



Bristol Safeguarding
Children Board

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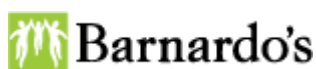
Strategy for Children Missing from Home or Care

January

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Part 1

Strategy



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Version Control

Version	Date	Purpose of policy/Procedure	Review Date
1.01	2011	Provide a clear outline of the multi-agency responsibilities and response to meeting the needs of children who go missing from home and care	2014
2.01	2014	As above: incorporation of revised Statutory Guidance and revised police procedures	2016

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Running away from home, or from a care placement, is often symptomatic of wider difficulties in a child or young person's life. The reasons behind running away may vary, but it will usually indicate that a child or young person is unhappy in their current circumstances. Although they may be running from a dangerous situation, young people who run away may be making themselves more vulnerable, therefore there is a need for all agencies working with children to understand the nature of this problem and work effectively to protect children from harm.
- 1.2 In June 2008, the Government published a Young Runaways Action Plan. The Plan highlights the Government's commitment to working with local authorities, the police and the voluntary sector to ensure that young people who run away, or who feel they have to leave, are kept safe, and receive the immediate and ongoing support they need. In April 2009, the Government began asking LSCBs to self-evaluate their progress in developing services to meet the needs of these children. In July 2009, the Government further issued Statutory Guidance on 'Children who Run Away and go Missing from Home or Care'¹.
- 1.3 This Strategy has been developed as part of a local response to these two key documents and the requirements within them.
- 1.4 Safeguarding children is a multi-agency concern co-ordinated by Bristol Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB), the local multi-agency partnership of education, health, police, social care, voluntary sector, and associated services. BSCB is the statutory forum for agreeing how the relevant organisations in Bristol will co-operate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in our city. This includes meeting the needs of children that run away from home or their care placement. The work of the BSCB is part of the wider arrangements that make up the Bristol Children outcomes board and health and wellbeing board.
- 1.5 Agencies within BSCB are frequently in a position to identify children and young people at risk of running away. Similarly the Police and BCC People Directorate, are frequent partners in managing 'missing' episodes involving children in care. It is, therefore, important that staff in all agencies work together to meet the needs of this vulnerable group of children. This strategy has been developed to assist in this, and identifies the structures that should exist across agencies that are involved in dealing with missing persons so that, where they overlap or interface, respective actions and responsibilities are clear.
- 1.6 This strategy is designed to support an effective, collaborative safeguarding response from all agencies involved when a child goes missing. It is issued alongside guidance for assessing both the risk of the child going missing and the risk to the child when they are missing. The accompanying guidance describes appropriate staff and agency actions to:
 - locate the child;
 - to affect their return; and

¹<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/statutory%20guidance%20on%20children%20who%20run%20away%20and%20go%20missing%20from%20home%20or%20care.pdf>

- to identify the issues that caused, and may continue to cause, the child to go missing.

1.7 This Strategy is aligned to the South West Child Protection Procedures. All agencies that are provided by, or commissioned by BCC People Directorate are required to adhere to these procedures, while all other agencies across the city, including community and voluntary agencies, are also required to provide services that meet these standards.

Full details of the South West Child Protection Procedures are available via the following web link:
www.swcpp.org.uk

2. Responding to the needs of all children and young people who run away and go missing

2.1 Definitions

Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK government in 1991, states that a child “means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.” (Article 1², 1989). Working Together, 2013³ (para. 1) defines a child as ‘a child is anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday’.

Runaway

A child or young person under the age of 18yrs who has run away from their home or placement, either due to having been forced, coerced or lured to leave or whose whereabouts are unknown.

Missing

When a child or young person is reported to the police they will either be classified as Missing or absent. From 2014 the Police have begun to adopt a new definition of missing and absent in relation to both adults and children/young people⁴:

- **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 at risk of harm to themselves or another; and
- **absent:** a person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.

When considering which classification to employ the police will give due regard to a range of factors in order to accurately establish the degree of risk. These factors include:

- the age of the person
- their vulnerability
- developmental factors
- explanations of the circumstances to establish what is ‘out of character’ and whether ‘established whereabouts’ indicates a level of risk

Over two-thirds of children who go missing or run away are not reported as such to the police, by their parent or by their carer (Rees, 2011: 19)⁵. The majority of children who run away do so to avoid their home circumstances, they typically see themselves as ‘runaways’ rather than ‘missing’ children. In terms of the steps that need to be taken to locate these children and safeguard their welfare, this Strategy includes them as ‘missing’ children.

² [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), 1989

³ <http://www.workingtogetheronline.co.uk/chapters/intro.html>

⁴ ACPO. (2013a) [Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons 2013](#) College of Policing ,p.5

⁵ Rees, Gwyther (2011) Still Running III: Early findings from our third national survey of young runaways, (London: The Children’s Society)

Failed to return – Unauthorised absence

This category is critical to the clarification of roles of the Police and Children’s Social Work. Some children absent themselves from home or care for a short period and then return, often their whereabouts are known or may be quickly established through contact with family or friends or are unknown but the children are not considered at risk. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed as a boundary testing activity which is well within the range of normal teenage behaviour. These children have failed to return, and would not usually come within the definition of ‘missing’. If a child’s whereabouts are known then they cannot be ‘missing’. However an on-going pattern of ‘Failing to return’ must be carefully monitored as the child may subsequently go ‘missing’.

A police classification of 'Absent' when a child is reported as missing to the police is different to an 'Unauthorised Absence – or failure to return' which should not be reported to the police. Police classifications of 'Missing' and 'Absent' are used to ascertain the threshold of response to a reported missing episode dependant on risk.

2.2 Other issues to consider in relation to Children Missing from Home or Care

Child Abduction

Where a child has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence, this is a ‘crime in action’ and should be reported to the police immediately.

Forced marriage

Some young people run away because they are at risk of abuse. Forced marriage in particular can lead to young women running away from home. Further guidance relating to Forced Marriage is available here www.bristol.gov.uk/safeguardingchildren and here <http://www.bava.org.uk/types-of-abuse/forced-marriage/>

Children missing from education

These are Children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll, and are not receiving a suitable education otherwise than being in school, for example, at home, privately, or in alternative provision.

Evidence suggests young runaways face more challenges to accessing universal services and may be ‘missing from education’. Agencies with responsibility for children who run away or go missing from home and care will need to ensure they link up with Bristol Education Welfare Officers and those with responsibility for other universal services such as health. Guidance on children missing education can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education>

Asylum Seeking Children

There are complex issues facing Asylum Seeking children. Information about some children’s whereabouts is not always maintained due to the transient nature of their accommodation arrangements. Agencies must however, be alert to the fact that some children are trafficked into,

within and out of the UK for custom related reasons, to be abused and exploited for commercial gain, including through sex, for domestic servitude etc.

Grooming for potential sexual exploitation

In some cases, young people may run away or go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them sexually. Evidence suggests that 90 per cent of children subjected to sexual grooming go missing at some point.

Guidance has been produced, [‘BSCB- Safeguarding Children and Young People at Risk of Sexual Exploitation – Practice Guidance and Procedure’](#), to help local agencies identify children and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation and take action to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Child trafficking

The [‘Bristol Practice Guidance and Procedure for Preventing and Safeguarding Children Who Are At Risk or Have Been Trafficked or Exploited’](#) has been developed in conjunction with the BSCB. The procedure provides guidance to professionals and volunteers from all agencies in safeguarding children who are at risk of or have been abused and neglected by adults who traffic them within, into and out of the UK in order to exploit them.

The majority of migrating accompanied and unaccompanied children seek asylum at their port of entry or soon after their arrival in UK. However, children who are migrated for exploitative reasons (trafficked) do not come to the attention of the authorities or disappear from contact with statutory services soon after arrival.

All children are rendered more vulnerable as a result of accompanied or unaccompanied migration; trafficked children are at increased risk of significant harm.

The issue of internal trafficking of UK born young people mainly relates to those young people who face issues of sexual exploitation and who are moved within Bristol or other parts of the UK as part of the process of their exploitation.

2.3 Key principles

The following principles should be adopted by all agencies in relation to identifying and locating children who go missing:

- The safety and welfare of the child is paramount
- Locating and returning the child to a safe environment is the main objective
- Child Protection Procedures (www.swcpp.org.uk) will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child who is missing may be at risk of significant harm
- Notification to the Police will only take place following a Risk Assessment and in clearly defined circumstances as set out in this Procedure
- The Police will act on any report of a child missing on the understanding that a Risk Assessment has been completed
- Every *‘missing’* child who returns and is offered a Return Interview **will** be interviewed by someone other than their direct carer.

Where the child is known to Children's Services or meets the criteria⁶ for referral to Children's Social work, Bristol People Directorate Child and Family Support Services will ensure that there are a range of service options to address the child's needs when they return through either a referral via First Response to Early Help or Safe Choices or the Area Social Work Teams as required.

The South West Child Protection Procedures

These procedures will sit alongside the BSCB's Child Protection Procedures, and the regional South West Child Protection Procedures: www.swcpp.org.uk

2.4 Why do children runaway

Push/pull factors – addressing the causes of running away

Research carried out by the Social Exclusion Unit *Young Runaways* (2002)⁷, found that the top reasons for running away are:

Push factors

- Problems at home – ranging from arguments with parents to long-term abuse or maltreatment.
- Family break-up – young people drawn into their parents' conflicts are less likely to do well at school and more likely to truant or to run away from home.
- Mental health problems – a disproportionate number of young people who run away from home have a mental health problem.
- Bullying – children who are being severely bullied are more likely to run away from school and home or care.
- Teenage pregnancy – some young women run away or are forced to leave home because they become pregnant (or fear that they may be pregnant). They may also be in denial about their pregnancy, meaning that they are not getting the advice they need about pregnancy options. There is also a greater risk of pregnancy when girls run away, and those working with them will need to ensure they have rapid access to confidential contraception and sexual health services to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

Pull factors

- Running to be near friends or family – especially when a young person is in care and there are problems in contact arrangements with family and friends.
- Grooming for potential sexual exploitation or child trafficking – young people may run away or go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them.
- Criminality/ exploitation

⁶ See 'BSCB Thresholds Guidance' link to be added

⁷ http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/library/b89436_3.pdf

2.5 Strategic overview

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children – and in particular protecting them from significant harm – depends on effective joint-working between agencies and professionals that have different roles and expertise. Individual children, especially some of the most vulnerable children and those at greatest risk of social exclusion, need co-ordinated help from health, education, children’s social work, the voluntary sector and other agencies.

Where it is decided that a child needs support from several agencies, having a Lead Professional helps to ensure that the actions identified in the assessment process are fully co-ordinated.

In order to achieve effective joint-working, the following partners were involved in the original development of this strategy in 2011.

- Bristol Children & Young People’s Services (CYPS);
 - Children’s Social Care
 - Education
- Bristol Emergency Duty Team
- Learning Partnership West
- Barnardo’s BASE (Sexual Exploitation) Project and Barnardo’s - Safe Choices
- Avon & Somerset Constabulary - Public Protection Unit
- Bristol Primary and Secondary Schools
- Bristol Neighbourhoods (Housing)

Each of the above partners has a key part to play to ensure the safety and welfare of all those children and young people who go missing from either home or care. The current version of the Strategy was revised in 2014 by the BSCB Missing from Home and Care Strategy Group.

This relationship between a range of agencies is promoted and supported by:

- a strong lead from the chair of BSCB, who is accountable to the Bristol’s City Director and Asst. Mayor for children’s services. The chair of BSCB, through forums such as the Children’s Outcomes Board, will bring all agencies together to provide a co-ordinated response to young runaways; and
- effective joint-working by the local authority, health and voluntary sector partners, with monitoring by the BSCB.
- The effective operation of this strategy and associated Guidance is undertaken by the BSCB Missing from Home and Care Strategy Group

Bristol Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB)

Local Safeguarding Children Boards are charged with ensuring children and young people ‘stay safe from harm’ (Section 11, Children Act (2004)).

All protocols complement the work of the BSCB and are actively reviewed with ongoing monitoring and reporting. ‘Children missing from Home or Care’ is a quarterly agenda item at each BSCB meeting, where the board will be informed of activity and trends in terms of the numbers of

runaways, specific characteristics and risk factors associated with those running away, and actions to address these risks.

The BSCB Training Section are responsible for ensuring that appropriate and effective training is available, particularly in risk assessments and managing return interviews.

There also exists a strong working relationship between Bristol City Council (First Response), Avon & Somerset Constabulary and Barnardo's - Safe Choices. Protocols outline the agreed level and type of information to be collected to aid individual risk-assessment and for planning purposes, as well as reacting to alerts that children are missing from home or care (see Appendix A).

Information Sharing

Case Specific Information

When there are concerns about a child's or young person's safety or well-being, it may well be necessary to share information with other agencies. The safety and welfare of a child or a young person must be the first consideration when making decisions about sharing information about them.

Specific additional procedures apply if a child or young person is in the care of the local authority (children in care), or is receiving a service from Children's Social work.

Agencies working with children and young people and their families and carers must use well established, comprehensive, transparent and consensual information sharing systems and processes that places the individual at the centre of how their information is used.

This must be delivered in accordance with the:

- Children Act (1989)
- Data Protection Act (1998)
- Human Rights Act (2000)
- Children Act (2004)
- And other relevant legislation and guidance.

All information obtained and shared in support of this protocol must be fully recorded within each organisation's management systems and be clearly referenced to the evidence and the information upon which decisions have been made. This must include details for any third parties and full details of all the information/evidence that they have supplied/been given.

The local Information Sharing Protocol 'Sharing information on Children'⁸ provides the overarching framework that will facilitate this and it should be read in conjunction with this document.

Aggregated Information

Information relating to children and young people missing from home and care helps Bristol People Directorate Child & Family Support Services and our partners to develop a picture of 'running' patterns in their area. Through reporting this information to Bristol Safeguarding Children Board we

⁸ [Information Sharing Protocols](#)

will enable them to use this information to inform local service provision and to ensure that the necessary procedures are in place to respond to the needs of young runaways.

Procedures and protocols are in place to ensure that information about children who are reported missing (from home as well as care) is shared between the police, First Response and specialist commissioned services (Barnardo's - Safe Choices).

This information is used strategically by the BSCB Missing from Home and Care group and missing data is reported quarterly to the Board. Patterns of running by individuals or by groups of young people are identified, and with effective intervention local services respond appropriately to reduce the instances of running by these young people.

Strong links are established between the police missing persons co-ordinator, First Response and Barnardo's - Safe Choices and sharing information about children who are reported missing from home. BASE (Barnardo's Against Sexual Exploitation) also works effectively in sharing information with police and First Response when a young person is running away/going missing.

2.6 Regional arrangements and cross-border issues

Where runaways from one local authority area present themselves in another local authority, it is important that the authority where the child is found (also known as the receiving authority) works with the authority where the child usually resides (also known as the home authority) to ensure that the child has access to the help and support services they need. Responsibility for making safeguarding enquiries rests with the local authority in which the child is found. If this local authority is not the one in which the child normally resides, it may negotiate with the 'home' local authority to continue with these enquiries.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary work closely with neighbouring forces to ensure that young people who run away and present themselves in another local authority are protected and returned to their family or placement with due care and consideration being taken for their welfare.

2.7 Out-of-hours responses

In every event of a child running from home or care, the local safeguarding procedures should be followed as set out in the local running from home or care protocol. These procedures can be accessed here: www.swcpp.org.uk

If there is concern that the child may be at risk if returned home, the child should be referred to the Emergency Duty Team in order to ensure that their needs are assessed and make appropriate arrangements to provide safe accommodation.

Not all children and young people who run away from home or care are in need of emergency accommodation. However, if a child or young person is deemed to be at risk of sleeping rough or with someone they have just met, these young people need somewhere safe to go and need to know how to access that provision, so that they are not put at even greater risk. It is the responsibility of Bristol People Directorate to ensure that such accommodation is genuinely available in an emergency, and can be accessed at any time of the day or night.

Bristol City Council's Housing services and People Directorate Child & Family Support Services share a strategic approach to the provision of emergency accommodation and housing and support pathways for young people in order to eradicate the use of B&B accommodation.