



Bristol Safeguarding
Children Board

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Strategy for Children Missing from Home or Care

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Part 2

Guidance
for children
missing
from Home



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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

This section outlines the support to be provided by agencies to young people at risk of running away or going missing from home and children who run away or are missing and are living in private fostering arrangements.

2. Runaway and Missing from Home Protocol

Protocols exist between relevant partner agencies covering children who run away and go missing from home. Bristol's missing from home protocol agreed between BCC People Directorate, the police, other agencies and relevant voluntary sector agencies defines each agency's roles and responsibilities when a child goes missing and when they return.

Bristol's missing from home protocol includes:

- an agreed definition of a missing or runaway child or young person;
- an agreed inter-agency framework for classifying the degree of risk when a child goes missing from home or when a missing young person comes to agency notice
- details of who should carry out a Single Assessment (SAF) and how this information should be shared
- the basis on which Safe Choices and Children's Social work offer 'Return Interviews' for children who have run away from home;
- details of preventative approaches.

Bristol's protocol agrees a threshold for when referrals should be made to children's social work, for example when:

- evidence exists that the child has developed a repeated pattern of running;
- the child has, or is likely to, experience significant harm;
- the parent appears unable, or unwilling, to work to support and meet the needs of the child.

For further information in terms of protocols and thresholds, please refer to [BSCB Threshold Guidance](#). This handbook outlines a structure for consultation, co-ordination and co-operation between agencies in order to promote the child's welfare, as well as to protect the child from abuse and neglect.

3. Assessment of need – Early Help

Single Assessment Framework (SAF)

The use of the SAF as a means of analysing the child's needs enables practitioners to combine their assessment with that of any other professional who might already be working with a child or have completed a specialist assessment for them. With consent from the child (where it is considered they are competent to do so), and in most cases their parents, practitioners from different agencies are able to share information about a child's needs, enabling them to work more effectively together, build up a holistic picture and develop a better co-ordinated response.

Information regarding the Single Assessment process can be found on the BSCB webpages:

<http://www.bristol.gov.uk/page/children-and-young-people/bristol-safeguarding-children-board>

Lead Professional

The Lead Professional provides a main point of contact for the child and, where appropriate, their family; and will assist the young person and their family to access services. It is essential that the Lead Professional is able to build up the trust and support necessary to facilitate the delivery of services for the young person.

4. Risk assessment

Where an individual needs-assessment indicates the child may be at risk of harm, a referral should be made to Children's Social work via First Response. An evaluation of whether the child is likely to run away from home in the future will be one of the factors that informs the level of risk posed to the child, and the decision as to whether a referral to First Response is appropriate. The assessment of whether a young person might run away again should be based on information about their:

- individual circumstances, including family circumstances in which the child has gone missing;
- motivation for running;
- possible destination; and
- recent pattern of absences (if any).

When young people who are missing from home are located but have not been reported missing to the police by their families, further investigation might be warranted. It may be necessary to inquire into whether there are any continuing safeguarding concerns, or whether the young person and their family should be offered family support services.

Where a child has an allocated Social Worker as a Child in Need or is subject of a Child Protection Plan, consideration should be given to reviewing the child's plan every time they are reported missing or run away. The persistence of this behaviour would suggest that the action following from earlier assessments should be reviewed and alternative options to support the young person considered. The Social Worker on receipt of a notification via First Response will create a Missing Person Record on the ICS system and ensure that the Return Interview, where the criteria is met, is completed.

Where a child is identified as at risk of significant harm, a referral should be made. Children's social care protocols and procedures outline a threshold for a referral in the 'BSCB Threshold Guidance'.

5. Police Safe and Well Check and Return Interviews

Police Safe and Well Check

This is carried out by the Police as soon as possible after the person has returned. Its purpose is

- to check for any indications that the young person 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 person goes missing frequently, it may not be practicable to see them every time they return. In these cases, a reasonable decision should be taken with regard to the frequency of such checks. This will mainly apply to young people missing from care who are likely to have other people responsible for their welfare to check this. Every effort should be made to visit those young people missing from home on every occasion.

The manner in which a Self and Well check is undertaken requires careful consideration and planning in order to avoid potentially alienating a young person who may be a victim of abuse/exploitation.

Independent Return Interview

Following a child or young person returning home First Response will, subject to the criteria outlined below, notify Safe Choices who will ensure that a return interview is offered to the child and/or their parents within 72 hours of the young person being located or returning.

The return interview should be offered when a child:

- has been missing for over 24 hours;
- has been missing on two or more occasions;
- has engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence;
- has been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing (or this is believed to have been the case);
- has known mental health issues;
- is at known risk of sexual or other exploitation; and/or
- has contact with persons posing risk to children; or
- other exceptional circumstances

One of the above criteria should result in Safe Choices being notified of the episode and receiving a referral from First Response.

The return interview is a more in-depth interview carried out by an independent person who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge. Many young people who run away or go missing need to build up trust with somebody before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they decided to run away. The interview and actions that follow from it should:

- 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 (his/her medical condition should be discussed and any need for medical attention assessed).
- understand and try to address the reasons why the child or young person ran away
- attempt to prevent a missing episode happening again.

Any information gained through the return interview that may indicate criminal activity should be passed to the Police Safeguarding Unit using the Return interview feedback form.

6. Missing from a private foster home

Most private fostering arrangements will be settled and supportive environments. However, some young people may have 'entered' a private fostering arrangement in an attempt by a family to address difficulties in the relationships within the family. These issues may be unresolved and the young person may in some circumstances be more vulnerable to go missing from the private foster home. It is important that these young people receive the same prompt and comprehensive response as children missing from home and from care.

Where a child or young person has been reported missing from a 'private foster home', there should already have been a referral to Children's Social work (in respect to the private fostering arrangement). In Bristol all children in private foster care whom the local authority have been made aware of should already have an allocated social worker. The child/young person will be receiving social worker visits, at a minimum, every 6 weeks or 12 weeks (if they have been in the private fostering arrangement for over 12 months) and there should also be a private fostering assessment in place.

Key actions to be undertaken when a child in a private fostering arrangement goes missing are as follows:

- Where a child or young person has been reported missing, found and returned to their private foster carers and it is apparent that they are in a private fostering placement that the local authority has not been made aware of, a referral should be made to children's social care to ensure that the arrangement is assessed and that the child or young person's needs are being met.
- Children's social care will allocate a social worker to undertake a private fostering assessment.
- When a social worker for a child in a private fostering arrangement receives a referral/notification that the child has gone missing a review of the child or young person's needs should be arranged immediately to ensure that the placement is still able to meet the child or young person's needs and to provide further support to the carers and child or young person. This review should also involve the private foster carer's social worker.
- Where there are concerns that a child or young person may be at risk of or suffering significant harm in a private fostering arrangement immediate action to safeguard the welfare of the child or young person may be required. Concerns will be investigated by the local authority within which the private foster home is located.

7. Support for 16- and 17-year-olds

As 16 and 17-year-olds have greater independence from their parents and carers and can choose to leave home, it may be necessary to involve other services such as housing officers in the assessment of their needs.

Bristol must provide accommodation for any "child in need" within their area who meets the criteria in section 20(1) of the Children Act 1989. Local authorities must also provide accommodation for a "child in need" who is over 16 and whose welfare is likely to be seriously prejudiced if they do not provide him or her with accommodation (section 20(3)).

The Judgement of the House of Lords in May of 2009¹ set out the responsibilities of Housing and Children's Services, in relation to 16-17 year olds who present to a Local Authority as homeless.

A flowchart has been agreed between Housing and CYPS together with a leaflet to give to young people.

When a 16-17 year old presents as homeless Southwark states that it should be BCC People Directorate rather than Housing who undertake an initial assessment.

An outline of the key processes and joint working arrangements for young people who present as homeless are included within Appendix D.

8. Repeat missing episodes

Particular attention should be given to repeated episodes or patterns of missing episodes. Such behaviour can indicate sexual exploitation. It is particularly important that in undertaking risk assessments that repeatedly going missing is now interpreted as a normal pattern of behaviour.

- If a child or young person has gone missing repeatedly (at least twice) Safe Choices will contact the child and/or their family to undertake an independent return interview and offer the appropriate support advice and guidance.
- If in spite of advice and support being given the child continues to run away a review needs to be held to consider what alternative strategies are available.

¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldjudgmt/jd090520/appg-1.htm>



Young people missing from home process

