Strategy for Children Missing from Home or Care

Part 3

January 2015

Guidance for children missing from Care
Contents

1 Introduction
2 Strategy and procedure
3 Missing from Home protocols
4 Care planning
5 Placement matters
6 Risk assessment
7 Categories of Absence
8 Actions to be taken by Foster Carer
9 Return of the child
10 Police Safe and Well Check and Return Interviews
11 Multi Agency Meetings
12 Looked After Children trafficked from abroad
13 Support for care staff
14 Young people missing from Care Process

Version Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Purpose of policy/Procedure</th>
<th>Review Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1.01</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Provide a clear outline of the multi-agency responsibilities and response to meeting the needs of children who go missing from home and care</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<td>2.01</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>As above: incorporation of revised Statutory Guidance and revised police procedures</td>
<td>2016</td>
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1. **Introduction**

Where young people are missing from their care placements (Residential and Foster Care), it is essential that the professionals concerned work closely together to respond to the incident in a timely way, and follow the procedures agreed in the Bristol missing from care protocol to locate the child as quickly as possible (see section 3). Once the child has been located, it will be essential to assess their needs so that they can be referred for appropriate services – which might include independent advocacy and support. It may also be necessary to convene a statutory review chaired by their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

2. **Strategy and procedure**

Bristol’s approach to managing missing-from-care episodes is a key element of the local authority’s wider strategy to ensure that it is a responsible corporate parent and enables all the children that it looks after to achieve the best possible outcomes.

The Child & Family Support Services Service Manager - Safeguarding and Quality Assurance is responsible for taking the lead in working with partner agencies so that across the authority there is a systematic response whenever a looked-after child goes missing from their care placement.

The Child & Family Support Services Children in Care Service Manager will ensure that adequate records are kept. Records should include up-to-date chronologies and case summaries, which will assist in identifying any concerns about children’s care and any patterns of absence in situations where individual children persistently go missing from their care placement(s).

3. **Missing from Care Protocol**

**Missing from care**

Bristol’s strategy for managing missing from care incidents includes the missing from care protocol agreed with the local Police and other partner agencies.

The Bristol Missing from Care protocol covers a range of joint-working procedures and systems:

- agreed categories of absence and definition of missing from local authority care;
- appropriate responses to children and young people who go missing from care, including arrangements for making missing persons reports to the Police;
- escalating the approach to intervention with individual children to reduce the likelihood of a child repeatedly going missing;
- agreed reporting and recording systems for local authorities;
- effective reporting and information-sharing between the local authority, the Police and other agencies (see Appendix A);
- prompt follow-up interviews with young people who go missing (see Section 3.7); and
- joint-assessment information which should be used to revise and amend care plans and Placement Plans (see section on Care Planning). This information should also be made available to Ofsted inspectors.
The Bristol Missing from Care protocol also sets out arrangements for all partner agencies to monitor outcomes and analyse patterns of young people who go missing from care on a regular basis. Issues addressed in strategic monitoring reports include:

- incidence of missing person’s episodes;
- location – are children more likely to be absent from some placements than others?
- safeguarding implications;
- actions when children are located (are children generally returned to the placements from which they have run away or gone missing?); and
- professional practice and procedural issues.

The missing from care protocol also includes the details of senior management posts in the local authority and in the Police force that will be accountable for ensuring that all the processes agreed as part of the missing from care protocol are followed.

Data about children who go missing from their care placements is included in regular reports to council members, especially to the Assistant Mayor for People and in annual reports by the local authority to BSCB and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

These reports are also made available to Ofsted during inspection or on request. These reports include information about the numbers of children who were missing from their care placements for more than 24 hours with details as to the child’s needs and the circumstances in which they went missing. They also include information about the measures being taken by the authority to safeguard looked-after children and reduce missing-from-care incidents.

Reports about patterns of absence and Missing episodes are also made available to:

- senior managers responsible for the quality of fostering and children’s homes services;
- commissioning managers in placing authorities;
- social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) for looked-after children and their managers;
- Ofsted inspectors during the inspection or on request.

Missing-from-care incidents are carefully recorded and highlighted on individual case records and files, thus ensuring that care plans are revised whenever necessary; and when, should it be necessary, evidential information can be shared with the Police to support criminal investigations.

4. Care planning

Child’s Care plan

Every child in care has a care plan based on a comprehensive assessment of their needs that takes into account their wishes, feelings and aspirations for their future. The care plan informs the decision as to which placement (e.g., foster care or children’s home) will be most suited to meeting the child’s needs. Where children have established a pattern of going absent and missing from placements, their care plan should include a strategy to minimise the likelihood of the child going missing in future and how to respond if they do.
Looked After Child (LAC) Review

All care plans are kept under review. The review meeting (LAC Review), chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), considers the plan for the welfare of the child, monitors the progress of the care plan, and makes decisions to amend it as necessary in light of changed knowledge and circumstances. The IRO is also responsible for monitoring the implementation and management of the Plan outside of the LAC review.

Where children have gone missing from their placements, then their LAC review provides an opportunity to ensure that their care plan has been appropriately amended to address the reasons why the child was absent or missing and should include a strategy to prevent re-occurrence should the child be absent or go missing from their placement in future. For example, where a child goes missing from their placement to have more contact with their family, then the review provides an opportunity to consider the child’s views about how contact might be managed in future. Similarly, where there is evidence that a child is vulnerable to sexual exploitation, it may be necessary to convene a review to consider whether the placement is able to put in place a strategy to minimise any risk to the child, or whether it may be necessary to look for an alternative placement in order to keep the child safe. The LAC reviews provide a check that the placement remains suitable for meeting the child’s needs.

Placement Plan

Alongside the Care Plan, a Placement Plan is completed between the social worker and the provider of the child’s placement. The expectations as to how they will meet the child’s needs are set out in the Placement Plan, describing how the provider will maintain the child’s positive routines as part of their commitment to enable the child to experience a constructive placement, supporting them to achieve their potential.

The Placement Plan includes details about:

- any specific behaviour-management strategies that the provider is expected to follow;
- the provider’s role in meeting the child’s health needs;
- the provider’s role in supporting the child’s education; and
- the provider’s role in supporting contact with the child’s family, including information about any restrictions of contact.

The National Minimum Standards (NMS) for fostering services and for children’s homes, and the statutory regulations relating to these, require providers to have explicit policies and procedures in place and these must be followed whenever a child is missing.

These policies are expected to be compatible with Bristol’s missing from care protocols established by the Police and the local authority that operate in the area where the foster placement or children’s home is located. Standard 5 of The Fostering services: National Minimum Standards (2011) specifies the responsibilities of Fostering Services and Foster Carers in relation to children who go missing from care. It is expected that Fostering Services and Foster Carers follow local guidance and procedures and take appropriate action to find children who have gone missing. Standard 5 of the Children’s Homes: National Minimum Standards (2011) specifies the responsibilities of Children’s Home and the staff employed within each Children’s Home in relation to children who go missing from care. It is expected that Children’s Homes and staff follow local guidance and procedures and take appropriate action to find children who have gone missing.
5. **Placement matters**

The NMS for children’s homes (2011) and fostering services (2011) set out basic expectations about how providers should take into account the needs of the children who rely on their services.

**Communication**

Whenever a child goes missing from a residential home or foster home, the foster carer or the manager on duty in the residential home will ensure that the following individuals and agencies are informed within the timescales set out in Bristol’s missing from care protocol:

- the local police;
- the authority responsible for the child’s placement – if they have not already been notified prior to the police being informed that the child is Missing. Notification is likely to be by phone in the first instance followed up by email/written confirmation. It is not enough just to notify the child’s social worker. The registered manager of the children’s home or the fostering service must be responsible for ensuring that the accountable manager in the local authority has received the notification that a looked after child is missing and has initiated the appropriate actions;
- Parents and any other persons with parental responsibility must be informed as soon as possible that their child is missing unless there are good reasons connected with the child’s welfare for this to be inappropriate. At the point where the responsible authority is informed, agreement must be reached as to which professional will be responsible for informing the child’s parents – this will usually be the child’s social worker but may in some situations be the manager of the residential unit or the foster carer (if it is safe and appropriate to do so). A record must be made as to when parents have been informed, and what information has been given to them.

**Out of Local Area placements**

For some of Bristol’s children in care, an appropriate placement may be one outside of Bristol. In these cases, Bristol Child and Family Support Services should ensure that these children and young people have access to all the services they need. Providers of care for children living outside of Bristol have a similar responsibility for ensuring that the children they care for are able to make use of appropriate local services. Information about these services must be recorded in the placement plan that should match the information about the child’s needs included in their care plan.

6. **Risk assessment**

Where a child goes missing from care, it is necessary to undertake a risk-assessment and to have in place an agreed procedure for actions to be taken that reflects the level of risk identified. Bristol’s agreed protocol and procedures determine when it is appropriate to refer the missing child to the out-of-hours/emergency duty team and to the Police. The Bristol risk-assessment tool is agreed and co-ordinated with partners, specifically the Police, in order to streamline information-sharing and decision making.

Where it is known that a child has a possibility of going missing from their placement, this should be included in an updated risk assessment, completed by the child’s social worker, prior to any placement being made. This risk assessment should involve consultation with the child’s parents (if appropriate), previous carers (if applicable) and the child themselves. The Placement Plan will include the details about
Guidance for Children Missing from Care

this risk assessment where there is an history of the child going missing. It should also explain to the child what actions will be taken if they go missing from the foster home.

If a child starts to go missing whilst in care the Fostering Service (i.e. the Family Placement Team (FPT) social worker or FPT duty or FPT out of hours), in consultation with the Child’s social worker, will conduct the risk assessment. The child’s care plan must also take account of any risk that the child may go missing in future and any factors which may increase the risk to the child should they go missing. The Fostering Service and Foster Carer should contribute to this assessment.

Professional judgement will need to be used in deciding whether the criteria has been met for reporting the child as missing to the police (it is the Police who will define whether a person is considered Missing or Absent), and should take into consideration the circumstances of the child and the circumstances around their absence. This will include detailed consideration of:

- Any guidance contained within the child’s care plan.
- The legal status of the child.
- Age of child - e.g. 10 years or under; 11 to 14 or 15 up to 18 years of age.
- The maturity and general vulnerability of the child.
- The circumstances of the absence, especially concerns about state of mind e.g. unusual behaviour prior to disappearance, disappeared with no prior indication, or seemed troubled.
- Environmental factors including weather, time of year, time of day, community events.
- Family or relationship problems, or recent history of family conflict or abuse.
- Whether the child may not have the physical ability to interact safely with others or in an unknown environment, e.g. visually impaired, history of abuse or inappropriate adult/stranger relationships, Downs Syndrome, indiscriminately friendly etc.
- Whether the child:
  - lacks reasonable awareness of the risks associated with running away, incl. learning disabled.
  - needs essential medication or treatment not readily available to them e.g. inhaler, insulin.
  - Mental illness or psychological disorder that increases risk of harm to themselves or others.
- Previous behaviour patterns and history of the child, especially previous history of absence.
- Whether the child:
  - Has previously disappeared and suffered or was exposed to harm whilst missing.
  - Has a history or suspected suicide or self harm.
  - Has a tendency to drug, alcohol, or substance abuse/dependency.
  - is perceived as running to or from someone or a situation.
- Any circumstances within the foster home that may be relevant to the absence.
- Involved in violent and/or racial incident or confrontation prior to disappearance.
- The influence of peer groups, families or friends.
- The predatory influences on the child. e.g. others want to use the child for crime, sex or drugs.
• Whether the child is:
  o Known to associate with adults or children who present a risk of harm e.g. Sexual Offenders, Offenders against children.
  o An ongoing victim of bullying, harassment, or exploitation e.g. racial, sexual etc.
  o A victim or potential victim, of abduction, of forced marriage, female genital mutilation or trafficking, incl. for sexual exploitation.

• Whether there is a danger posed by the child to others and the risk of offending.

• Details of any locations, where the presence of the child will or will not be permitted, or that may be a cause of concern.

• Financial problems.

• Use of Facebook or any other social networking sites.

• School, college or employment problems.

• Any other particular circumstances at the time of the incident which might be relevant.

7. Categories of Absence

A police classification of 'Absent' when a child is reported as missing to the police is different to an 'Unauthorised Absence - 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. When a Child has been reported ‘missing’ to the police the police will inform the person making the report whether the report is categorised as ‘Missing’ or ‘Absent’.

A child is considered ‘Missing’ (see below for definitions) if their whereabouts are unknown. They remain missing until they are located and their well-being or otherwise is known.

However not all children who are missing from their foster or residential placement should be reported as missing to the Police. For example, a child staying with a friend without prior permission, or staying out longer than agreed when you know where they are. For each child there will be a space of time during which any absence without authority will not be cause for concern. This period will be different for each child and will be a period of “unauthorised absence - failure to return”.

Unauthorised absence – Failure to return

Some children absent themselves from 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 expected teenage behaviour.

Other examples of situations where unauthorised absence may apply are:

• Running away after a dispute.
• Failing to return on time
• Staying at a known location with a friend.
These children have taken ‘unauthorised absence – failure to return’, and would not usually come within the Police definition of ‘missing’. Instances of unauthorised absences should NOT normally be reported to the Police. If a child’s whereabouts are known then the Police will not consider them as ‘missing’ (unless the unauthorised absence causes concern for the safety of the child or there is potential risk to the public). When a child is categorised as an unauthorised absence the Police cannot enforce the return of a child. They have no power to do so if the child does not appear to be at risk.

If the assessment is that there is no apparent risk for their immediate safety but they are away from the foster or residential home without permission it is still important that foster carers/ residential unit manager inform the child’s social worker as soon as possible and that these incidences are recorded by the foster carer/ residential unit manager, as the child may subsequently go missing.

If the child’s whereabouts are known or suspected, a joint decision will need to be made by the foster carer/ residential unit manager and Family Placement Team (and child’s social worker if possible) as to whether to allow the child to remain at that location, albeit temporarily, or to seek their return.

A clear assessment needs to be made by the foster carer/ residential unit manager and Family Placement Team in each individual case as to the length of time that elapses before a child who is unauthorised absent needs to be re-categorised as missing. All unauthorised absences must be kept under regular review by the foster carer/ residential unit manager. It is important to consider whether there has been any changes to the possible risk factors that were considered in the Risk Assessment that would increase the risk of harm e.g. the child requires medication at a set time, weather conditions have severely deteriorated, etc.

Where a child whose whereabouts are not known and who cannot be contacted, is missing for more than 24 hrs, they must then be reclassified as missing and reported to the Police.

**Missing**

A child will be considered ‘Missing’ if:

- Their whereabouts cannot be established and 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.

If the foster carer, after consultation with Fostering Service, or manager of the residential unit assesses that the child is at risk due to any factor/s known, then the child is categorised as missing. Appropriate checks and reasonable steps should be taken to locate the child by the foster carers/ residential unit staff. Their absence should be given the highest priority and once the necessary checks have been completed the foster carer/ manager of the residential unit will need to report them to the Police as missing without delay and the assessed risks should be communicated. The foster carer should also report the child as missing to the child’s social worker or Emergency Duty Team (EDT). Foster carers must also inform the child’s social worker the next working day.

Reporting a child missing involves providing detailed information to the Police (see Appendix A & B). It is important that the carer makes it clear to the Police that they are reporting the child as missing. The carer should always ask for, and record a Police log reference number. The foster carer/ residential unit manager should keep written records of the circumstances of all incidents where a child is reported missing. Foster carers/ residential unit manager have delegated authority to provide information and details of the risk associated with a child to the Police when reporting them missing. A photo of the child should be taken as
soon as is appropriate after the child’s arrival at the foster/residential placement. Foster carers/residential unit manager will need to ensure that they always have a photo that is a good likeness of the child to be given to the Police if a child goes missing. After considering this and other information the Police will decide the risk level to be assigned to the case and the category of ‘Missing’ or ‘Absent’. The Police are the lead agency for the investigation of missing children.

When a child is missing from a foster home, the Police will visit the foster home to take details and check and make sure the child is not there. There may also be a need to remove personal items belonging to the child. Other children in the foster home and foster carers may need to be interviewed. The foster carer should make every effort to assist the Police in their investigation.

**NB. Where a Child has been missing from their placement for more than 48 Hours the Service Director Children and Family Support Services must be informed by the relevant Service Manager.**

**Absconder**

An absconder is a child who is absent from their placement without permission and who is subject to an order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process (e.g. remands, curfews, tagging, conditions of residence, other bail conditions, PACE detention or ASBO’s), or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings. A child in this category must be reported to the Police without delay. Foster carers/residential unit managers must also inform the child’s social worker or EDT.

Foster carers/residential Unit Managers should continue to make appropriate enquiries with other children in placement or by telephone with any people who may be able to assist with the investigation, unless they are requested not to do so by the Police. All information gleaned from these enquiries should be passed to the Police.

All missing cases where the child absconds should be subject to Multi-Agency Meeting (Police Critical Incident Review).

**8. Actions to be taken by Foster Carer/residential unit manager**

It is expected that the initial response by a foster carer/residential unit manager, in circumstances where a child is late home, will be to take all steps a responsible parent would take, to try to locate the child and to make a careful assessment of the risks to the safety of the child.

Foster carers/residential unit managers should always liaise with the Fostering Service or EDT (after midnight) before reporting a child as missing to the Police. When to do this will depend on the age of the child, the circumstances, and the child’s history.

Before notifying the Police, and in all cases of unauthorised absence and Missing from placement, efforts must be made to locate any child by the foster carer/residential unit manager, including making enquiries, checking likely locations and contacting people they might be associating with. This could include visits to addresses, search for the child, and making telephone calls. Details of all these enquiries should be recorded and shared with the Police. However if there are believed to be specific issues of risk to the foster carer in checking of locations, contacting people or returning a child to the foster house, then the foster carer should discuss with the Fostering Service, and where it is felt appropriate the Police should be contacted and asked for their assistance.
An absence is of concern where there is an indication that the child is unlikely to return within a short space of time or where there is immediate cause for concern for the child’s safety. At some point, depending upon the child and the circumstances, the absence will give rise to justifiable concern. At this point the foster carer will need to liaise with the Fostering Service or EDT (after midnight).

9. Return of the child

Where a child has been missing from their care placement, Child and Family Support Services will ensure that plans are in place to respond promptly once the child is located, including promptly informing the Police of the child’s return. If the child is located, but the professionals involved are unable to establish meaningful contact with the child, perhaps because they are under duress or being harboured, then the accountable staff will need to consider whether it is appropriate to apply to the court for a recovery order.

When the child or young person has been located, Child and Family Support Services will be responsible for making the decision about whether they should be returned to their placement.

Child and Family Support Services will also ensure that they have taken full account of the circumstances that led to the child running from their placement to avoid the child being returned to an abusive environment.

Return of the child to a Foster Carer

It is the responsibility of the foster carer to notify the Fostering Service, the child's social worker and Police of a child's return. The foster carer should also record the circumstances of the child's return and any reasons given by the child for being away from the foster home.

When a child is found or returns to their foster home, the foster carer will need to reassure the child of their commitment to them, as well as expressing their concern for the child's safety. The child might need to have the opportunity to talk to a person independent of the foster home, ideally prior to returning to the placement. It will be essential to assess their needs so that appropriate services and additional support can be provided, which could include:

- Barnardo's BASE;
- Connexions (offer support and guidance for young people);
- Reconstruct (local independent advocacy agency for children who are in care); or
- Bristol's Collaborative Service (offering 'wraparound' support in the community for children with complex needs).

Barnardo's BASE

BASE provides services to young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation or who are being sexually exploited. The service offers practical help to young people to help them deal with immediate difficulties they face, supporting young people to think about their lives and the relationships and situations they face, so that they make better decisions to keep themselves safer and healthier.
10. 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.

It may be delayed so that the relevant appropriate people can be present e.g. parent, child’s social worker etc. It is important to consider the timing of the check and the Police officer should liaise with the foster carer/Residential Unit Manager in this regard. Where a person goes missing frequently, it may not be practicable to see them every time they return. In these cases, a decision should be taken as to the frequency of these 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.

When a child has returned and a Police Safe and Well Check has not yet occurred but it is apparent that the child has been the victim of a crime whilst missing, or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person arising out of circumstances that have occurred whilst they were missing, then the Police must be called and asked to attend without delay. This is vital for the protection of the child and for the speedy recovery of evidence. In such circumstances, the young person’s clothing, mobile phone and trace evidence from their body, fingernails or hair may be crucial. In cases of alleged/suspected sexual abuse the child should be discouraged from washing and immediate advice sought from the Police. Equally if a foster carer/Residential Unit Manager becomes aware of the location of the scene of any crime committed against the child, or of the location of any crucial evidence (i.e. a used condom) they must notify the Police without delay. This will enable the Police to take steps to secure and preserve evidence. In cases of alleged/suspected sexual abuse the Police have access to specially trained officers, doctors and facilities designed to care for the victim and obtain evidence.

Return Interview

It is good practice that this interview takes place within 72 hours of the young person being located or returning from absence. It is especially important that a Return Interview takes place 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 exploitation; and/or
- has contact with persons posing risk to children.

A return interview is a more in-depth interview and is usually best carried out by an independent person (from the child’s care) 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
- try to prevent it happening again.

11. Multi-agency meetings

Where children run away persistently and/ or engage in other risky behaviour, such as frequently leaving their Placement to associate with unfamiliar or inappropriate adults, the Fostering Service/ Family Placement team, in consultation with the child’s social worker, should convene a multi-agency risk management meeting (Police Critical Incident Review). This will take place where the frequency is of concern. Because this is unique for each situation it is not possible to have a universal frequency trigger. The purpose of this meeting will be to develop a strategy with all relevant agencies for managing the identified risks to the child.

This is particularly important where groups of young people run away from their care placement or foster home together and are involved in substance misuse (including alcohol abuse), are being sexually exploited, or are committing offences. The care provider (Family Placement/Fostering Service) should ensure that multi-agency risk-management meetings take place regularly to review the strategy until the agencies concerned reach agreement that it has been effective in tackling the targeted concerns. Often children who repeatedly go missing are viewed as 'a problem' and insufficient consideration is given to the reason why they keep absenting themselves.

12. Looked-after children trafficked from abroad

A minority of Bristol’s children in care are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), and some of this group may have been trafficked into the UK and are likely to remain under the influence of their traffickers, even whilst they are looked after.

The assessment of need to inform the care plan will be particularly critical in these circumstances and must seek to establish:

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

Where it is apparent that a child has been trafficked into the UK a referral should be made using the National Referral Mechanism\(^1\) to the United Kingdom Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC)\(^2\).

In conducting this assessment it will be necessary for the local authority to work in close co-operation with staff in the UKHTC who may be familiar with patterns of trafficking into the UK. UKHTC staff should be able to advise on whether information about the individual child suggests that they fit the profile of a potentially trafficked child. All referrals should be sent, in the first instance, to UKHTC. First responders can either send completed referral forms by fax to 0870 496 5534 or by e-mail to UKHTC@soca.x.gsi.gov.uk.

13. Support for care staff

Support for Residential Home Staff

It is important that managers of children’s homes ensure that those caring for vulnerable young people are offered the support necessary so that they are equipped to deal with the challenges that face them when a child in their care runs away.

Staff teams in children’s homes are supported so that they can offer a consistent approach to young people’s care, including being proactive about strategies to divert young people from running away. All staff must understand the procedures that must be followed if a young person goes missing.

Children’s home staff are also trained on their services’ missing from care protocol. This is to be included in general training about safeguards for looked-after children. The competence and support-needs of care staff in managing missing from care issues should be considered during routine management appraisal and supervision.

Support and training for foster carers

Family Placement social workers will work with the foster carers they supervise to enable carers to develop the skills to anticipate the possibility of a child running away, and if possible to divert them from this course of action. Foster carers are also offered training so that they understand the importance of following the “Running or Missing from Home or Care” procedures, and to develop skills to enable them to discourage young people from going missing.

Foster carers need to counsel all children of the dangers and risks of leaving the foster home without permission. They should also make children aware of where they can assess help if they consider running away. Foster carers should also not exceed Fostering Service guidelines on the measures that they can take to prevent a child leaving their care without permission.

### Young People Missing from Care Process

**Actions when a child is defined as Unauthorised Absent**

- Carer to take reasonable steps to help the child return
- Carer should report episode to SW (during the day) or EDT (out of hours), FC service or agency
- If in house absent monitoring form to be completed and sent to Senior Practitioner: Children Missing from Care
- EDT to inform Commissioning team and Senior Practitioner: Children Missing from Care
- Child’s Social Worker to open a missing person record (LCS, under additional section) selecting absent category

**When found:**
- Child’s Social Worker to enter return date on missing person record
- If child is in care home, residential staff to carry out a debrief
- Senior Practitioner: Children Missing from Care to monitor patterns of absent episodes
- Risk management / strategy meeting held where appropriate

**Police do not need to be informed**

- If missing for more than 48 hours Service Director: Child & Family Support services to be informed

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**Actions when a child is defined as Missing**

- Carer should report episode to SW (during the day) or EDT (out of hours), FC service or agency
- If in house missing monitoring form to be completed and sent to Senior Practitioner: Children Missing from Care
- EDT to inform Commissioning team and Senior Practitioner: Children Missing from Care
- Child’s Social Worker to open a missing person record (LCS, under additional section) selecting missing category
- If residential consider whether Reg 30 needs completing

**When found:**
- Child’s Social Worker to enter return date on missing person record (in LCS)
- Police to conduct safe and well check
- Senior Practitioner: Children Missing from Care to contact Child’s SW to discuss appropriateness of return interview (according to risk)
- Risk management / strategy meeting held where appropriate
- Risk assessment to be updated
- If missing for more than 48 hours Service Director: Child & Family Support services to be informed

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**The police will ask the following questions to help determine if the child should be classified as missing or absent:**

- Is this person a cared-for or looked-after child? In what way?
- What is the specific concern on this occasion?
- What has been done so far to trace this individual?
- Is this significantly out of character? In what way?
- Are there any specific medical needs? What are they?
- Are they likely to be subjected to crime? What makes you think so?
- Are they likely to be a victim of abuse? What makes you think so?
- Are they currently at risk of sexual exploitation?
- Are they likely to attempt suicide? What makes you think this is likely?
- Do they pose a danger to other people? In what way?
- Is there any other information relevant to their absence?

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**Definition of ‘Reasonable Steps’**

Carer has attempted to contact both the child and all known friends and family; has checked social media; has looked for them in the local area or at any place they are thought to be (subject to risk assessment) and has attempted to arrange to pick up the young person either at their current location or form a nearby location if felt to be less of a risk.
Appendix A: Bristol Missing Young Person Joint Working Protocol:
Avon & Somerset Constabulary and Children & Young People’s Services

INITIAL REPORT
- Instigate investigation immediately
- Gather information and assess appropriate immediate response to risk
- Communicate risk to district

DUTY SERGEANT/INSPECTOR
- Assess risk and set clear investigative strategy
- Take ownership and direct initial actions
- Deploy appropriate resources
- MISPER co-ordinator to maintain overview

DETECTIVE SUPERVISOR
- Immediately aware of high risk
- Review medium after 48 hrs

REVIEW
- On a shift basis by Duty Inspector as responsible officer DI/DCI in compliance with policy
- Each to review investigation, dedicated resources and supervision
- Review for SLT by MISPER Co-ordinator for daily tasking

LONG TERM MANAGEMENT
- Clear investigative strategy and ownership
- Clear supervision
- Regular reviews
- Overview by MISPER co-ordinator

INVESTIGATION CLOSURE
- Safe and well interview
- Return interviews
- Ongoing support
- Intelligence dissemination

POST FINALISATION
- Quality assessment of response and investigative management
- Dip sampling
- Performance management

Multi-agency engagement
- Strategy requirement
- Harm reduction
- Multi-agency panel
- Information sharing

Specialist support?
- SIO
- POLSA
- Family support
- District SLT
- MISPER co-ordinator
Appendix B: Factors to be considered in formulating an investigative strategy (Police)

- a) Age of the person
- b) Child/Young person subject of a Child Protection Plan or subject of a Police Powers of Protection or Emergency Protection Order
- c) Subject to secure accommodation (welfare or Criminal?)
- d) Needs essential medication or treatment not readily available to them
- e) Belief that the person may not have the physical ability to interact safely with others or an unknown environment, e.g. amnesia, visually impaired, Downs Syndrome etc
- f) Mental disability or psychological disorder that may increase risk of harm to themselves or others
- g) Drug dependency
- h) Alcohol dependency
- i) Likely associates when absent
- j) History of self-harm
- k) General state of mind
- l) Likelihood of self return

Circumstances of disappearance (detail reasoning and evidence)

- m) Suspicion of murder
- n) Suspicion of abduction
- o) Suspected suicide or self harm
- p) Involved in violent and/or racist incident or confrontation prior to disappearance
- q) Out of character behaviour/actions e.g. unusual behaviour prior to disappearance, disappeared with no prior indication etc.
- r) Inclement weather conditions
- s) Family/relationship problems or recent history of family conflict/abuse
- t) Employment problems
- u) Financial problems
- v) School or college problems
- w) Ongoing victim of bullying or harassment, e.g. racial, sexual, homophobic, online, etc
- x) Previously disappeared and suffered or was exposed to harm whilst missing

Questions to help identify the risk (these questions will be asked by Police Call Handlers)

A new set of questions has been developed to help call takers note what risk the person faces. They are designed to assist in drawing a clearer picture and to probe to get more information where necessary.

The new questions are:

- Is this person a cared-for or looked-after child? In what way?
- What is the specific concern on this occasion?
- Is this significantly out of character? In what way?
- Are there any specific medical needs? What are they?
- Are they likely to be subjected to crime? What makes you think so?
- Are they likely to be a victim of abuse? What makes you think so?
- Are they currently at risk of sexual exploitation?
- Are they likely to attempt suicide? What makes you think this is likely?
- Do they pose a danger to other people? In what way?
- Is there any other information relevant to their absence?

The risk posed to an individual can rise and fall and the assessment can change with circumstances.
Foster Carers and residential Unit Staff should be able to provide this information to the police when reporting a young person ‘Missing’. Ensure that you are clear what category (Missing or Absent) the Police have recorded the young person under and what action is to be taken by whom.

**Police Call Handler Missing Person Question Set**

Name  
DOB  
Description  
Mobile  
Cared for?  
Extent of care?  
Whereabouts known?  
Any contact?  
Missing before?  
When/where found previously?  
Why missing?  
Medical condition/needs?  
Dangerous?  
Note left/threat?  
Suicidal?  
Specific concerns?  
Likely victim?  
Involved in crime?  
At risk of abuse or sexual exploitation?  
Where/when last seen?  
Who last seen with?  
Vehicle used?  
Direction of travel?  
Weapons?  
Personal possessions?  
With anyone?  
Intentions?  
Expected time of return?  
Actions taken by caller to locate person?  
Other significant information?  
Best contact person?
Appendix C: Barnardo’s Safe Choices

When a young person is assessed as missing from home and reported to the police, a missing person’s report will be generated (the Police will assess the situation based on the information provided at the time, if a person should be classified as missing. Where this is the case a missing person investigation will commence). The Missing Person’s Coordinator will then share all of the missing person’s reports with the First Response Team. The missing person’s reports will then be assessed using the criteria below to decide whether a referral to Safe Choices is appropriate.

Referral Criteria:

The young person must not:

- Be in the care of the local authority
- Have an allocated social worker

One of the risk indicators in the criteria for undertaking Return Interview must be present (Or any additional information from the police about other presenting concerns).

When a young person meets the above criteria, the Missing Person’s Report will be shared with the Safe Choices Team by First Response. All appropriate referrals will initially receive a letter, and then a follow up phone call offering them a return interview. The purpose of the return interview is to meet with the young person and parent/carer to assess and gain information regarding their missing episode and risk indicators alongside other presenting issues.

Dependent on the outcome of the return interview, the possible outcomes are: direct work provided by the Safe Choices Project Worker; re-referral to First Response for further assessment by a social worker; signposting to appropriate services to minimise risk.

One-to-One Direct Work

The support provided is young person centred and will include a range of support to address a number of issues, some of which include; exploration of push and pull factors associated with missing, general safety, safe relationships, sexual exploitation, sexual health and drug and alcohol awareness. In some cases where the young person has very specific needs, this will result in signposting or referrals being made to other specialist services. In cases where it is assessed that the missing episode was a one off and risk has reduced, there will be no further action.

Safe Choices Project has the benefit of being co-located with other services including Barnardo’s Against Sexual Exploitation project (BASE) and Barnardo’s Bristol Youth Links (BYL) Sex and Relationships Project. This is hugely beneficial when additional needs are identified in these areas, as young people can then be referred into the most appropriate service.

We also work closely with Senior Practitioner ROLAC and Child Missing from Care (Bristol City Council Senior Social Worker) who provides Return Interviews for young people in Local Authority Care and Avon and Somerset Constabulary Missing Persons Coordinator for Bristol. Mapping meetings are held regularly with the above and a BASE Project Worker to map missing trends across the city identifying vulnerable young people whose needs have not been appropriate met, patterns associated with recent missing episodes, and locations and individuals of risk to ensure children and young people are not falling through the gaps.