

**Missing Children Practice Guidance**

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[MISSING AND ABSENT CHILDREN PRACTICE GUIDANCE 3](#_Toc63109804)

[Missing and absent – What is the difference? 3](#_Toc63109805)

[Roles and responsibilities 3](#_Toc63109806)

[Missing Child Strategy Meeting 4](#_Toc63109807)

[Media alerts 5](#_Toc63109808)

[What is a Missing Profile? 5](#_Toc63109809)

[Buckinghamshire children placed in and outside of the county 6](#_Toc63109810)

[A child from another local authority placed in Buckinghamshire 6](#_Toc63109811)

[Return home interviews 6](#_Toc63109812)

[Planning for the return 7](#_Toc63109813)

[Links to Missing and Exploitation Hub 7](#_Toc63109814)

[What does good look like? 7](#_Toc63109815)

[Appendix 1 – How to record missing / found on LCS 9](#_Toc63109816)

[Appendix 2- Missing Profile 9](#_Toc63109817)

[Appendix 3 – Return Home Interview – R-U-Safe form 23](#_Toc63109818)

# MISSING CHILDREN PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a key duty on local authorities. Children running away and going missing from home or care is a safeguarding issue.

# Missing and absent – What is the difference?

*A child or young person is defined as ‘Missing’ if they are away from their home or placement, their whereabouts is unknown or cannot be established and the behaviour is out of character, and/or the circumstances of the child's disappearance or the child's vulnerability means that there is cause to be concerned for their welfare or safety.*

*‘Absent’ is defined by the police as meaning ‘A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be (and there is no apparent risk)’.*

# Roles and responsibilities

All those involved in the child’s life have a responsibility to ensure the missing child is located and safe from harm. However, specific agencies will have specific roles to fulfil when a child goes missing.

**The role of the police;**

* The police prioritise all incidents of children categorised as ‘missing’ from home or care as medium or high risk.
* Where a child is categorised as ‘absent’, the details will be recorded by the police who also agree review times and any ongoing actions with the child’s family, carer or responsible local authority.
* Police and other professionals including local authority and third sector staff (known to the child) will work together to share information and locate / communicate with the child.

**The role of the Team Manager in social care;**

* The Team Manager must at the point of a child being identified as ‘missing’ consider the risks and set clear time bound actions which should be recorded as a management oversight on the child’s LCS record. This must be monitored until the child is found.

**The role of the Social Worker;**

* To record on LCS details of the missing episode; details of missing episode ceasing; and the return interview information on LCS (see appendix 1 for flow chart).
* Analyse the information to support understanding of missing episode, drivers and how impact on the child’s care planning.
* Where required, the social worker must ensure a strategy meeting is convened.

**The role of IRO**

* As the corporate parent of children looked after the role of the IRO is to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child’s needs and to ensure that each child’s wishes, and feelings are given full and due consideration. When a child goes missing, there is an expectation that the IRO is informed and are actively involved in locating, planning for return and reducing the risk.

**Alert to HOS and Need to Know;**

* The social worker and their line manager will need to determine when a Need to Know[[1]](#footnote-1) notification needs to be completed and sent to Head of Service.

# Missing Child Strategy Meeting

Where a child is missing, i.e. whereabouts unknown, the first strategy meeting or discussion should be convened within the first working day of the child's going missing if possible, and a strategy meeting should be held at the latest within 3 days.

If the child returns prior to the meeting, the meeting can be cancelled, however where there are repeat concerns or a high risk to the child, it is recommended that a professionals meeting is still held.

The decision to convene the strategy meeting (or not to where there may be a defensible and legitimate reason not to do so) and a record of the meeting itself must always be recorded on the child’s electronic LCS record.

***The aim of a strategy meeting is to share information to determine risk and to agree which actions are going to be taken, when they will be taken and who will undertake them.***

Strategy meetings should consider (but are not limited to);

* Consideration of a hypothesis as to what the circumstances and motivation for the missing episode is.
* Making further attempts to contact the child/young person’s known relatives, friends, regular places of visit etc.
* Discussion and agreement of monitoring social media accounts.
* Planning the communication with relatives and friends regarding the concerns and the expectation that the relatives/friends will inform professionals should they obtain any relevant information.
* The use of mobile and social networking technology to engage the child/young person and / or ascertain their whereabouts.
* Updating the Missing Profile form (Appendix 2).
* Communication with other local authorities and local agencies with the information about the missing child/young person. This should include youth offending services, contextual safeguarding leads, and other social care/community safety departments.
* Partner agencies should share and receive information with each other based on what they need to know in order to take action to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.
* Seeking a Recovery Order.
* Notifying national authorities and agencies, such as Department for Work and Pensions and Child Benefit agencies.
* Appropriate legal interventions if there is any suspicion that the child may have been removed from UK jurisdiction.
* Contact with British Transport Police to identify if a child has been travelling using public transport.
* If the child remains missing a review strategy meeting should be held at least weekly until the child’s return.
* A record of the meeting must be circulated to all attending and must be held securely within each agency.

# Media alerts

* It is often necessary to consider use of publicity when trying to locate a missing child. However, this needs to be agreed via a strategy meeting where risks in publishing a media alert are explored carefully and any identified risks are mitigated against. It is well known, that a media alert can support to get a child back home but can also put the child at further risk of harm (in particular, for those children who are exploited).
* The Council’s press office and the police’s Missing Person Unit will also need to be consulted.
* A media alert will require the appropriate agreement of a Head of Service and Service Director.
* The child’s parents must be informed prior to a press release being made and consent should be received from them and/or those with parental responsibility.
* Legal Services should also be consulted where appropriate.
* Social workers should be aware that it is an offence for a person to publish material which is intended to or is likely to identify a child as being involved in court proceedings under the Children Act 1989. However, the court can give leave for this restriction to be waived if the child/young person’s welfare requires it.
* Where there is a care order/interim care order in place consent for media publicity must be gained in writing from the Director of Children’s Social Care. Good practice would also require Parent’s consent where possible, however this should not delay the media alert if determined it is necessary.

# What is a Missing Profile?

The Missing Profile (Appendix 2) provides key information to agencies including the police, which may support in locating the child. In addition, it can provide information within it to support risk management planning.

The Missing Profile is to be completed by the allocated worker for every Buckinghamshire child who has gone missing/absent from placement/home.

* The worker will give this Missing Profile to the Police (including police outside of the local area if a child has links to other policing areas, such as Metropolitan Police) when a child is reported as missing/absent.
* Once completed, a copy of the Missing Profile should be retained by the referring organisation. Children’s Services will upload their retained packs to Content Server within LCS.
* Missing Profiles are amended for every new missing/absent episode within or outside of strategy meetings.
* This Missing Profile *can* be completed proactively for a child where there is a hypothesis that they may go missing, to support forward planning.
* If a child is missing and returns in a shorter space of time (for example, they return within a 4-hour window) the allocated worker should discuss with their manager the appropriateness of initiating the Missing Profile.
* This should be used in conjunction with Return Home Interviews and to support information being shared at strategy meetings.

Factors to discuss with manager to determine whether this form should be used can include, but are not limited to;

* Previous short but repeated missing episodes.
* Concerns, recent or historical, from parents or carers regarding associates, change in behaviour etc.
* Recent offending behaviour.
* Absences from school.
* Stayed overnight/for a period of time at a family members/friend’s house.

# Buckinghamshire children placed in and outside of the county

**Children missing from their placement *in* Buckinghamshire;**

* Children will be reported to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub by Thames Valley Police via the missing and found reports.
* The MASH will then record the details on LCS which alerts the responsible team for the child.
* The responsible team will liaise with the police and, in the case of looked after children, the foster carer or placement provider and parents as necessary until the child is found.

**When a child goes missing from home in Buckinghamshire**

* When a child is not open to Children’s Social Care the history of the child and circumstances will be reviewed by a manager within the MASH and a decision made on whether this is for information only or if threshold for an assessment is met.

**Buckinghamshire child placed outside of County (i.e. home Local Authority)**

* The carers/placement or the local police (in which the child is placed) will often be the ones to alert the allocated Social Worker who in turn will need to record the missing episode, details of missing episode ceasing and return interview on LCS.

# A child from another local authority placed in Buckinghamshire

* If a child from another local authority is placed in Buckinghamshire, Thames Valley Police will alert MASH or Out of Hours Emergency Social Work Team in each case.
* The relevant local authority will be notified and liaised with.

# Return home interviews

Return home interviews should be carried out independently and be analysed to understand triggers for children going missing.

* RUSafe (Barnados) have a contract with Buckinghamshire Council to undertake return interviews and to report any concerns arising from those interviews to the Missing and Exploitation Hub alongside the allocated Social Worker and/or Team.
* For children placed outside of a 20-mile radius of Buckinghamshire the Missing Persons Co-ordinator will identify a suitable agency in that area to undertake the return interview.
* The allocated social worker must analyse the Return Home Interview information to support understanding triggers for missing episodes and must incorporate this into future planning. (Appendix 3- R U safe form Return Home Interview form). This should take place *within* 72 hours of the child being found.

# Planning for the return

Where a child goes missing from their care placement or home, planning needs to start for their return *before* they are located. In addition:

* 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 Children’s Social Care will consider whether a crime should be recorded and/or an application for a recovery order is required.
* Children’s Social Care will consider whether the child should be returned to their placement/home.
* If the child is looked after, an early Looked After Child Review may be convened to address issues for the child and placement.

# Links to Missing and Exploitation Hub

There is a need to ensure that individual children who go missing are seen in the context of the wider community and there is consideration given to contextual safeguarding. The Missing and Exploitation Hub will support individual social workers to understand contextual risks that may be present which would impact the ability to locate the child.

* All children who go missing 3 times or more *within* 90 days will need to be referred to the Missing and Exploitation Hub by the allocated social worker.
* Where there is no allocated social worker, the Missing Coordinator will raise the child in the Missing and Exploitation Hub Touchdown Meeting.

# What does good look like?

Children who go missing / absent can be at risk of significant harm, and it is the duty of all professionals involved to ensure efforts are made to understand the reason for the missing / absence and plans are made alongside the child and / family to support them to stay safe.

Each missing episode is not the same and for each child it can vary in length, geographical location, means of transportation and reason for missing. Often, there is not one sole reason a child goes missing and professionals should hold multiple hypothesis based on evidence available and the information provided by the child themselves as to what the triggers are which cause them to go missing.

Multi-agency planning is crucial in trying to locate a child but is also essential when trying to manage the risk and vulnerabilities a child may present when they do go missing.

Missing episodes in children can be considered in 4 phases:

* Methods being used to locate the child whilst managing risk and vulnerabilities.
* Planning for their return, immediate and longer-term planning.
* Planning for what should happen should they go missing again.
* Understanding / intelligence gathering on reasons for missing episode.

Most crucially – is ensuring a relationship-based approach is adopted to develop a trusting environment so the child feels able to share information about their missing episode which will support professionals in keeping them safe.

Think about the following when dealing with a child who has gone missing;

* *Who knows this child well?*
* *How can they support to locate the child?*
* *Are they someone who the child doesn’t see as a “threat” / worry”? (This may be someone in a non-statutory role and / or an extended family member or friend).*
* *What happened before they went missing? Did they get a phone call? Did someone pick them up in a car? Were they behaving differently?*
* *What are the contextual risks faced by the child?*
* *What geographical location are they linked to?*
* *What have their previous missing episodes (if any) told us*?
* *Who will be the first person to speak to the child should they be located* *and how can we ensure that person is available to the child?*
* *What strengths / hobbies / interest does the child have that may be built upon?*
* *What disruption activity can take place from other professionals – such as Child Abduction Warning Notices?*
* *How can we try and prevent the child from going missing again?*
* *What additional support / activity can be put in place when the child does return?*
* *If the child is likely to go missing again, what will be the immediate actions that will happen?*
* *How are we liaising with other geographical areas the child may have links to? Not just police but other local authorities? How will they know if our child is in their area?*
* *What do we know about their social media usage?*

***Use and analyse the information you already have in the Initial Notification Pack in conjunction with the Return Home Interviews – this will assist in understanding patterns, themes and any other significant information which may support keeping the child safe.***

# Appendix 1 – How to record missing / found on LCS

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# Appendix 2 - Missing Profile

**Missing Profile**

**S** Sexual Health, Sexualised Behaviour & Risk Taking

**A** Absent Education / Attendance (Education / Training)

**F** Familial Abuse & or Problems at Home

**E** Emotional Health & Physical Condition

**G** Gangs, Groups, Associations, Coercion & Control

**U** Use of Technology & Sexual Bullying

**A** Alcohol & Drug Misuse

**R** Receipt of Unexplained Gifts, Money or Rewards

**D** Distrust – Running Away & or Non-Engagement

**Guidance**

* Dial 101 to report child/young person missing
* Obtain occurrence number from Police
* Complete or update this Missing Profile
* Ensure a copy of this Missing Profile is sent to police dealing with the missing episode
* Ensure a copy of this Missing Profile is sent to the Missing and Exploitation Hub [exploitationreferrals@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:exploitationreferrals@buckinghamshire.gov.uk) ***(The Hub will support in identifying patterns / trends and provide you with any additional and relevant information on contextual risks)***
* Inform Emergency Social Work Team that this Missing Profile has been completed and where it can be found on the LCS record. [**eswt@buckinghamshire.gov.uk**](mailto:eswt@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)
* If child/young person returns or is located call 101 and EDT to update
* Don’t forget to use this profile in conjunction with Return Home Interviews to gain greater understanding of your child’s missing episodes / patterns / triggers / risks and vulnerabilities

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Date reported to Police: |  | Occurrence no: |
|  |  |  |

**Please note;**

* If the reporting service is not social care, a referral to social care should also be made as soon as possible following the report to the police, and this form will need to be completed by those who know the child.
* Where there is risk of a child/young person going missing, the completion of this as a pre-prepared notification tool can be initiated through Child in Need or Child Protection Plans. In most cases this will be with the knowledge and consent of the child/young person and their families (the normal considerations relating to significant harm apply regarding consent).

**Missing Profile**

**Childs / Young Persons Details**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Name: |  | Date of birth: |
| Gender: |  | Height & build: |
| Eye colour, hair colour, glasses, tattoos, piercings any distinctive visible marks: |  | Ethnic Origin / Ethnic Appearance: |
| Mobile number(s): |  | |
| Social network information: (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, snapchat names / identifiers) |  | |
| Email address: |  | |
| Address missing from: |  | |
| Education or school attended: |  | |
| Social Worker: |  | Tel No: |
| Home County; |  | |
| Name of IRO: |  | |
| Subject to Child Protection Plan: |  | |
| Legal Status:  (e.g. Section 20,  Section 31) |  | |

**Childs Photo**

|  |
| --- |
|  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Is the photo recent?  (If yes please provide approximate date taken &  provide copies) |  |

**Informant Details**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name: |  |
| Contact number(s): |  |
| Email address: |  |

**Circumstances**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Date last seen: |  | Time last seen: |
| Where last seen: |  | |
| By whom: |  | |
| Who were they with? |  | |
| Agreed date to return: |  | Agreed time to return: |
| Where did the C/YP say they were going? |  | |
| What was the C/YP wearing?  (Please provide a detailed description) |  | |

**Enquiries made to locate the child/young person**

**Telephone numbers called;**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Tel: | Time: | Result: |
| Tel: | Time: | Result: |
| Tel: | Time: | Result: |
| Tel: | Time: | Result: |
| Tel: | Time: | Result: |
| Thorough room search completed? | Yes: No: | Date of room search: |
| Time of room search: |  | Completed by: |
| Any relevant information discovered: (e.g. phones, documentation or clothing) |  | |
| Other areas and addresses known to frequent: |  | |

**Family / Friend details**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Mother: | Name: | Tel: |
|  | Address: | |
| Father: | Name: | Tel: |
|  | Address: | |
| Sibling: | Name: | Tel: |
|  | Address: | |
| Sibling: | Name: | Tel: |
|  | Address: | |
| Boyfriend / Girlfriend: | Name: | Tel: |
|  | Address: | |
| Friends / Associates/ Acquaintances: | Name: | Tel: |
|  | Address: | |
| Friends / Associates/ Acquaintances: | Name: | Tel: |
|  | Address: | |
| Friends / Associates/ Acquaintances: | Name: | Tel: |
|  | Address: | |
| Friends / Associates/ Acquaintances: | Name: | Tel: |
|  | Address: | |
| Any other relatives with close contact: |  | |

**Transport and Financial**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Oyster card/Travel Card no: |  | |
| Finance | Cash: £ | Bank card: |
| Bank account details: |  | |
| Passport number: |  | |

**Risk Assessment**

Please note some information in the following risk assessment may not apply to missing child or young person, therefore please state ‘not applicable’ or ‘not known’. If you state yes, please provide reasons / rationale for saying yes. This is what key to understanding the risks.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Medical condition or mental/ psychological disorder or illness:  (e.g. epilepsy, diabetes, schizophrenia, bi-polar) |  | |
| Medication taken: |  | |
|  | How often: | When next due: |
| Effects of not taking medication: |  | |
| Known drug or alcohol user: |  | |
| Sexually active: | Yes: No: | |
| Risk of Sexual Exploitation: |  | |
| Risk of Criminal Exploitation; |  | |
| Recent behaviour changes: |  | |
| Suspicion suicide or self-harm: |  | |
| Involvement in violent / racial homophobic, DV incident prior to disappearance: |  | |
| Money issues: (e.g. drugs debt) |  | |
| School or college issues: |  | |
| Ongoing victim of bullying or harassment: |  | |
| Previously absconded, reported missing and exposed to harm whilst missing: |  | |
| Suspicion of abduction or murder: |  | |
| Any other risk factors: |  | |

**Any other information which may assist in locating the Child/Young Person**

|  |
| --- |
| ***Please note how best to engage the child should they be sighted by someone – think about their experiences of trauma and how this can cause them to behave? What is their behaviour telling us?*** |

**Definitions**

Based on the DfE ‘Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care’ (2014) the definitions which should be used are set out as follows:

* ***Child:***anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. ‘Children’ and ‘young people’ are used throughout this guidance to refer to anyone under the age of 18.
* ***Young runaway:***a child who has run away from their home or care placement or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.
* ***Missing child:***a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.
* ***Looked after child:*** a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
* ***Responsible local authority:*** the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child’s care and care planning.
* ***Host local authority:*** the local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority’s area.
* ***Missing from 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.
* ***Care leaver:*** an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989. Care leavers cover young people from ages 16-24
* ***Away from placement without authorisation:*** a looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place where they are expected to be, and the carer **has concerns** or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.

It is important to note that when a child meets these criteria, the same procedures should be followed as if they were missing.

**Definition of Child Sexual Exploitation**

CSE - applies to those under 18 and involves exploitative situations usually they receive 'something' i.e. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money, as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities.   
  
CSE can be committed by individuals or by groups and can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet / mobile phones.  
  
The policing purpose in properly identifying victims of CSE is to protect the young persons and enable us to target the perpetrators, the only way we can identify these groups or individuals is through constructive interaction with the victims.

# Appendix 3 – Return Home Interview – R-U-Safe form



1.  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)