

**“Missing”
Improvement Workshop**

By

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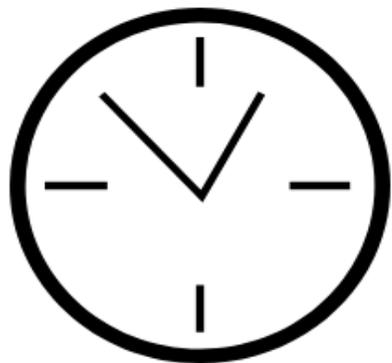
In this workshop you will hear a case study about a missing child; you will consider some of the reasons that 'push' a child to go missing, and some of the risks they face when they are 'pulled' into unsafe situations.

You will learn about the picture in West Sussex, and what challenges exist as we seek to protect this group of children.

And finally, you will learn what we need to do – to respond to a child when they go missing, when they are found or return, and after we have listened to them and discovered what happened.

Missing children and young people

Objectives



A child will be reported missing **every 2 minutes** in the UK

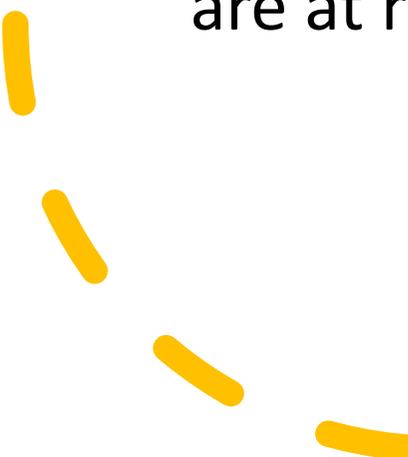
Background

Annually in the UK, an estimated 80,000 children go missing in over 210,000 reported incidents

Although it is hard to quantify what proportion come to harm while missing, missing children are at significant risk of harm



Children running away and going missing from care, home and education poses a significant operational challenge for the children's partnership, with Children's Society identifying that **100,000 children** run away from home or care in the UK every year.



When children run away they are at risk of physical abuse, sexual exploitation and are forced to use risky survival strategies.

What about missing children in West Sussex what is the local picture?

39% of children missing were our own
Looked After Children
20% of missing children were not open to
services.

In West Sussex last year (Jan 2019-Dec 2019)

On average 10 children were reported missing every 24 hours.

On average 70 children were reported missing each week.

On average 304 children were reported missing each month.

In 2019 a total of 3644 children were reported missing in West
Sussex



Even if a child does not come to direct harm while missing, they can nevertheless be at substantially increased risk.

Research by the Children's Society found that 11% of missing children had been ***“hurt or harmed while away from home on the only or most recent occasion”***.



Other research has found that one in every eight young people reported missing had been physically hurt and one in nine had been sexually assaulted while away.

Research has also shown children are more likely to have to resort to unsafe strategies whilst away; 18% admitted to sleeping rough or staying with someone they just met, and one in five to stealing, begging or doing “other things” in order to survive.

Most worryingly, missing children are at greater risk of being exploited, with seven in ten victims of Child Sexual Exploitation going missing from home at least once.



What happens to children when they go missing ?

Clare's story – Missing People Charity -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pYtBxjeydU>



The video you have just seen highlights some of the dangers children face when they go missing.

Why do children go missing?

Children go missing for lots of reasons, these are often referred to as 'Push & Pull' factors. When we are trying to understand what is happening for the child, we must **adopt a 'whole child' approach**. We can see missing as a behaviour that a child is using to get their needs met – these may be complex as a result of a range of needs, or more straightforward to understand and response to an isolated incident.

Mental Health and Self-harm

Mental health issues can be a trigger for some children to run away and in the most extreme cases children go missing with the intention of hurting themselves or to take their own life. A Safer Return, report by charity missing People showed that

One in five (21%) children who went missing shared information which suggested they had depression or another mental health issue – and

One in eight (13%) presented as at risk of self-harm and **4%** of suicide.

Children said that going missing was an attempt to escape from their mental health issues for a while, for example by spending time with friends, drinking alcohol or taking drugs, or as one child put it *“a distraction from the thoughts going around in my head”*.

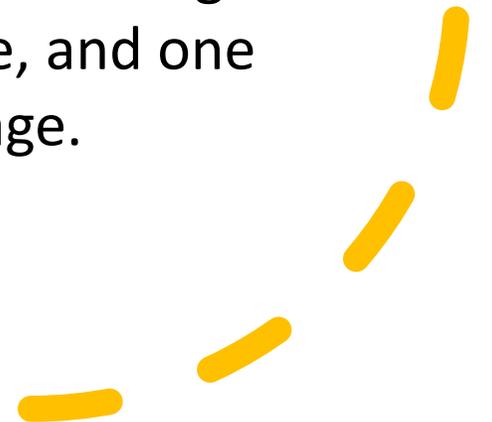
Most Importantly - One in four children (24%) who were not known to any services presented as at risk due to depression or another mental health issue at the time of their RHI. For at least some of these children, the RHI was their first interaction with a professional regarding their mental health and an opportunity to signpost or refer to CAMHS or other appropriate services.

Problems at School

Low Self Esteem/ Confidence/ Loneliness

When Missing People Charity asked children about what school is like for them, more than half of the children (51%) that went missing said that had issues with truancy, poor school attendance or exclusion from school.

These are wider vulnerabilities that contribute to more than two in five (42%) identified as having low self-esteem or poor self-confidence, and one in five (20%) lacking friends their own age.



Unhappy in care

Difficulties arising from being in care were frequently identified as a trigger for the missing episode. Half (50%) of looked after children mentioned placement or care home issues as contributing to them going missing, while one in three (35%) said they went missing in order to spend time with family.

Looked after children are at high risk of being reported missing. Nationally, 1 in 10 looked after children are reported missing each year compared to 1 in 200 children in the general population. Looked after children were also more likely to go missing on multiple occasions; 57% were reported missing two or more times compared with 36% of other children.

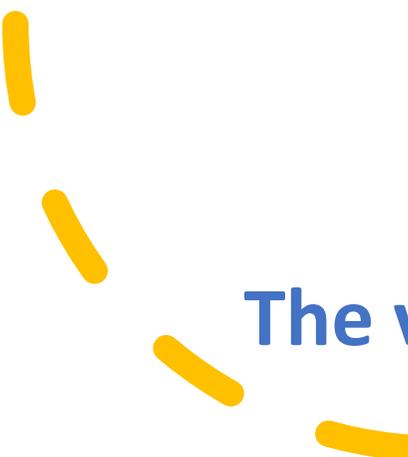
Research suggests that as well as being at heightened risk of going missing, looked after children are also particularly likely to be harmed while away. They are more likely to have experienced abuse, neglect or trauma in the past, so when missing they are at a heightened risk of exploitation or of physical or sexual abuse. They are also more likely to be specifically targeted for sexual exploitation as *“perpetrators target children’s homes specifically because of the high vulnerability of the children in them and how easily they can make contact with the children.”*



What happens to children when they go missing ?

Clare's story – Missing People Charity -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pYtBxjeydU>



The video you have just seen highlights some of the dangers children face when they go missing.

Criminal or Sexual
exploitation

Peer influence

Gang affiliation

Unhealthy / harmful
relationship

Alcohol / drug
misuse

Trafficking

Pull Factors:

These are the things that gain young person's attention, admiration and affection often that often tap into their insecurities or desire for acceptance and status

Getting a buzz and the excitement of doing something risky or forbidden

Feeling accepted

Receiving alcohol, drugs, money or gifts

Being offered somewhere to stay where there are no rules

Being given lifts, taken to new places and having adventures

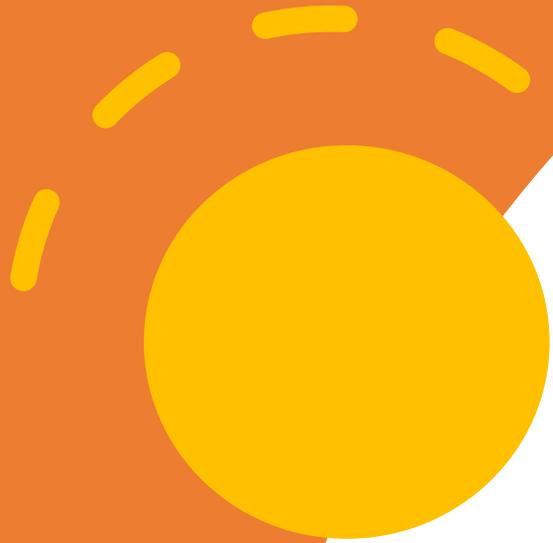
Being part of an alternative scene, e.g. group/gang or music scene

Meeting somebody who thinks they are special on the internet



Whatever the reason the child has gone missing,
we must be holistic in our understanding –
and to do this we should:

- (a) consider the wider needs, vulnerabilities, strengths and resources of the child or young person; and
- (b) focus on their wider life circumstances and recognise them as more than 'a child who has been missing'.



Part 2

What do you need to do
when a child goes missing...

When a child goes missing or runs away from home, care or school, they are at risk.

The first part of this guidance therefore refers to protecting all children from the risks associated with going missing, whether they are looked after children or children who live within their family home

Many children will exhibit normal adolescent behaviour in testing boundaries and it is **not** helpful to consider every incident of lateness or absence for all people as missing. Young people must not be reported missing as a behaviour management tool. However, some children will need to be treated as missing immediately due to their vulnerability.



Step 1

Report the child missing

Reporting a Child is Missing - Contact the Police on 101

It is the responsibility of parents and carers to report a child missing to the police to 101.

Information to give the police should be gathered before the call is made. This includes a check of their room to see what might be missing, what the child was wearing when last seen, time and place last seen, any other contact they have or information from a friend or school about where they were last seen, with whom, and what they think they were doing. Other important information to give to police is about risk of harm – e.g. is the child known to be exploited? by whom? Where? When? is it likely this is happening now?



When Sussex Police receive a call reporting a child missing, the call handler will conduct an initial risk assessment to determine the appropriate status.

The police will prioritise all episodes of children 'missing' from home or care to investigate the disappearance and attempt to locate the young child prior to them suffering any harm.

The Police investigation and all resulting actions will be proportionate to the risk level and recorded on police recording system – 'NICHE'



Step 2 Police Risk Assessment/ Investigation

High

The risk posed is **immediate** and there are substantial grounds for believing that the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability, or may have been a victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger. If the child is known or believed to be at risk of exploitation, they must initially be categorised as 'high' risk missing.

Medium

The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger, or they are a threat to themselves or others.

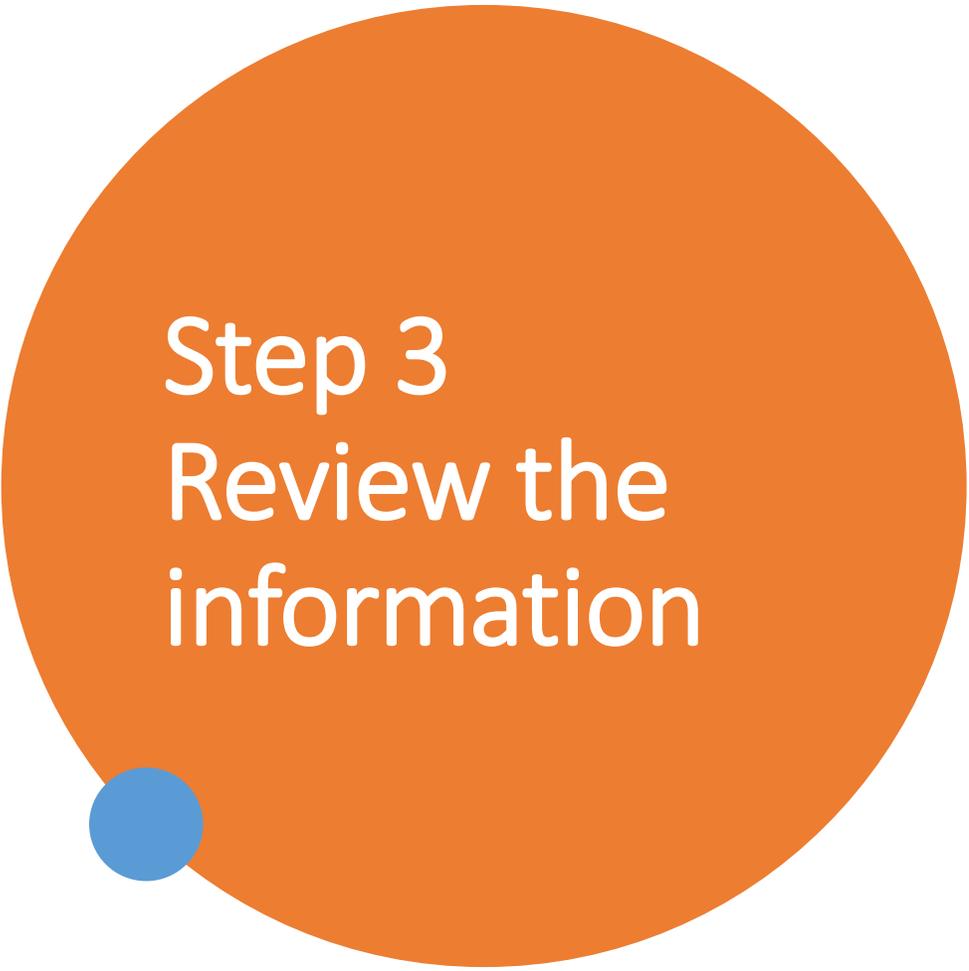
Low

In line with NPCC (National Police Chiefs' Council) guidance it is no longer appropriate to classify children aged 17 years or under as low risk missing persons.

Once a case is generated on the NICHE system as “MISSING”, an Initial Investigating Officer will be appointed.

The Initial Investigating Officer and all subsequent officers will carry out a thorough investigation in line with the latest published Sussex Police Policy on “Missing Persons”.

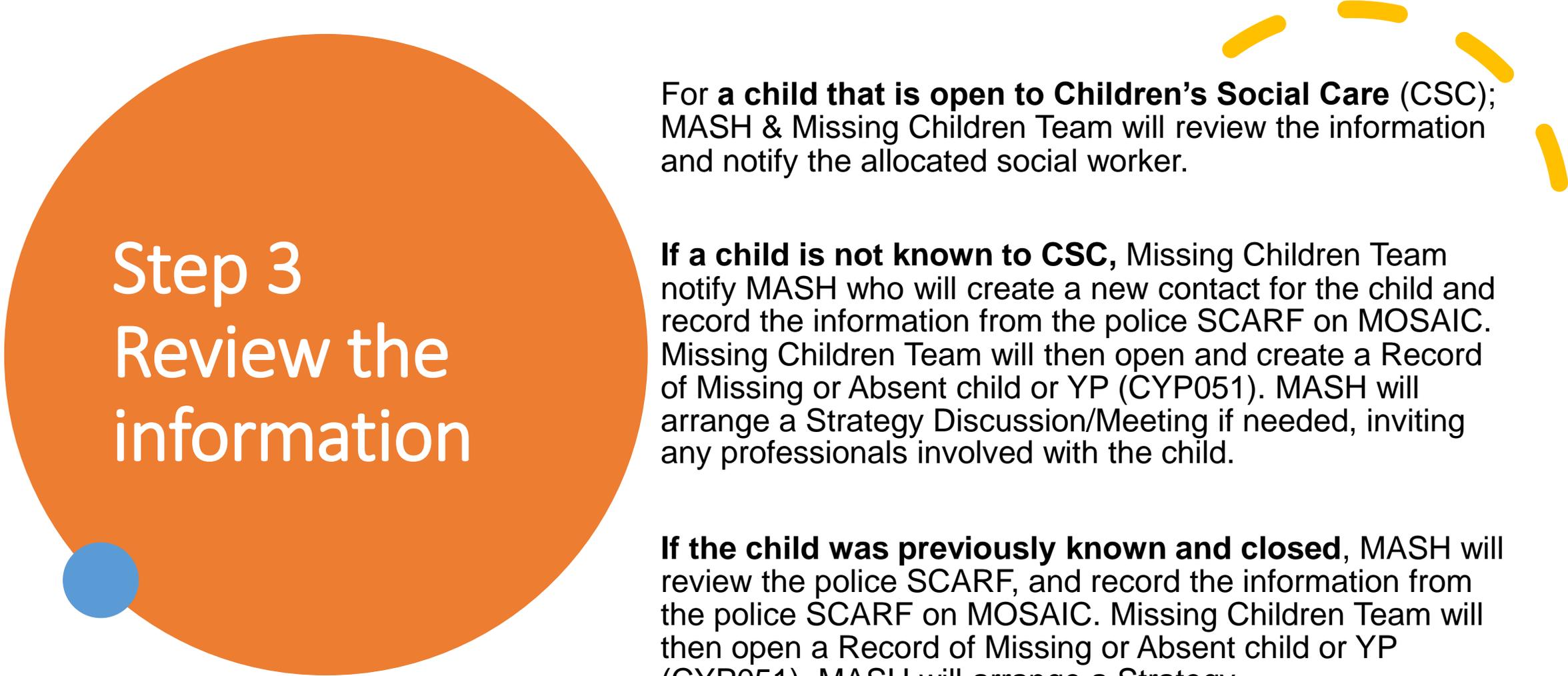
When the NICHE report is generated it will be sent to MASH and to the CSC Missing Children email address
(Missing.Children@westsussex.gov.uk)



Step 3 Review the information



If the child placed in West Sussex by another local authority, MASH will (if needed) create a new contact for the child and record the information from the police SCARF on MOSAIC. Missing Children Team will then open and create a Record of Missing or Absent child or YP (CYP051) and send the Police SCARF to the placing authority. MASH will arrange a joint Strategy Discussion/Meeting if needed, inviting any professionals involved with the child.

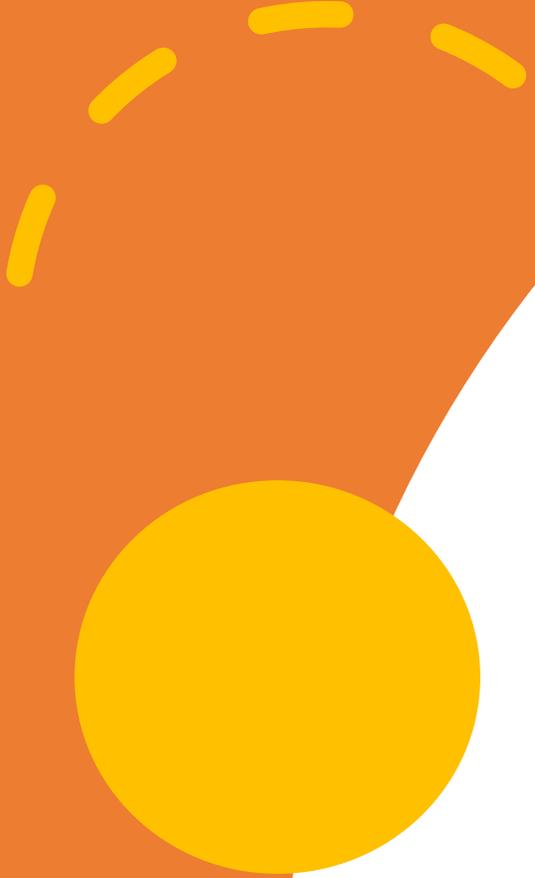


Step 3 Review the information

For a **child that is open to Children's Social Care (CSC)**; MASH & Missing Children Team will review the information and notify the allocated social worker.

If a child is not known to CSC, Missing Children Team notify MASH who will create a new contact for the child and record the information from the police SCARF on MOSAIC. Missing Children Team will then open and create a Record of Missing or Absent child or YP (CYP051). MASH will arrange a Strategy Discussion/Meeting if needed, inviting any professionals involved with the child.

If the child was previously known and closed, MASH will review the police SCARF, and record the information from the police SCARF on MOSAIC. Missing Children Team will then open a Record of Missing or Absent child or YP (CYP051). MASH will arrange a Strategy Discussion/Meeting if needed.



For all notifications of missing reports by police, the Missing Children Team will record the missing episode onto MOSAIC (CYP051), and also onto the Missing Children Database.

Please note that when a child that has been placed
by West Sussex in another county
goes missing the placement will inform the allocated social worker and
MASH.

So that we can support the social worker and keep accurate information about missing children, it is essential that Missing Children's team are notified, preferably with a copy of the police notification .

**Please ensure placement/lead professional notifies
Missing children Team via email
(Missing.Children@westsussex.gov.uk)**

Step 4

What are the known and likely risks to the child whilst they are missing?

Some children will need to be treated as high risk missing immediately due to their vulnerability. It may be that this has already been decided as part of the child's plan however, the circumstances may differ and will require a judgement to be made by the person receiving the initial notification. If in doubt, this should be discussed through the line management chain – without delay.

Risk factors demanding escalated and urgent interventions include:

- Any case where the risk of significant harm in even a single future missing episode is very high;
- Cases where it has been identified that immediate action is necessary to ensure the safety of the child

When risk identified:

- **Social Worker:** to inform Practice Manager, IRO if the child is looked after, CP Chair if on a CP Plan. If the child is looked after and placed outside of West Sussex the social worker must inform the Missing Children Team via Missing.Children@westsussex.gov.uk. Social worker to put a case note summary on mosaic.
- **Practice Manager:** to take lead role of coordinating immediate safety plan with Missing Police Team. PM to add a Case Note Summary including plan on MOSAIC.
- **Practice Manager:** to arrange and Chair Strategy Meeting with Missing Police Team as soon as practicable to agree further action that is required to locate and see the child, and plan for when child is found. If high level of complexity or risk **Group Manager** should Chair the Strategy Meeting
- **Practice Manager:** to inform Group Manager and if particularly high levels of risk indicating a significant level of harm or reputational risk.
- **Group Manager** to inform Service Leader who should complete 'Need to Know' document to Head of Service. GM to add a Case Note Summary including oversight of plan on MOSAIC.

Step 5

Children who have been missing for more than 24 hours, and are still missing need to have a strategy discussion

All strategy requests are sent to MASH including missing children

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Missing Police Team attend as a participant for children who are still missing.

A strategy meeting will be held when a child has been missing for 24 hours, or has been missing for 3 or more times within a four week period. The purpose is to ascertain the current level of risk/vulnerability and to formulate the strategy to find the child. It will also determine where the child is to be returned upon being located (note, this is not a forum for care planning).

Do not wait 24 hours to convene a strategy discussion if the risk is immediate

In considering the strategy to locate a missing child, discussions should consider what information each agency holds, both historical and current, in relation to *this* specific episode:

- **Harm**; what is the nature of harm? What is the evidence for this harm? Is the risk posed immediate, is it significant? Are there any additional complicating factors – age, communication, learning needs etc
- **Patterns**; is there a pattern of missing episodes that indicates either the nature of harm, specific or particular activity or locations?
- **Network**; what is the child's network? Family, friends, peers and associates – any known names, young people and/or adults the child may be in contact with/going to and associated risks or protective factors?
- **Travel**; what means of travel has the child used – foot, bike, car, taxi, bus, train? How has this been facilitated (money, people, organisation)?
- **Accommodation**; Any known places the child may be/travelling to/likely to visit, any known addresses of friends/family.

It is important to distinguish between that which is fact, that which is opinion and that which is hypothesis.

This is particularly important when considering 'risk factors',

for example a child who is missing can be considered at risk of Child Exploitation

on what basis?

the fact they are missing and vulnerable does not necessarily equate to an active risk of Child Exploitation and it is important that we work on a proportionate balance of probabilities basis.

Actions must be drawn up with clear timescales, with clarity of who is doing what and when:

- **Agency Checks**; who will contact Health, Education, Police, Probation, Community Safety, Anti-Social Behaviour Teams, other Local Authorities, Business Crime Reduction Partnership (as required)
- **Network**; who will make contact with identified persons including the child? How will they do so and when/at what intervals?
- **Travel**; dependent upon the pattern and mode of behaviours, have discussions been had with British Transport Police/local train and bus companies? Have images been shared with relevant agencies?
- **Other partners**; does the young person frequent local places/restaurants, eg. McDonalds/Subway etc. Does contact need to be made? CCTV for example?
- **Publicity**; is publicity required? If the child is Looked After by the Local Authority, this should be agreed by the Head of Social Care/Assistant Director. The family should be informed.

NB A strategy discussion can be a sit down meeting or a series of phone discussions – the key determinant is urgency

Outcome of Strategy

The discussion must decide whether a Child & Family Assessment is required under section 17 Children Act 1989; whether single or joint agency enquiries/investigation is required under section 47; whether a multi-agency planning meeting is needed and for those not looked after whether an ICPC is required – this determination is made according to the threshold of ‘significant harm’.

It is the responsibility of the Chair to make a provisional arrangement for a reconvened strategy in the event of the child continuing to be missing, or upon return, if there is evidence they have experienced harm.

Step 6

Children who have been missing for more than 24 hours

- **Group Manager** to inform the Service Leader using the 'Need to Know' template with the summary of missing circumstances, background, identified vulnerabilities, length of this missing episode and missing history, actions agreed at strategy meeting with dates, risk assessment and plan for when child is located.
- **Group Manager** to add Case Note Summary to mosaic.
- **Service Leader** to inform Head of Social Care and gain permission for media release and consult parents about any decision to publish information. Case note to be added by Service Leader to mosaic.
- **Head of Social Care** to review Need to Know document, seek assurance regarding any actions if required and advise DCS if necessary. Case note to be added by Head of Social Care to mosaic.

Step 7

If a child has been missing for more than 72 hours, and within 7 days

Group Manager: to Chair 2nd Strategy Meeting to include cross local authority police teams involved, social worker and social care support staff, school Head of Year or Safeguarding Lead, foster carers or Registered Manager of children's home and other relevant professionals working with child and family. Ensure note taker is booked for the meeting.

- Review vulnerabilities and risk assessment, actions taken and outcomes of those actions, and ensure that all possible steps are being taken to locate and return the child; update Service Lead.
- Review media actions taken and seek consent of Head of Children's Social care if required.
- Agree steps to be taken when child is found, for those subject to CP liaise with CPA (consider Review Child Protection Conference) and liaise with IRO for CLA.

Group Manager: to add Case Note Summary to mosaic

Service Leader: to provide summary of missing circumstances (updating Need to Know document) and actions being taken for Head of Social Care. Case note to be added by Service Leader to mosaic.

Head of Children's Social Care: 'Need to Know' document to DCS who will advise Chief Executive and Cabinet Members if required.

Case note to be added by Head of Social Care to mosaic.



Step 8

If a Child Remains Missing for a longer period of time:

Group Manager will formally review all cases each week until the child is found.

Head of Service and Director of Children's Services should formally review plan at monthly intervals – case must always remain open

Children who run away or going missing are at significant risk of harm. In addition to the problems that contributed to them running away, children face a number of dangers whilst away from home or care.

Even if a child does not come to direct harm while missing, they can be at substantially increased risk, and it is important that the child is offered support at the earliest opportunity following their return from missing, to protect them from harm they may be suffering and reduce further risk.

What next - Next Month

I will be talk to you about the Return Home Interview (RHI) which is a valuable intervention in protecting and safeguarding children who go missing and a way to identify the different sources of harm or risk of harm missing children are exposed to and ensure these risks are dealt with and reduced in the future.