

FACTSHEET: Safeguarding Children Missing from Home or Care, or Away from Placement without Authorisation

The purpose of the Missing Young People Operational Group is to bring together the key agencies working with children and young people who go missing from home (including children in care and children and young people living with their families). The group is accountable to the Sheffield Children Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP). The operational work will be undertaken by the Youth Justice Service (YJS) and South Yorkshire Police (SYP) who are committed to working together with regard to the safeguarding of all children, including looked after children, and the management of their missing periods. This will include effective and appropriate information sharing and decision making in the best interests of individual children and young people. There are two dedicated South Yorkshire Police Missing Persons Investigators who work closely with the local authority, to reduce the number of repeat missing episodes and to keep children safe within the city.

Definition

The multi-agency approach to the management, recording and investigation of missing children is designed to ensure that potential risk is assessed in every situation and that each incident is given the correct priority and the most appropriate response. The missing episode itself should not be seen as a discrete incident but will almost certainly be a symptom of other ongoing issues. It is important to deal with the missing episode, locate the missing child and ensure that they are returned safe and well. It is also important that ongoing work to identify the causes of missing incidents occurs and thus prevents them reoccurring in the future.

Definitions are as follows:

- Missing – ‘A child reported as missing from home or care to the police by their family or carers, whose whereabouts are not known and where there is an assessment that the child may be at risk or pose a risk to others’
- Away from placement without authorisation – ‘A looked-after child whose whereabouts are known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be, and where the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the LA or police.’

If a child is away from placement without authorisation, a judgement needs to be made by the carer whether there is an immediate safeguarding concern. If there is not an immediate safeguarding concern then the social worker (or EDT if out of hours) needs informing by the carer. If there is an immediate safeguarding concern then the police need informing though this should not be reported as a missing person report.

Reporting

When the police receive a report about a child, they will seek to establish what the concerns are and determine which definition applies. All children defined as ‘missing’ will be actively investigated by the police. When a child is categorised as ‘Missing’ then the police will notify the Missing Young People Team (MYPT) by sending a ‘missing email notification’.

MYPT will circulate a daily list of children who are missing or away from placement without authorisation to managers in order that progress can be continually monitored.

Initial Response and Strategy Meetings

An Initial Response form will be sent to the allocated worker following notification of each missing episode if the young person is still missing and should be completed within 24 hours of being sent by the Missing Young People Team in order to share with partner agencies and reduce risk during the missing episode.

A Missing Young Person Strategy meeting should always take place if:

- A child has been missing for a period of 72 hours or more; and/or
- A child has gone missing 3 times or more in any 28 day period; and/or
- The child is felt to be at risk of significant harm as a result of their missing episode(s) and/or
- There is any other pattern of behaviour which causes concern.

If the child has a social worker allocated then this social worker should chair the Missing Young Person Strategy Meeting. If there is no allocated social worker the meeting will be chaired by a Social Worker for Prevention and Intervention from the relevant Multi-Agency Support Team.

Action Plan

On return the police should carry out a ‘safe and well check’. If there are concerns as a result of these checks the police will record these on a Gen 117 form, which will be sent to the Sheffield Safeguarding Hub if the child is not known or to the child’s social worker if they have one.

The Missing Young People Team arrange for an Independent Return Home Interview to be carried out by staff based within the Youth Justice Service. Information obtained during this interview is fed back to allocated professionals by the MYPT.

Where the child is looked after, living in fostering or residential care, the carer must inform the social worker and the police of the child’s return.