**My Foster Child is Missing**

**Standards and Regulations**

**Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:**

* NMS - [Standard 5 - Missing From Care](http://www.minimumstandards.org/fost_five.html).

**Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:**

* TSDS - [Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/files/fost_care_tsd_standards_guid.pdf);
* TSDS - [Standard 4 - Know how to communicate effectively](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/files/fost_care_tsd_standards_guid.pdf).

**See also:**

* [West Yorkshire Joint Protocol for Children Missing from Home or Care](https://westyorkscb.proceduresonline.com/files/pr_missing.pdf);
* [Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/cse.html);
* [Extremism and Radicalisation](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/extreme_radical.html).

**Top Tips: missing children**

Below are some top tips if your foster child/young person has gone missing or is at risk of going missing:

* Know as much information about the child/young person;
* Have a recent photo;
* Develop an Individual Child Safe Care Plan for them;
* Develop strategies to minimise the risks;
* Help them to understand the dangers and risks of leaving the foster home without permission;
* Look out for behaviours that may indicate they are planning to leave;
* Develop a positive relationship with them;
* Listen;
* Show you care about them;
* Make them aware of where they can access help if they consider running away;
* Welcome them back;
* Keep a record.

When a child comes to live with you, their social worker will make you aware of any previous occasions when the child has gone missing or if they have concerns that this is something they may do in the future.

The child’s Placement Plan should also consider any likely risk of the child going missing, and include measures designed to reduce or prevent the child from going missing. The Placement Plan should also include any information that would help facilitate the location of the child should they go missing.

The care provided should minimise the risk of the child going missing; however a child/young person should be aware that they need to take some responsibility for their own safety, dependent upon their age and understanding.

You should talk to the child/young person about the risks of running away and provide them with information on where they can get help if they are worried about something or feel like running away.

The likely risks young people face when they go missing will vary depending on their age and level of understanding.

There might be a variety of reasons why young people go missing, but it is always an indicator that something is not right in their life. It is through communication that you are most likely to understand and deal with the issues that made them go. This could include peer group issues, family contact or other reasons. On the other hand, the young person might not be used to people being concerned about their whereabouts and they might not understand that you are trying to keep them safe and look after them.

If a young person living with you, has gone missing, and they have done this before has gone missing whilst with you or before, you should look out for signs or patterns of behaviour that usually happen before they go missing. This may help you talk to them to prevent them from going.

You should know consider what measures you can take to prevent a child from leaving without permission and put these in place. The use of persuasion and your relationship is the most powerful tool that you have to prevent them from going.

When the child is **missing without your permission but you know where they are**, you will need to treat the situation differently to when you don’t know where they have gone. In these situations where a child is absent without permission you should act like a responsible parent and take all practical steps to establish the child’s location and to ensure that they return without delay. You should record that the child/ young person is absent without authorization and inform the social worker who will need to record on the child’s electronic file.

The following checklist is a good tool to help you think about the level of risk to the child and what action should be taken:

1. Is this event significantly out of character?
2. Have they done this before?
3. Is there a time you expect them to return?
4. Who are they with?
5. Have you been in contact with the child?
6. Is the child likely to be subjected to harm or a crime?
7. Is the child a danger to themselves or others?
8. Is the child likely to attempt suicide?
9. Does the child have any specific medical needs?
10. Is there a specific concern?
11. Do you know the child's whereabouts?
12. Do you believe them to be involved in crime?
13. What were their intended actions when last seen?
14. What have you done to locate the child?
15. Is there any other significant information you are aware of?

**If your foster child is missing and you do not know where they are**, and they are not found within a reasonable time frame: one hour for under 12's and two hours for over 12's (unless stated otherwise in their Placement Plan), you must contact the child’s social worker, duty worker or the Out Of Hours team. They will advise about reporting the child missing to the police.

If your foster child is missing, you should do all that you can to find the child including working with the police where necessary.

You will need to give a description of the child, including what they were wearing and an up to date photo, their legal status and any other information you think will help.

You should also inform your supervising social worker as soon as possible.

You should clearly record your actions when a child is missing. You should also make a record of how and when they returned and keep a detailed record of their explanation about why they went missing. and what actions you will put in place to try and prevent a further occurrence. This information should be shared with the responsible authority and, where appropriate, the child’s parents.

The child’s social worker should arrange a **return home interview** with the child to talk about why the child went missing and to ensure the child is safe and well.

**Definitions**

There are different terms which are used in relation to missing children:

[Statutory Guidance On Children Who Run Away Or Go Missing From Home Or Care (January 2014)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/275701/Statutory_guidance_missing-children.pdf) uses the following definitions:

**Missing Child:**

A child reported as missing to the Police by their family or carers.

**Missing from Care:**

A Child in Care who is not at their foster home or where they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts are unknown.

**Away from Foster Home Without Authorisation:**

A Child in Care whose whereabouts are known but who is not at their foster home or the place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the Police.

**Young Runaway:**

A child who has run away from their home or foster home , or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.

[Guidance issued by the College of Policing (2016)](https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons/#definition-of-missing) states that all reports of missing people will sit within a continuum of risk from ‘no apparent risk (absent)’ to high-risk cases requiring immediate, intensive action. The appropriate level of police response in each case will be based on initial and on-going risk assessment in each case.

Police will not be sent to cases where children/young people are defined as being ‘low risk missing (absent)'. Instead the onus will be on foster carers to take steps to locate the child/young person, with regular review by the Police and escalation if there is a change to the circumstances that has increased the level of risk.