Missing Children and Return Home Interview Process

Head of Service – Prevention and YOS

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# Introduction and Purpose

This document provides local guidance to Children’s Social Care (CSC) on the actions that Social Workers take alongside the Independent Return Home Interview (RHI) process where a child open to CSC returns from being missing; this includes guidance on relevant preparations to be made where a Looked After Child is placed outside of Somerset. It also provides guidance to the Family Intervention Service (FIS) on the actions to be undertaken in operating the Independent Return Home Interview (RHI) process when any child returns from being missing.

# Relevant Guidance

[Children Missing from Care, Home and Education](https://www.proceduresonline.com/swcpp/somerset/p_ch_miss_care_home_ed.html)

[Children Missing from Education](http://www.proceduresonline.com/swcpp/somerset/p_ch_missing_educ.html)

[Child Missing Education - School Process Chart](http://www.proceduresonline.com/swcpp/somerset/files/cme_school_process.pdf)

[Child Sexual Exploitation – SSCB](http://sscb.safeguardingsomerset.org.uk/working-with-children/cse-protocols/)

[Children and Families that go Missing (Including Unborn Children)](http://www.proceduresonline.com/swcpp/somerset/p_ch_fam_go_missing.html?zoom_highlight=MISSING)

[Misper casework process - Return Home Interviews](file:///T:\Teams\Team%208\POLICIES%20PROCEDURES%20GUIDANCE\FLOW%20CHARTS%20AND%20PROCESSES\Misper%20casework%20process%20-%20Return%20Home%20interviews.pdf)

# Performance and Quality Standards

* 1. The child must be offered an Independent Return Home Interview within 72 hours of the Family Intervention Service being informed of the child returning to their home or care setting.
  2. We expect that 100% of those eligible for a face to face interview will be offered one.
  3. Out of all children offered a return home interview we expect that 100% of all those that accept this will be completed within 3 working days.
  4. We will aim to have no more than 10% of children refusing return home interviews

# Quality Standards

* 1. A notification is received by YOS & Prevention Duty from the Police and via LCS for each child Missing / Return Episode – this will be reassigned to the local area Family Intervention Service work tray in LCS.
  2. Area Team Leaders and Professional Practitioners monitor their area work trays and reassign to the relevant worker, whether that is the Family Intervention Worker holding the case or the dedicated Misper worker, **within 24 hours** during core working hours.
  3. If the referral is for a child under the age of eight years old this will be directed to Children’s Social Care by Somerset Direct.
  4. The allocated Worker will check Children Social Care LCS and FIS EHM records for information including known risks and will also identify any agencies that are already involved including YOS.
  5. The allocated Worker will attempt to contact, via phone, the child and parents/carers to arrange an interview, if this has not been possible within the 72 hours attempts will continue for up to 5 working days. This should be done at different times of the day to maximise the chance of success. There will be a minimum of 3 attempts with one outside of core working hours.
  6. If contact is unsuccessful, then the allocated Worker will send a letter. If the child is under 12 the letter will be sent to the parent/carer. If the child is 13 or older, then letters will be sent to both the parent/carer and the child **unless** the child is over 16 and living independently in which case the letter will be sent only to the child. The letter will explain the process and an interview will be offered as well as details on who to contact.
  7. If no contact is made the allocated Worker will complete the Independent Return Home Interview paperwork on LCS giving an explanation as to why contact was not made. See [Misper casework process - Return Home Interviews](file:///T:\Teams\Team%208\POLICIES%20PROCEDURES%20GUIDANCE\FLOW%20CHARTS%20AND%20PROCESSES\Misper%20casework%20process%20-%20Return%20Home%20interviews.pdf) flowchart for guidance.
  8. If contact is made but interview is refused, then the allocated Worker will send a letter with information about services available and complete the Independent Return Home Interview paperwork on LCS giving an explanation as to why the interview was refused. See [Misper casework process - Return Home Interviews](file:///T:\Teams\Team%208\POLICIES%20PROCEDURES%20GUIDANCE\FLOW%20CHARTS%20AND%20PROCESSES\Misper%20casework%20process%20-%20Return%20Home%20interviews.pdf) flowchart for guidance.
  9. If successful contact is made an interview will be offered.
  10. If the child subsequently refuses to engage in interview, parents and / or carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence they may be aware of and details recorded on the Independent Return Home Interview paperwork.
  11. If interview is accepted the allocated Worker will complete the Independent Return Home Interview with the child.
  12. The allocated Worker will complete a Child Exploitation (CE) screen for children where appropriate, all missing children over the age of, and including, 13 year olds will require a CE Screen, and follow the Somerset Safeguarding Children’s Partnership process unless a Social Worker has completed a new screen since the reported missing episode.
  13. The allocated Worker will also complete the Missing from Home Risk Assessment and Prevention Plan for ALL cases where there is no allocated Social Worker unless one of the reasons set out on the first page of the document applies. Evidence of why a prevention plan has not been completed must be recorded as a case note on the child’s record on LCS.
  14. Once the interview is completed the Independent Return Interview paperwork will be completed on LCS within 48 hours.
  15. If the child gives consent, the allocated Worker will share the outcomes of the Independent Return Interview with the placement or parent where appropriate. If the child does not give consent the allocated Worker will inform the placement that the interview has been completed, on what date, but that consent to share details has not been given.
  16. The allocated Worker will generate an email to the allocated Social Worker for Child in Need (CIN) / Child Protection (CP) / Child Looked After (CLA) cases and those going through Assessment, it will include the date of the Independent Return Home Interview and request them to complete or update a Missing Prevention Plan.
  17. Where there is a need for further action, it is the responsibility of the Social Worker or, where there is no allocated Social Worker, the Family Intervention Service/Misper allocated Worker to ensure that all referrals and other follow up actions occur in a timely fashion depending upon the level of risk.
  18. If multiple missing episodes occur when a previous episode is still open the allocated Worker will finalise each individual missing person episode on LCS for each occasion but will only complete the Missing Return Home Interview form once, including all additional missing incidents.
  19. If the child is a current open case with the Family Intervention Service (FIS) a significant event case note will be entered into their EHM record by the allocated Worker or the Misper worker.

# Children Open to Somerset Children’s Social Care who go missing

* 1. Children open to Children’s Social Care, who are not Looked After
     1. When a child goes missing, it is the primary responsibility of the child’s carer (who will usually be the person who holds parental responsibility for the child) to take reasonable steps to ensure that the child is found and to liaise with the relevant professional agencies to locate the child and to ensure his/her safety.
     2. Where Children’s Social Care is involved with the family on a CIN or CP basis, our role is to offer support and guidance to the child and family and work in partnership with them and other agencies to ensure that the child’s needs are being met, including the need for protection.
     3. As with any other event of concern in the life of a child, where a child goes missing, the allocated Social Worker should consider and assess the responses of the carer(s) and form a view as to how appropriate they are. This should include consideration, with their Team Manager, of the level and type of risk to the child.
     4. The Social Worker should also consider whether it is appropriate to call a Strategy Meeting with all involved organisations to discuss risks to the child and actions to reduce these, including a plan to find the child and how to safeguard them on their return.
     5. The Social Worker should record the missing episode on LCS.
     6. The Social Worker should ensure that the Case Summary on LCS reflects any current concerns regarding the child going missing and a summary of actions required.
     7. The Social Worker should ensure that Child Exploitation (CE) risks are reviewed and banner updated where appropriate.
     8. If a Child Protection Plan is in place, the Social Worker should inform the CP Coordinator that the child is missing.

**When any child, open to Children’s Social Care returns from being missing, as soon as the Social Worker is made aware, they will:**

* Make meaningful contact with the child within 48 hours and record this as a ‘Missing return SW follow-up contact’. – Case note
* Prepare or update the Missing Prevention Plan.
* Email a request for a Return Home Interview by sending the child’s name, DOB and contact details to Family Intervention Service at: [FISenquiries@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:FISenquiries@somerset.gov.uk)
  1. Children open to Children’s Social Care, who are ‘Looked After’
     1. When a Child who is ‘Looked After’ goes missing the Social Worker will consider with their Team Manager, the same working day, the level and type of risk to the child.
     2. Where appropriate, call a Strategy Meeting with all involved professionals/agencies to discuss risks to the child and actions to reduce these, including a plan to find the child and how to safeguard them on their return. (If a child has been missing for 24 hours a Strategy Meeting must be called and further Strategy Discussions held at a minimum of every 72 hours, thereafter, dependent on level of assessed risk until the child has been located and visited by the Social Worker or the Police.)
     3. Ensure the missing episode and associated risks are reflected in the Care Plan and Case Summary on LCS.
     4. Ensure that Child Exploitation (CE) banners are updated as appropriate.
     5. Ensure the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is made aware.
     6. Ensure the placement provider is involved, where appropriate.

**When a Child who is ‘Looked After’ returns from being missing the Social Worker will:**

* + - Ensure the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is made aware.
    - Make meaningful contact with the child within 48 hours and add details to a ‘missing return SW follow up contact’ case note.
    - Prepare or update the Missing Prevention Plan.
    - Email a request for a Return Home Interview by sending the child’s name, DOB and contact details to Family Intervention Service at: [FISenquiries@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:FISenquiries@somerset.gov.uk)

# Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Where the missing child is an unaccompanied asylum seeker

* + - The process will operate as for other children
    - The Social Worker will advise Family Intervention Service of any need for interpreting services

# Somerset Children Looked After Placed Out of Area

* 1. **When commissioning external care placements, the Placements Team will reach agreement with the provider (and the host authority, if the placement is outside Somerset) to ensure that:**
     1. The Somerset Social Worker is notified of missing incidents within one working day of the missing episode beginning.
     2. The contract identifies the name and contact details of the Other Local Authority’s Officer responsible for missing children.
     3. It is clear whether the host authority will undertake an Independent Return Interview or not.
     4. If so, how the outcome of these will be communicated to the Somerset Social Worker and in what time period.
     5. If not, how the need for an Independent Return Interview will be notified to Family Intervention Service who will attempt to make telephone contact.
  2. **Where a Somerset Child Looked After is placed out of area and the Social Worker is made aware that the child is missing, they must:**
     1. Ensure that the host authority where the child is placed outside Somerset is informed.
     2. When the Social Worker is notified that the child has returned, they must ensure that the provider and the host authority (where the child is placed outside Somerset) is informed and that the agreed Independent Return Interview process for that placement is triggered.

# Placements in Somerset of Children from Other Local Authorities

* 1. **Where a child placed in Somerset by an external local authority goes missing:**
     1. The other Local Authority is expected to inform Avon and Somerset Police.
     2. When the child returns from being missing, the Police will include this with notifications to the Family Intervention Service who will contact the placement and seek to offer an independent Return Interview to the child.
     3. When the return home interview is completed, or it has been refused by the child, Family Intervention Service will send the interview form to the named Social Worker in the other Local Authority. The form will be shared with the placement by Family Intervention Service if the child consents, or if there are immediate safeguarding concerns. In all other situations, the placement will be advised to seek information from the child’s Social Worker.