What does Missing child and Authorised Absence mean?

Missing child: a child reported as missing to the Police by their parents/carers because their whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be a victim of crime and/or there is a risk of harm to themselves or someone else;

Authorised Absence: An unauthorised absence is any instance when a child is not where they should be but their whereabouts is known.

**Why might children go missing?**

One or more of the following ‘push’ factors can precede a missing incident; any one factor may be a trigger for a child going missing:

* Not feeling accepted or safe in the environment where children should be safe and happy
* Family breakdown and young people being drawn into parents’/carers’ conflicts
* Domestic abuse
* Poor family relationships including step parent issues
* Physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse or neglect
* Issues over appropriate boundaries
* Bullying (including e-safety/sexting etc.)
* Teenage pregnancy (or fear that they may be pregnant)
* Fear of forced marriage or female genital mutilation

**‘Pull’ factors can include:**

* Staying out with peers, boyfriends, or girlfriends
* Wanting to be with someone they can only be with by running away
* For someone in Care, running to be near friends and family
* Wanting freedom and independence
* Caught up in risky behaviours such as substance misuse or crime
* Grooming and/or coercion by a peer or an older person
* Fear of repercussion for self or family if they don’t go

**The immediate risks associated with going missing include:**

* Child sexual exploitation
* Involvement in criminal activities
* Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and exploitation
* Alcohol/substance misuse
* Deterioration of physical and mental health
* Missing schooling and education
* Vulnerable to trafficking

**For further information, support or advice please contact:** **exploitation.team@towerhamlets.gov.uk**

**What to do if a child is missing**

**Reporting**

Parents/carers and schools are responsible for reporting to the Police when a child goes missing from home or school. Reports of missing children should include as much identifying information as possible and full details of the circumstances.

**Investigation**

The Metropolitan Police are the lead agency for investigating and finding missing children. They will risk assess the notification they have received (for more information please reference LBTH Missing Protocol 2022).

**Planning for Return**

From the moment a child is reported as missing, their parents/carers, Social Worker and Police will also start planning for when they are found. This is particularly important for children who repeatedly go missing as it may help to prevent future instances.

All agencies’ shared objective is to ensure that the child’s immediate needs are met and that arrangements are put in place to minimise the risk of them going missing again

**Prevention Interviews**

Police will undertake a face-to-face Prevention Interviews as soon as possible after the young person has returned. The 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 against them.

**Independent Return Home Interviews**

The Exploitation service support workers will be allocated the for an independent Return Home Interview, carried out in accordance with detailed local guidance. Wherever possible, this interview will take place in a neutral setting, within 72 hours of the young person returning home. Where a young person expresses a preference, the interview can take place at their home or school.