Children’s Services

Procedures for Children Missing from Home and Care

**Version FINAL v2.5**

**Date: November 2023**

# About this document

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| **Title** | **Procedures for Children Missing from Home and Care** |
| **Purpose** | **This document outlines the procedure to be followed when a child or young person is reported missing from either home or care.** |
| **Reviewed by** | **Jackie Clementson** |
| **Originally Approved by** | **Lisa Bursill** |
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| August 2019 | Final v 1 | First Issued | Mike Hall |
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#### Intended Audience

This document has been issued to the following people for Review (R) Information (I) and Review and Sign off (S). The Child in Need procedure is mandatory and must be shared with all staff and partners working with Children in Need and their families.

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| **Name** | **Position** | **S/R/I** |
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| All staff |  | I |

**PROCEDURES FOR CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE**

These procedures should be read in conjunction with:

* [Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership Guidance for Children and Young People Missing from Home and Care](http://surreyscb.procedures.org.uk/hkpho/procedures-for-specific-circumstances/children-missing-from-care-and-home)
* Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from Home or Care – Department of Education, January 2014.
* Detailed procedures regarding Return Home Interviews and LCS Recording of missing children

1. **DEFINITION**

Missing - Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.

All reports of missing people sit within a continuum of risk from ‘no apparent risk’ to high-risk cases that require immediate, intensive action. Risk assessing is dynamic and can change with any new information.

**Police definition**

Anyone including children can be risk assessed as:

**No Apparent Risk** – there is no apparent risk of harm to either the subject or the public.

**Low Risk** – the risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but minimal.

**Medium Risk** – the risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.

**High Risk** – the risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.

If a child is assessed as No Apparent Risk a short review time will be set for actions to be carried out by the informant to gather more information or locate the missing person.

Risk of serious harm has been defined as (Home Office 2002 and OASys 2006):

**‘A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible.’**

1. **WHEN A CHILD IS THOUGHT TO BE MISSING**

2.1 If a child or young person is reported or thought to be missing, immediate efforts should be made to try and locate him/her. Parents/carers/staff or the responsible adult involved with the child or young person are expected to undertake the following basic steps to try and locate the child if considered safe to do so:

* Search bedroom/house/outbuildings/vehicles;
* Contact known friends and relatives where child/young person may be;
* Check mobile phone, email and internet sites such as Facebook (if you have access to these);
* Visit locations that the child is known to frequent.

2.2 If the child is a Surrey Looked After Child and has not been found through the above procedure, residential staff/foster carers must without delay notify the:

* Police (providing information from Missing Persons Checklist (Appendix 1)
* Those who have parental responsibility (where appropriate)
* Social worker/supervising social worker and the accountable team manager
* Placements Team
* Independent reviewing officer, Safeguarding Children Unit
* Emergency Duty Team (if out of hours) by email
* Responsible authority if the child is placed by another local authority
* Surrey’s Virtual Head teacher for Looked after Children

In addition, supervising social workers or residential workers should complete a [Cause for Concern form](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/surreycs/doc-library/#collapse1_7) and inform their Service Manager if the child has been missing over 24h.

2.3 If the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan or a S47 enquiry and has been missing over 24h, the allocated social worker should inform:

* Head of Safeguarding Unit, CP Conference Chair and the Lead Nurse for Safeguarding Children;
* All members of the Core Group
* Legal Services – if the child is subject to court proceedings

2.4 In all cases, if the child is missing for more than 24 hours, a [Cause for Concern report](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/surreycs/doc-library/#collapse1_7) should be completed and sent to the Service Manager for the area of work who will decide if more senior managers should be informed.

1. **THE POLICE RESPONSE**
   1. When the child is reported as missing the Police will initiate an investigation that is appropriate to the level of risk. The parent/placement/referrer must inform the Police of any relevant information that may alter the level of risk, and also notify Police if the child returns or is located as soon as possible.
   2. Arrangements should be agreed and made for when the child is located.  The Police will not transport as a matter of routine, and the care provider/person with parental responsibility will be expected to collect the child or arrange and pay for transport. However, Police will assist with transportation if there is evidence of risk of violence or risk to the child’s safety.
   3. Police will attend and conduct a prevention interview for all missing incidents. This should be completed at an appropriate time where the child is placed in a regulated Surrey Children’s Home and accepted as Safe. It is therefore essential that any concerns that arise on their return are relayed to the Police. Where the Police are concerned that the child has suffered, or is likely to suffer significant harm, a referral will be made to Surrey Children’s Service.
   4. Negotiation can be undertaken where there are regular Prevention Interviews for Surrey Looked after children. Appropriate times and frequency can be discussed.
   5. The Police have responsibility for advising the media regarding children missing from care, however, decisions to publicise missing looked after children will always be made in consultation with the Head of Children’s Services in conjunction with the child’s parents and carers.
2. **LONGER/SIGNIFICANT ABSENCES AND CHILDREN WHO REPEATEDLY GO MISSING**

4.1 A Multi-Agency intervention meeting will be arranged in the following circumstances:

* a child is missing for more than 24 hours;
* Where a chid has been missing three times in any ninety-day period.
* Where indicators of particular risk are identified, eg. Contact with a person who poses a risk to children, risk of child sexual exploitation or there is risk of significant harm.
* This intervention meeting can be reconvened as a Strategy discussion if the risk suggests there is the possibility of Imminent or Serious harm.

*This will be based on the risk assessment and the child’s individual circumstances and will take place within a maximum of 5 working days of the episode starting. The meeting should be convened by the child’s social worker, lead professional or the SPA depending on the status of the child.*

4.2 For these meetings to achieve positive outcomes the appropriate attendance and clarity of purpose are essential. The meetings should be chaired and recorded and the increased levels of concern reflected in the seniority of those attending. This meeting should involve:

* The accountable Service Manager (Chair) from the team responsible for the child’s care
* Missing Children Police representative;
* The registered manager of the children’s home or fostering service (in the case of a Looked After Child)
* Person who conducted the most recent Return Home Conversation (where appropriate)
* Representatives from CAMHS/Health/GP/Education/CAMHS/TYS/SAT (as appropriate)
* Any other voluntary or statutory agency that has an interest, or may take an interest, in the child’s welfare and circumstances

4.3 The purpose of the strategy/intervention meeting is to review the actions taken up to this point and satisfy themselves that all possible steps are being taken to locate and return the child. The meeting should also consider what actions are required to reduce the risk of significant harm. The meeting should try to identify any ‘push’ or ‘pull’ factors in the case and in the case of ‘pull’ factors it may be necessary to target those in the community who harbour the missing person or exploit them with regard to crime, sex or drugs.

4.4 If the child is looked after by another Local Authority and placed in Surrey, the Surrey SPA will notify the other Local Authority who will be responsible for the Return Home Interview and Strategy discussion, if appropriate.

**5 CHILDREN WHO MAY HAVE BEEN ABDUCTED, KIDNAPPED OR TRAFFICKED**

5.1 Where all of the following criteria are met, the Strategy Meeting will consider whether a Child Rescue Alert is required. The criteria for this are strict so as to ensure the public, professionals and media do not become de-sensitised to them:

* The child is apparently under 18 years old;
* There is a reasonable belief that the child has been kidnapped or abducted;
* There is a reasonable belief that the child is in imminent danger of serious harm or death;
* There is sufficient information available to enable the public to assist Police in locating the child.

The decision to issue a Child Rescue Alert will be made by the Head of Children’s Service in discussion with the Police.

5.2 If there are concerns that a child has been trafficked, a referral will be made to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).

**6 WHEN A MISSING CHILD RETURNS**

6.1 Professionals should carefully consider the circumstances of the ‘return’ of the child to ensure that they are not being placed in a position of potential risk.  If a child returns to their home or placement of their own accord then this may be seen to be a safe setting in the short term, but an RHI should be completed to ensure the child’s voice is heard.  If the child is ‘found’ then any signs of reluctance on their part to return to their home or placement should form part of a risk assessment before a child is ‘returned’ or accommodated elsewhere;

6.2 In all instances of the return of a child who has been reported missing, the Police will attend as soon as possible and in any event within 24 hours to confirm that the child is safe and well and to ensure as far as possible that it is safe to return home or to the care placement that they have been missing from. The purpose is to check whether the child has suffered harm, where and who they have been with and give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them. (see ACPO guidance on Missing People)

If a child goes missing frequently, it may not be practicable for the police to see them every time, in which case a reasonable decision should be taken by police, parent/carer or social worker with regard to the frequency of such checks, considering the level of risk and potential level of harm eg. gang involvement, forced marriage, bullying, trafficking or sexual exploitation. The reason not to conduct such a check will be recorded on the case file. *See paragraph three subsection three and four above*

6.3 The lead agency that first locates the child will inform the Parent/Carer, Police, Social Worker, School, Health Services, and all others informed of the missing episode, of the child’s return without delay.

6.4 Where an allegation of physical or sexual abuse is made or becomes evident, safeguarding procedures must be implemented and a referral to the SARC should be considered.

If there is any suggestion that the child has been a victim or perpetrator of crime, consideration must be given to referring the child to SARC in order to support securing evidence by police including forensic examination, such as securing clothing and delaying washing/bathing in relevant cases.  However, the welfare of the child is paramount at all times and careful consideration must be given to the potential effects on the child of securing evidence.  Permission must be obtained from the child’s parents and/or those with parental responsibility. The child cannot consent to these procedures taking place.

**7** **RETURN HOME Interviews (RHI)**

7.1

When a child goes missing in Surrey, Surrey Police will contact the Early Help Hub.

7.2 When a child living outside of Surrey goes missing the Early Help Hub should be advised by a local Police force or the child’s placement/home

7.3 When the child returns home, or to a safe place, a Return Home Interview is required (RHI) Threshold criteria and triaging of who requires an RHI is undertaken by the Early Help Hub if the notification is received by them and emailed to Duty email address & workers.

7.4. Early Help Hub will email Police notifications to the Quadrant Team allocated worker, manager & Duty Inbox, or Contact to Assessment Team Duty Box for unopen cases

7.5 Quadrant Teams will be responsible for opening and closing the missing episode on LCS and undertaking the RHI

7.6 The RHI should be undertaken by the person the child is most likely to talk to, this can be the allocated worker or Family Worker or other as identified by the team around the child.

7.7 Every attempt should be made to undertake the RHI within 72 hours of the child’s return.

7.8 All responses to RHI’s should be completed using the embedded form on LCS, even where the RHI is not required or declined.

7.9 RHI to be shared with Police and other partners with consent where appropriate.

*See attached RHI flow for LCS – Appendix 2.*

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**8 REFERRAL TO RISK MANAGEMENT MEETING**

If the child has been missing for 24 hours and where factors indicate that the child is a risk of significant harm or at risk from crime; and/or the child is considered at Significant or Experiencing risk of child exploitation, they should be referred to the Risk Management Meeting for discussion. Risk Management Meetings have representation from Surrey Children’s Services, Police, Education, Health Services, CAMHS and Surrey Family Services and meet weekly in each area to discuss children with the above criteria and to devise a multi-agency safety plan for them.

For detailed guidance see [RMM procedures.](https://www.proceduresonline.com/trixcms1/media/10965/rmm-operational-guidance-and-procedure-march-2021-v33.docx)

**9 CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE – INFORMING SENIOR MANAGERS**

9.1 It is the responsibility of the child’s social worker to [update LCS](http://www.practicemanual.co.uk/Websites/practicemanual/images/Surrey%20County%20Council/RECORDING_MISSING_CHILDREN_ON_ICS_Feb_2013.docx) and inform senior managers immediately if a child is missing from care.

9.2 A Need to Know form should be used to inform senior leadership.

9.3 When a child in care goes missing their social worker is responsible for informing (in writing) the relevant team and area manager. In addition, they must inform the Head of Countywide Services who has overall responsibility for maintaining accurate information about how many children are missing from care at any given point on time. The child’s social worker is also responsible for informing their senior managers and the Head of Countywide Services when the child is found.

**10 RECORDING ON LCS**

The child's missing status will be [recorded on LCS](http://www.practicemanual.co.uk/Websites/practicemanual/images/Surrey%20County%20Council/RECORDING_MISSING_CHILDREN_ON_ICS_Feb_2013.docx) (Using Create Missing Episode) by the SPA. (see detailed [LCS recording guidance](https://www.proceduresonline.com/trixcms1/media/10103/rhi-process-new-1909-mh-v4.pptx)). If the child is placed out-of-County, the child’s social worker must ensure that the Missing Episode is created on LCS.

*MAY 2021*

**APPendices**

1. Missing Persons Checklist
2. RHI checklist and process flow
3. Flowchart for actions when a child/young person is missing from care
4. Flowchart for actions when are Care Leaver is missing from care
5. Intervention Meeting template
6. Safety Plan Template

**APPENDIX 1: MISSING PERSONS CHECKLIST**

When reporting to the police, the person taking the report will need the following information:

* Next of Kin
* A description of the child and their clothing
* Details of when the child was last seen and with whom
* A recent photograph (if available)
* Family address
* Known associates and addresses frequented
* Personal details of the child; include full name, date of birth and nicknames
* Any previous history of absconding/absenteeism and circumstances of where found
* The names and addresses of the child’s GP and dentist
* Any factors which increase the risk to the child
* Any illnesses or medication – when is medication required, if missed what are the effects
* Any notes/letters been left
* Are any clothes missing
* Does the missing child have a phone with them, if so service provider details and number
* Does the child have any money
* Has a search of the premises been completed
* Child in Care – Name of staff member who has completed search of home for the child (NB police reserve the right to conduct further searches).

**APPENDIX 2: RHI LCS Process MAP**

**Process following opening of Missing Episode and RHI**

SW/Practitioner to complete RHI and send for authorisation – to include explicit professionals to share RHI with

)

RHI started (72 hours completion time)

Alert sent/episode opened as per process.

TM to authorise and use RHI MOS – add to case note in missing lozenge

BS or SW to send out RHI to police and stated professionals

TM to reassign open episode to BS or SW as appropriate

Close episode

**MANANGMENT OVERSIGHT FOLLOWING COMPLETION OF RHI**

**(to be completed within case notes in missing episode)**

**Summary of identified risks.**

Brief summary of content of RHI

**Analysis of risks**

To include history and already known risks

**Specific Actions**

Specific actions in relation to missing – is strat needed? Network meeting, RMM etc,

**Safety plan**

What plan needs to be in place to specifically address the worries raised in RHI, how will this be incorporated into existing plans (CIN/CP/EH).

When will this be reviewed?

**APPENDIX 3: FLOWCHART FOR ACTIONS WHEN A CHILD/YOUNG PERSON IS MISSING FROM CARE**

**When a child/young person is first thought to be missing:**

* Search bedroom/house/outbuildings/vehicles
* Contact know friends and relatives where child/young person may be
* Check mobile phone, email and internet sites, eg. Facebook
* Check locations that the child is known to frequent

If the child/young person has not returned after 24 hours, the child/young person’s social worker must convene an Strategy Discussion

Immediate notification to:

* Placements team (Notes email address: Missing LAC/CSFC/SCC)
* Police
* Parents or guardians
* Early Help Hub: [Earlyhelphub@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:Earlyhelphub@surreycc.gov.uk) by email.
* Social worker/supervising social worker and team manager
* IRO
* EDT (if out of hours) by email
* Responsible authority (if child is placed by another local authority)
* Surrey’s Virtual Head teacher for LAC

Child/young person’s social worker will add a Missing Child Record on LCS

When the child returns, their social worker will:

* notify all the above people
* update the Missing Child Record on LCS
* arrange to undertake a Return Home Interview within 72 hours
* discuss with the child’s Independent Reviewing Officer whether it is necessary to convene a CLA review

Police will attend and conduct a Prevention interview as appropriate

Social worker to update the risk assessment

Social worker will discuss with the IRO whether it is necessary to convene a LAC review

The child’s Social Worker will undertake a Return Home Interview

**APPENDIX 4: FLOWCHART FOR ACTIONS FOR SURREY CARE LEAVERS WHO GO MISSING FROM CARE**

*(This flowchart should be read in conjunction with Surrey Children Services procedures for children who go missing from care.)*

If Care Leaver is thought to be missing or not where they are supposed to be, immediate efforts should be made to try to locate them. Placement providers or a responsible adult involved with the Care Leaver are expected to undertake efforts to locate the young person. If the young person cannot be found the keyworker/ responsible adult should report the situation to the Police providing as much detail as possible.

Where the young person is missing the Police will initiate an investigation that is appropriate to the level of risk

An intervention meeting chaired by Care Leavers Service Manager should be arranged as soon as possible and in any event with five working days of notification, in the following circumstances:

* Where the Care Leavers is missing for more than 24 hours.
* Where indicators of particular risk are identified e.g. contact with a person who poses a risk to children, risk of sexual exploitation or risk of significant harm.

The keyworker must immediately inform:

* The allocated Personal Adviser
* The police
* EDT (if out of hours) by email

The Personal Adviser must inform:

* Their Line Manager or Duty Manager
* The Head of Countywide Services
* Record the missing episode on LCS and update CLS business support to add to missing database.

When a Care Leaver returns:

* The keyworker must notify the people identified in box above.
* The Keyworker will complete a safe and well check.
* The Personal Adviser will update the missing episode on LCS

If risk of radicalisation is identified make a referral to PREVENT.

If risk of sexual exploitation is identified, the adult safeguarding policies should be followed

Personal Adviser must:

* Offer a Return Home Interview (RHI) & record on LCS
* From the information from RHI, put in place an appropriate risk safety plan.
* Update the pathway plan.
* Consider a referral to Community Harm and Risk Management Meeting (CHaRMM).

**APPENDIX 5: INTERVENTION MEETING TEMPLATE**

**MISSING CHILD INTERVENTION MEETING**

*Convened under Surrey Safeguarding Children Board Guidance for Children & Young People Missing from Home and Care*

Date and location of meeting

Name of ChildD.O.B.

Placement address

Legal status and who holds P.R.

**Attendees and apologies**

1. **Current Circumstances: includes date of placement, date of going missing and any previous history of absence(s)**
2. **What information is known in respect of the YP’s reasons for going missing? (What are the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors?)**
3. **What is known about their activities, location and contacts/associates when they are missing?**
4. **Does the YP maintain contact with key adults eg via phone, Facebook and text? Have there been any sightings or evidence of their welfare and whereabouts?**
5. **What are judged to be the primary risks that they face whilst missing?**
6. **Are there any specific health considerations eg medication?**
7. **What actions/efforts are currently being made to locate and return the YP?**
8. **Are there other actions that can and should be taken in this respect? (What would disrupt the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors?)**
9. **What are the arrangements for collecting/receiving the YP when they are found or return?**
10. **What is the ongoing plan to stop or reduce the likelihood of further episodes?**

**Date of any future meeting.**

**Minutes to be circulated to the following:**

**Signed Date**

**APPENDIX 6: SAFETY PLAN TEMPLATE**

To be used with RHI. **Those completing RHI should also complete Safety plan and Cut and paste table once complete in to RHI Form support child/parent views.** This plan should be made with the family and be supported by the family as well as our partners.

Think about: safe spaces, Safe people, contact details, emergency contact, high risk places, Family support, regular contact. Meeting time and place.

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| **SAFETY PLAN** | | | |
| What is needed  (*CE assessment, RMM, Police support, CSP support, CAMHS, Education etc*) | Who will help with this and how? | What will it mean for me and my family? [the outcome] | Date of review |
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