

Fostering

Foster Care Policy

Missing Children

The Trust Board has granted the Chief Executive of the Sandwell Children's Trust the authority to approve this document.



Sandwell
Children's Trust

Foster Care Policy: Missing Children

A child will be defined as 'Missing' if their whereabouts are unknown and:

- (a) The circumstances are out of character; or
- (b) The context suggests the child may be;
 - (i) The subject of a crime; or
 - (ii) At risk of harm themselves.

A child will be defined as 'Absent' if the following criteria are met:

- (a) The child has deliberately or carelessly absented themselves; and
- (b) This is not out of character or there is an apparent explanation for them going absent on this occasion; AND
- (c) The child is expected to return; AND
- (d) The child is not expected to suffer or cause harm whilst absent; AND
- (e) The level of risk does not justify police intervention at this time.

Foster carers have clear roles and responsibilities if children go missing from placement.

The carer needs to inform the Police that the child is missing from placement. The police will require information as follows.

- Name and gender of the child (including all names and aliases);
- Date of birth and age;
- Description of the child and their clothing;
- The child's home address and if relevant the child's family home address;
- The location the child is absent from;
- Circumstances of the absence, including any signs of pre-planning (have they taken any money/clothing etc.);
- Whether the child told anyone they intended to leave, including if they have left a letter or note;
- The child's mobile phone number and if they have taken their mobile;
- If any contact has been made with the child, including if a message has been left on the child's mobile phone and/or if a text message has been sent;
- Locations where the child may have gone, including places where they were found previously;
- Details of any friends and associates they may be with;
- Name, address and telephone number of the reporting person and their relationship to the child;
- Addresses that the reporting person has already checked (including time/date and details of who lives at the addresses visited).
- Any regular medication taken by the child.

Please note that we do not expect carers to check possible addresses prior to the police being informed.

Photographs

Two recent photographs of the child (face and full body length) should be retained by the carer for missing from care purposes. Copies of these photographs should also be held on the child's electronic file. Digital photographs are preferable and they should be regularly updated.

Immediately after contacting the police, the carer needs to inform Sandwell Children's Trust. During working hours, the child's social worker and the carers' supervising social worker must be informed. The carer needs to telephone the child's social worker and in their absence speak to either the duty worker or to the social worker's manager. Additionally, if the supervising social worker is not available the carer needs to pass the information either to the duty worker or the manager. It is not sufficient to leave a message or send an email. Outside working hours the Emergency Duty Service needs to be informed.

Recording

The carer needs to keep clear and accurate records of their actions when a child has gone missing. Recordings need to reflect who was informed and the time they were spoken to.

Return home

When a looked after child returns from a missing episode, a protocol needs to be followed by the child's social worker (see foster carers' handbook for details). The carer needs to inform the police and the social workers if a child returns voluntarily.

Good practice would indicate that the carer makes the child welcome, tells them they are glad the child is safe and does not interrogate them about their whereabouts. No sanctions should be applied