised before making a decision of low or no risk for a child for whom there is limited information and/or to go missing is out of character**. Risk levels can be reduced following new information but should they have been made wrongly low in the first instance valuable time may have been lost to safely locate a child.

* 1. **Missing notification**

When a child does not return to his/her placement at the designated time the carer should take the action that would reasonably be expected of any parent, i.e. attempt to contact the child to ascertain their whereabouts and establish when they will be returning. This might include contacting known friends and relatives and visiting them and collecting the child, subject to the current risk assessment and professional advice.

Where a child is missing from the parental home, parents should be advised to take the steps set out above, if they have not done so already.

Where the foster carer or residential worker has been unable to contact the child or ascertain their whereabouts, the carer or the senior residential duty worker should contact the allocated social worker, if there is one, or MASH and then go through any risk assessments that are available. The carer will then call the police if it appears that the child is ‘missing’.

**Out of normal working hours**, the carer should contact the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) who will generate an EDT report and forward it to the social worker their Team Manager, the IRO and the missing coordinator. EDT, following consultation with the carer/ residential manager, and with reference to the risk assessment, will make a decision as to whether to inform the police.

Whenever a looked after child runs away from a placement, the foster carer or the manager on duty in the children’s home is responsible for ensuring that parents and any other person with parental responsibility are informed, unless it is not reasonably practicable or to do so would be inconsistent with the child’s welfare.

Foster carers must inform their own supervising social worker (or duty social worker) at the first opportunity. A residential worker should contact the child’s social worker or the EDT. The child’s social worker will then alert their manager and the IRO.

If a missing child is texting or phoning in from time to time, the opportunity should be taken to ask how they are feeling and why they are not at home.

Once the social worker has been informed that the young person has returned from a missing episode, they should alert the missing coordinator who will complete and submit the Children’s Society **‘Return Interview’ referral form.** The Missing coordinator will update FWi and upload the referral form into documents.

The relevant Service Managers in whose service the missing child is allocated should review all cases where a child is absent for 3 working days or more and advise on any further action necessary. Please see “Strategy meetings” below.

The **Framework-I Notification of Missing or Absent** Tower Hamlets Child must be completed for any missing child.

The Custodian of the **Missing Persons Register** must be informed if other local authorities are to be alerted. (Please refer to the [Tower Hamlets Missing Persons Notification Procedure](http://towernet/staff_services/businessareas/csf/children_socialcare/procedures_and_policies/#Childreninneed).)

* 1. **Unauthorised absence**

If the child is contactable or their whereabouts are known but they refuse to return it is not a matter for the police unless there is reason to consider that the child may be at risk of significant harm. If the carer is in any doubt they should contact the senior worker in the unit (in the case of residential units) or the child’s social worker / EDT. A decision will be made as to whether to inform the police. The content of the Risk Assessment Record will guide what action to take. Reference should also be made to the approved addresses form ( **Appendix 2 – Approved addresses form to establish ‘missing’ or ‘absent’**) to support the decision.

Foster carers and residential staff must (as far as is practicable) do all that a reasonable parent would do to locate and ensure the safe return of the child/ young person (see paragraph 1 section 8.2.).

If the carer believes the child/ young person is at risk, or the carer feels that they are unable to make an informed judgment in relation to this (for example if the child is new to the placement, or if the staff on duty do not know the child well enough) they must inform the child's social worker/ EDT immediately. If it is thought that there are specific issues of safety or public order difficulties involved in returning the child, then action should be agreed between the police, the residential unit staff/ foster carer and the social worker/EDT.

Unauthorised absences should be reported on the **Framework-I Notification of Missing or Absent** Tower Hamlets Child, which has fields for both missing episodes and unauthorised absences.

* 1. **Strategy Discussion**

A strategy meeting should be called as soon as there are serious concerns about the child. In any event, whenever a child is missing for 3 days, a strategy meeting/discussion should be held. This will be arranged by Children’s Social Care, and the police invited (if the child is subject of a child protection plan, then officers from the Missing Persons Unit and the Child Abuse Investigation Team, or if not then the Missing Persons Unit only) and any other agencies who may have important information including Youth Justice and Family Intervention Service, Health and Education.

**Strategy meetings for looked-after children and children subject to CP plans or S47 enquiries must take place within shorter timescales**. For looked-after children the trigger in Tower Hamlets is 72 hours; when a looked-after child has been missing for 24 hours, a strategy discussion should be held. For children subject to CP plans or S47 enquiries a strategy meeting must be arranged within 7 days.

The strategy meeting should be chaired by the allocated social worker’s team manager or delegated officer at the same level. The purpose of this meeting is to ensure sharing of information between all relevant agencies, to confirm what action has been taken to locate the child and to agree what further action is possible or necessary.

If **two or more children have gone missing together** from their home or placement(s), the responsible social workers for all the children should liaise with the placement provider/s and consider whether to arrange a joint missing persons’ multi-agency meeting. Unless there is a specific reason as to why this joint meeting should not or cannot take place, this should be considered as the most appropriate way to ensure a holistic picture is obtained, minimise duplication and ensure a plan of action is timely and co-ordinated. Careful consideration should be given to the issue of confidentiality. A separate individual record if the meeting and a separate action plan must be drawn up for each child.

* 1. **Media Alerts**

The Police have responsibility for any missing person enquiry and will decide whether media involvement will assist or hamper the enquiry. A decision to use the media will only be made after consultation between the Police and the Local Authority. The parents and family should also be informed and involved. The usual mechanism for this action will be through a strategy meeting / discussion.

Where media publicity is required, any statement made between agencies will normally be agreed through press officers. Where a child is to be publicised through the media, every effort will be made to inform the parents beforehand.

The Service Manager, Children Looked After must be notified of any proposal to publicise a child and will advise the Divisional Director, Children’s Social Care.

* 1. **Planning for return**

Where a looked after child has run away from their placement, the responsible social worker should ensure that plans are in place to respond promptly once the child is located.

While the child is missing the social worker, manager, carer, supervising social worker and unit manager as appropriate should consider whether the child can return to the placement once recovered and if not should plan an alternative suitable placement. The IRO should also be consulted about this decision. The expectation should be that the child will return to the placement, at least in the short term, unless there are safeguarding reasons why that should not happen.

* 1. **Children subject to CP Plans or S47 enquiries**

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:

1. Informing the Local Authority Custodian of the Child Protection Register or equivalent, and the local Primary Care Trust’s Designated Nurse
2. Ensuring that a Strategy Meeting is arranged – as soon as practicable and in any event within 3 days, the social worker should arrange a strategy meeting if the child is still missing. Representatives from both the Police Missing Persons Unit and Child Abuse Investigation Team should attend the strategy meeting, as well as other practitioners involved with the child

For further information, please refer to the [LBTH Missing Persons Notification Procedure.](http://towernet/staff_services/businessareas/csf/children_socialcare/procedures_and_policies/#Childreninneed)

* 1. **Children at risk of extremism**

Where a child has left the country, and where there is some evidence to suggest that this might be linked to extremism, that young person should be deemed ‘missing’. The situation should be considered at a strategy meeting, chaired by a Children’s Independent Reviewing Officer, at the earliest opportunity.

Where there a strong suggestion that a child is at risk of flight linked to extremism but has not yet left the country; that young person will not be considered ‘missing’. However, a strategy meeting will need be held as a matter of urgency.

* 1. **Looked after children who may have been trafficked**

Some of the children looked after by Tower Hamlets may be 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 risk of going missing, with most going missing within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours. Unaccompanied migrant or asylum seeking children who go missing immediately after becoming looked after should be treated as children who may be victims of trafficking.

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

1. relevant details about the child’s background before they came to the UK;
2. an understanding of the reasons why the child came to the UK and
3. an analysis of the child’s vulnerability to remaining under the influence of traffickers

Following the assessment close co-operation with the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKTC) and immigration staff will be necessary. Immigration staff will be able to advise on whether the assessment indicates that the child fits the profile of a trafficked child.

Provision may need to be made for the child to be in a safe place before any assessment takes place. The location of the child should not be divulged to any enquirers until their identify and relationship with the child has been established. 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.

‘Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked’ 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 into the UK’s victim identification framework, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). The Trafficked Children Toolkit, developed by the London Safeguarding Children Board, has been made available to all local authorities to help professionals assess the needs of these children and to refer them to the NRM.

NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre (CTAC) provides specialist advice and information to professionals who have concerns that a child may have been trafficked. Phone **0808 800 5000** Monday to Friday 9.30am-4.30pm; [emailhelp@ncpcc.org.uk](mailto:emailhelp@ncpcc.org.uk) or visit the [CTAC website](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/services-and-resources/services-for-children-and-families/child-trafficking-advice-centre-ctac/).

* 1. **Children who repeatedly run away and go missing**

Repeat episodes of a child going missing can indicate **sexual exploitation** or **exploitation for criminal purposes**; repeatedly going missing should not be viewed as a normal pattern of behaviour. 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, the local authority 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. The case should be referred to the Missing Operational Group (MOG) using the single referral form.

* 1. **Sixteen and 17 year olds**

Whilst young people aged 16 and 17 have a greater degree of independence and self-determination than younger children, they are not adults and are subject to safeguarding procedures. It should be noted that for some children; particularly care leavers, the transition to adulthood may increase their level of vulnerability including to risks such as trafficking, sexual exploitation or gang activity, as it is a period of significant change and potential uncertainty.

Age should not be used as an indicator of lower risk when a 16 or 17 year old child cannot be located, and protective action should be as swift and decisive for vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds to determine their location and return them to a place of safety. This policy applies in its entirety to 16 and 17 year olds who go missing, run away or are made homeless.

Children and young people who go missing under the age of 16 are not legally considered as being able to live independently away from home. For children and young people over the age of 16, consideration should be given to their physical and emotional needs and the potential risk of harm when making a judgment as to whether they can live independently away from home.

* 1. **Looked After Children and relevant/eligible care leavers aged 16+**

From the age of 16 young people in care are referred to as care leavers, however, it is important to note that local authorities have very similar duties and responsibilities towards 16 and 17 year old care leavers as they do to children in care and for the purposes of this guidance, the response to a missing care leaver age 16 and 17 should be the same.

Local authorities continue to have a range of responsibilities towards children leaving care until the young person’s 21st, and in some instances their 25th birthday. Pathway plans should reflect any risks to the child from abuse or exploitation and missing episodes and actions to reduce the risk. Police continue to have a duty to investigate missing adults; particularly if they remain vulnerable or at risk.

Sixteen and 17 year olds who are S.20 Accommodated and have ‘capacity’ can withdraw their consent to be accommodated – refusal of permission to ‘stay out’ beyond agreed limits can be a trigger for this. It is in the best interests of care leavers to remain in suitable accommodation. Therefore in such circumstances a LAC Review chaired by an IRO should be held to explore this decision with the young person and their support network, with the aim of maintaining the living arrangement.

Semi-independent living arrangements are classed as ‘unregulated’ and not covered by the regulations that apply to fostering and residential placements. This is to enable semi-independent provision to realistically prepare young people for their transition to adulthood; for example, via the planned stepping down of monitoring and support.

In practice most semi-independent arrangements allow for care leavers to have periods of time, including overnights, away from their accommodation. This will be included in the placement plan, individual placement agreement (IPA) or the occupational licence; and a clear agreement reached between the provider, the care leaver and the 16+ social worker.  **Appendix 2 – Approved addresses form to establish ‘missing’ or ‘absent’** should be used to support this agreement.

1. **WHEN A CHILD IS FOUND**

Carers for looked-after children should inform the child’s social worker that the child has returned.

The social worker should inform the child’s parents as appropriate, the IRO, and the missing coordinator immediately. The **FWi Notification of Missing or Absent Tower Hamlets Child form** should be completed by the missing coordinator noting the correct date the young person ceased to be missing. The missing coordinator will make an immediate RHI referral to the Childrens Society.

**Safe and well checks** are carried out by the police as soon as possible after the 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.

Where a child goes missing frequently, it may not be practicable for the police to see them every time they return. In these cases a reasonable decision should be taken in agreement between the police and the child’s parent or carer or their social worker with regard to the frequency of such checks bearing in mind the established link between frequent missing episodes and serious harm, which could include gang involvement, forced marriage, bullying or sexual exploitation. The reason for a decision not to conduct a safe and well check should be reported on the case file.

When children missing from home are located but have not been reported missing to the police by their families, parents and carers should be encouraged to report any future episodes of running away. This may require particular work in some communities, for example those with high levels of gang crime. Children’s Social Care should pro-actively consider investigating further to identify early any safeguarding concerns, or whether the child and their family need further support.

* 1. **Independent Return Interview**

When a child is found, they must be offered an independent return interview. Independent return interviews provide an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their home.

Once information is received of a looked after young person who has gone missing, the information will be shared with the Children’s Society on **by the missing coordinator** as soon as possible. who will also follow this up by completing and submitting the Children’s Society ‘Return interview’ referral form. This can be found on the Children’s Social Care intranet page: [social work practice under ‘Missing Children’](http://towernet/staff_services/businessareas/csf/children_socialcare/social_work_practice/#MissingChildren)

The Children’s Society will then make arrangements to contact the young person with the aim of conducting a return interview within 72 hours of the child returning to their home or care setting. This timescale is partly dependent on the missing coordinator making a prompt referral when the child has returned.

The Children’s Society will record the interview on their Return of Missing Child Interview form.

Once completed, the Children’s Society will submit the form back to the missing coordinator, who will in turn upload it on to FWi, under Documents, and circulate to other professionals as appropriate.

Where possible, a looked-after child should be given the opportunity to talk before they return to their placement.

The interview and actions that follow from it should:

* 1. Identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered – including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the ‘Safe and Well check’ – either before they ran away or whilst missing.
  2. Understand and address the reasons why the child ran away.
  3. Help the child feel they are cared for and their absence is unsafe, and understand that they have options, to prevent repeat instances of them running away
  4. Provide them with information on how to stay safe if they choose to run away again, including helpline numbers, and cover how they will keep in touch at a distance and with whom during this period.

The interview should be held in a neutral place where the child feels safe. The interview provides an opportunity to hear from the child about why they went missing and to understand the risks and issues faced by the child while missing. This could include exploring issues where a child:

* + - 1. Has been reported missing on two or more occasions
      2. Is frequently absent without authorisation
      3. Has been hurt or harmed while they have been missing
      4. Is at known or suspected risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking
      5. Is at known or suspected risk of involvement in criminal activity or drugs
      6. Has contact with persons posing risk to children; and/or
      7. Has been engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities

during their absence

The assessment of whether a child might run away again should be based on analysis of previous and current risk assessments.

Following the Safe and Well Check and Independent Return Interview, Children’s Social Care, police and voluntary services should work together:

1. To build up a comprehensive picture of why the child went missing
2. To understand what happened while they were missing
3. To understand who they were missing with and where they were found; and,
4. To understand what support they require upon returning home or to their care placement in accordance with the ‘Working Together’ guidance

The outcomes of all checks and interviews should be recorded on the child’s framework-I case file.

Where children refuse to engage with the interviewer, parents and carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence they may be aware of.

* 1. **Return to placement**

When a child has been located, it must be decided whether the child’s placement remains appropriate. The decision should be informed by discussions with the child and carers where appropriate. The decision will also be informed by discussion held while the child is missing (see section **8.6.** **Planning for return** above).

Placement plans must be kept up to date and include a strategy to reduce the pressure on the child to run away.

1. **TOOLS FOR RESPONDING TO THE ABDUCTION OF CHILDREN IN CARE**

When a child for whom Tower Hamlets has parental responsibility is missing from placement or abducted, and the child’s location is known, consideration should first be given to recovering the child by negotiation. However, in an emergency situation, the Police can be requested to take suitable action. There are also a number of legal tools that can be accessed by the local authority to allow for the recovery or collection of a missing child.

* 1. **Harbouring Notice**

If the local authority or the police have reason to believe that an adult is adversely involved with a child who is missing from home, they may consider making a witness statement by the local authority manager specifically prohibiting that adult from having any contact with the named child, without exceptions. The police would then show the adult a copy of the statement and a photograph of the child (which they would not be allowed to keep) and serve upon that adult a warning harbouring notice and explaining that nay breach would be dealt with by arrest under section 2 Child Abduction Act 1984.

* 1. **Recovery Order**

Where Tower Hamlets has parental responsibility for the child, when there is no immediate risk that the child will be harmed or moved elsewhere, the person holding or harbouring the child should be notified by letter of the Department’s intention to apply for a Recovery Order.

If there continues to be no agreement following this, a Recovery order should be applied for. Legal Services should be consulted and will provide the necessary court form for completion by the social worker.

Recovery Orders may be served on persons who are thought to be withholding information about the whereabouts of the missing child. A Recovery Order empowers the Police to enter the premises to search for the missing child.

The social worker will attend court to make the application.

The social worker will need to decide whether the assistance of a police officer is likely to be required in recovering the child, as this must be specified in the order.

When the social worker (or other authorised person) goes to enact the order, s/he must take the order and be able to produce it as evidence of authorisation.

Within 48 hours of the order being made, the social worker must serve copies on:

1. The parties
2. Any person who has actual care of the child or had it immediately prior to the order being made
3. The local authority in whose area the child lives or was found

For further details about Recovery Orders, please refer to [Section 50 of the Children Act 1989](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/50).

* 1. **Collection Orders**

If the Tower Hamlets social work team are unsure of the whereabouts of a child and have cause to believe the child to be at risk of harm, a Collection can be applied for at the High Court. This mandates the Court Tipstaff to find and collect the child.

Collection Orders can be applied for out of hours but must only be sought following consultation with Legal Services and the agreement of the Divisional Director, Children’s Social Care or the Out of Hours Duty Service Manager.



1. **Appendix 1 – Missing Person Risk Assessment**

**Data Protection Act:** The information on this form is collected to assess the risk to a young person who has gone missing from home or care. It may be shared with anyone concerned in achieving the safe return of the young person.

**MISSING PERSON RISK ASSESSMENT**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name of the child / young person | | |  | | |
| DOB |  | **Age** |  | **Legal status** |  |
| Name of placement provider / carer | | |  | | |
| Address of placement | | |  | | |
| Date and time they went missing | | |  | | |
| Assessment completed by | | |  | | |
| Job Title and Team | | |  | | |
| Date of completion | | |  | | |

This tool is designed to promote and support the care provider and social worker to collate information regarding the young person as an individual within the context of the specific missing incident, therefore a new risk assessment must be completed each time a child or young person goes missing.

To complete the form a judgement as to whether each factor is of relevance to the missing young person at the time of the incident or as part of their relevant history is required and all the information should be used to inform the level of risk and the issues that need to be considered in any search / investigation.

As a guide where the majority of the factors exist as current issues for the child or young person at the time of completing the assessment then the risk rating is HIGH and the young person should be reported to the police as missing.

Recent Photo

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name |  |
| DOB |  |
| Current address |  |
| (Child) Mobile phone number |  |
| Date of arrival at current address |  |
| Previous address |  |

**Who should be contacted if the young person goes missing? Please include contact numbers and addresses:-**

**Care Order Details:**

**Physical attributes and distinguishing features:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Gender |  | Build |  |
| Ethnic appearance |  | **Hair type / colour** |  |
| Height |  | **Eye colour** |  |
| Distinguishing features |  | **Language spoken** |  |

**Overview of behaviour that would be important to the police** (e.g. mental health, at risk of child sexual exploitation, any history of aggressive behaviour, vulnerabilities, history of self-harm, known to carry any weapon):

**Medical conditions, any medication needed and times taken (if applicable):**

**Historical information if the young person has been missing in the past** (e.g. how many times have they been missing before? Do they use public transport? Have they been exploited during missing episodes? Have they been involved in criminal activity when missing, do they go missing with anyone?)

**Please list details of addresses/locations that the young person may have visited if found/absent in the past:**

**What was the last method of contact?**

| RISK FACTOR | Judgement  Is this risk factor a current concern?  Yes or No | Comments and / or evidence to support your judgement |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Young Person is under the age of 13yrs |  |  |
| Young Person has prescribed essential medication or requires urgent medical treatment. |  |  |
| Young Person has made an attempt or threat of suicide or self-harm immediately prior to going missing. |  |  |
| Young Person is in breach of any Police or Court imposed Bail conditions. |  |  |
| Young Person known to be under significant influence of alcohol or drugs immediately prior to going missing. |  |  |
| Young Person has made a threat of direct harm to another person prior to going missing.  Details of the threat and potential victims must be identified in any report to the police. |  |  |
| Young Person has difficulties in ability to interact safely with others or in an unknown environment, e.g. Disability, Visual Impairment, Learning Difficulty. |  |  |
| Young Person has previously been missing AND has suffered significant harm whilst missing. |  |  |
| Young Person has been subject to or is at risk of sexual ‘exploitation’ and this risk continues. |  |  |
| Young Person known to be in contact with a Person Posing Risk to Children (PPRC) |  |  |
| Young Person is themselves registered as a Person Posing Risk to Children (PPRC) |  |  |
| Young Person has been subjected to bullying or harassment, e.g. racial, sexual, immediately prior to them going missing. |  |  |
| Young Person was involved in a violent incident immediately prior to going missing. |  |  |
| Young Person has exhibited unusual and unexplained behaviour prior to disappearance |  |  |
| Young Person has no history of running away and no direct contact can be made |  |  |
| Young Person has gone missing whilst on holiday or temporary visit to a place outside of their placement area. |  |  |
| Severe weather conditions exist and sustained exposure would seriously increase risk to health. |  |  |
| Suspicion of abduction. | **Do not follow this procedure – report immediately to police as a criminal matter** | |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Outcome of Risk Assessment | High Risk issues exist and immediate referral to Police is required |  |
|  | Medium or Low risk issue exist and child / young persons may self-return to be located through implementation of Prevention and Action Plan. |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Signed |  |
| Name (BLOCK CAPITALS) |  |
| Job Title & Team |  |
| Date & time |  |

1. **Appendix 2 – Approved addresses form to establish ‘missing’ or ‘absent’**



