

**PAN Merseyside - Local Safeguarding Children Boards
Missing Children Procedure**

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SECTION 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Going missing is a dangerous activity. A child or young person who goes missing just once faces the same immediate risks as those faced by a child or young person who regularly goes missing. However, children who go missing when they are young, and/or more frequently are more likely to face longer-term problems.

The following procedure has been created to provide a joined up multi agency response to children and young people who are missing or have gone missing from home and care.

Research by The Children's Society has led to an estimate suggesting that some 100,000 children go missing every year. Essentially, when they go missing, children are either running *from* a problem such as neglect or abuse at home, or *to* somewhere they want to be. They may have been coerced to run away by someone else. Whatever the reason for their running, The Children's Society estimates that approximately 25% of those children who go missing are at risk of serious harm. There are particular concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual exploitation, violent crime, gang exploitation and misuse of alcohol and drugs.

The immediate risks associated with going missing include:

- No means of support or legitimate income - leading to high risk activities;
- Involvement in criminal activities including gang crime
- Victim of Abuse;
- Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and exploitation or through gang activities
- Risk of trafficking
- Alcohol/substance misuse
- Deterioration of physical and mental health
- Missing out on schooling and education
- Increased vulnerability.

Longer-term risks include:

- Long-term drug dependency / alcohol dependency
- Crime
- Homelessness
- Disengagement from education
- Child sexual exploitation
- Poor physical and/or mental health.

1.2 LOCAL PICTURE

Given that Looked After Children (LAC) are a particularly vulnerable group of young people who go missing, the local protocol needs to take account of the responsibilities of the local authority and its partner agencies as Corporate Parents and through the Corporate Parenting Board and the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). All the commitments set out in our Pledge to Looked After Children are relevant in this context as they reflect many of the reasons why looked after children may run away.

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Based on information provided by Merseyside Police over a twelve-month period, three distinct groups of children were found to run away in the Merseyside area. These were children living at home or in a family environment, children in the care of the Local Authority (most often those in residential care) and children living in our areas who are '[Accommodated](#)'/'[looked after](#)' by other local authorities (most of who were also in residential care provided by private providers). By far the majority of those involved children and young people staying out overnight and returning of their own accord the next day, often before 24 hours had elapsed. A smaller number of children who ran away multiple times (subsequently referred to as persistent) while the rest ran away once. These two populations were also distinct in the nature of their home environment, with all the persistent runaways being in local authority care and in the vast majority of cases residential care. Half the persistent group were placed in the Merseyside area by other local authorities.

Another distinction emerged between the persistent and single episode young people. The young people living at home often appeared to be reacting to a specific incident, most frequently an argument with their parents/carers about typical teenage issues of lifestyle, boyfriends, drugs or contact with a non-resident parent. This is not to say that there were not underlying and deeper rooted problems and in some cases the involvement of Social Care was indicated. Although those in care who went missing persistently also appeared to be using the act of going missing as a statement of independence and choice, they were not obviously reacting to arguments with their carers. In fact going missing appeared to be an end in itself, reinforced by having somewhere to go (often a relative or friend). Unfortunately, this group of young people, perhaps because of their more fragile family connections and friendships, appeared to be at greater risk of child sexual exploitation or becoming involved in crime and organised crime groups.

Any missing episode is potentially serious: one runaway is one too many. Therefore prevention work relating to children going missing is of paramount importance. The prevention of children and young people going missing requires an integrated multi-agency approach to vulnerable children and young people. Prevention strategies need to include the prevention of children going missing from home and care and will include:

- Awareness and training for all professionals;
- Awareness and safety sessions for young people via curriculum opportunities;
- Multi agency assessment procedures, including Early Help, should include the risk indicators for running away;
- Consistent implementation of this protocol across all agencies;
- Monitoring and reporting of missing from home, care and education incidents;
- Support to parents;
- Every individual has a duty to inform the authorities if a child is missing.
- Effective interventions are best achieved by partnership working, information sharing, problem-solving and performance management.

1.3 SCOPE

This procedure should provide a framework to support staff in a variety of circumstances where they are working with cases where children go missing. The guidance relates to all children and young people under the age of 18 who are:

- Living within the Merseyside Area with their parents and are not receiving specialist/targeted services.
- Defined as a 'Child In Need' and are receiving services
- Subject of a child protection plan;

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- Looked after by a local authority based within the Merseyside area; and
- Children and young people who are 'looked after' by another Local Authority and are placed with a carer within the Merseyside boundary.

1.4 NATIONAL GUIDANCE

This Procedure should be read alongside *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care 2014* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care>.

With regard to children and young people who are 'looked after' by another Local Authority and who are placed within the Merseyside boundary, they remain the responsibility of the placing Local Authority.

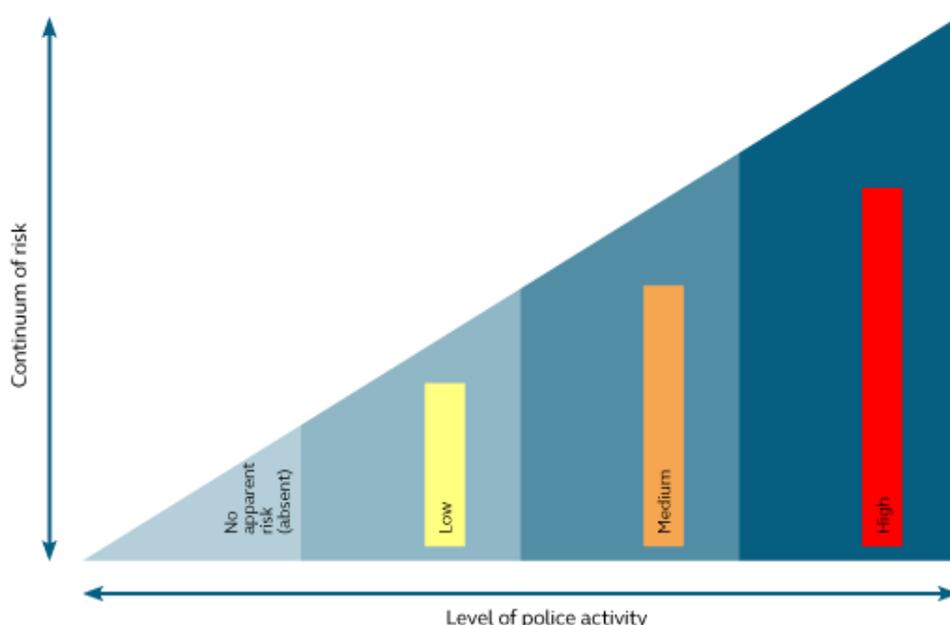
SECTION 2

2.1 DEFINITIONS OF CHILDREN 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 children sit within a continuum of risk from 'no apparent risk (absent)' through to high-risk cases that require immediate, intensive action.

Missing definition



Looked After Children can also be 'absent', in that they are away from their placement, their whereabouts are known, but they should not be there. If the child is categorised by Merseyside Police as 'absent', the person calling the Police will be advised to call the police if there is a change in circumstances, which would increase the risk level (and potentially categorise the person as 'missing'), or if the person returns. Actions which should be taken by Children's Social Care and the partnership to address 'absent', away from placement behaviour, is outlined in the Looked After Children section of this Protocol.

Merseyside Police Missing Persons Policy states that **ALL CHILDREN AGED 13 YEARS AND UNDER WILL BE CATEGORISED AS 'MISSING' AND NOT CATEGORISED AS 'ABSENT' UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.**

If Merseyside Police have a CSE or Criminal Exploitation flag recorded on their systems, or have any intelligence that a child is at risk of CSE or CE, they must automatically be recorded as missing, never absent, and the risk level should automatically be recorded as high, for a review to be undertaken by a Police Inspector, who may make a decision to reduce the level of risk based on further information.

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Merseyside Police will ask the following standard set of questions whenever an individual is reported missing:

- Child's full name
- Full description of individual (Inc clothing and distinctive marks)
- Who are their known associates?
- Has the individual been reported missing before?
- Has the child made any preparations for being missing/absent?
- Is their behaviour out of character?
- Do they have access to a mobile phone?
- Do they use social network sites? (Facebook etc.).
- Do they have access to a vehicle?
- Do they have cash/access to cash?

The following questions are used as Critical Questions, to assist the Police in determining whether the individual is 'missing' or 'absent'.

- Is the child on any essential medication?
- Does the child suffer from any physical (disabilities) or mental health issues?
- Has the child previously self-harmed or made threats to self-harm or injure another person?
- Would you consider the child is being sexually or criminally exploited?
- Are there any additional vulnerabilities (creating a risk to the child or the public)

No apparent risk (absent / away from placement)

There is no apparent risk of harm to either the child or the public.

Actions to locate the child and/or gather further information should be agreed with the person notifying the Police.

Low risk (missing)

The risk of harm to the child or the public is assessed as possible but minimal.

Proportionate enquiries should be carried out to ensure that the individual has not come to harm.

Medium risk (missing)

The risk of harm to the child or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.

This category requires an active and measured response by the police and partner agencies in order to trace the missing child and support the person reporting.

High risk (missing)

The risk of serious harm to the child or the public is assessed as very likely.

This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of police resources – action may be delayed in exceptional circumstances, such as searching water or forested areas during hours of darkness.

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There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place where appropriate.

If a child or young person who has been missing or absent is considered to be at risk or experiencing child criminal or sexual exploitation **also** refer to the [PAN Merseyside Exploitation Protocol](#).

The remainder of this Procedure outlines actions the partnership should undertake regarding specific situations when a child is reported missing, according to the levels of needs of the child and presenting risks.

2.2 CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME

This section specifically relates to children who live **at home** with a parent or care and not known to Early Help Services or Children's Social Care.

Parents and family members are expected to undertake the following basic measures to try and locate their child if considered safe to do so:

- Search bedroom / house / outbuildings / vehicles;
- Contact known friends and relatives where the child/ young person may be;
- Visit locations that the child is known to frequent, if it is safe to do so.
- Report their child as missing to Merseyside Police via telephoning 101, or in cases of an emergency 999.

When a professional becomes aware that a child is, has been missing, they should advise the parent or carer to notify the Police immediately, if the parent has not already done so. If there is any concern the parent has not, and will not, report the child missing, the professional should notify the Police by telephoning 101 or 999 in a case of emergency. Merseyside Police will ensure that the professional's missing report is recorded as a missing episode. Action should be taken as appropriate to the duration of time the child or young person has been missing for. In any agency assessments of risk and safeguarding concerns, consideration should be given to the fact that the parent / carers has not reported their child as being missing and the risk this has placed the child in.

The professional does not need to inform the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) of the missing child report, as this will automatically be undertaken by the Police. However, if any assessment identifies any safeguarding concerns they should make a professional safeguarding referral to the MASH. Merseyside Police ensure that their missing persons database automatically notifies all children being reported as missing / absent to the MASH each following working day. If the child continues to be missing, the partnership investigation to ascertain their whereabouts will ensure contact is made with the child or young person's educational setting and inform the Designated Safeguarding Lead within the educational setting that the child or young person has been reported as being missing.

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The MASH should screen all missing reports and make a decision as to the level of presenting need and refer the child to the appropriate level of service if required.

If a parent refuses the offer of an Early Help Plan, or a Return Interview, and there are other causes of concern, a further discussion must take place in the MASH.

Early and effective sharing of information is essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour. **If the Police, on being informed of a child is missing from a family home environment identify “high risk” concerns the Merseyside Police Missing Persons Procedure should be expedited.** Merseyside Police Procedure states that **“high risk” concerns require the immediate deployment of Police resources** and that a member of Police Senior Management Team is involved.

A flag within the Police missing persons data communication to the MASH will identify if a child has been missing for 72 hours, a multi-agency Strategy Meeting must be convened by Children’s Social Care and including the Police, Education, Health and any other relevant agencies. In the Strategy Meeting, notifying Press Communications and escalation to the Director of Children’s Services (DCS) should be considered. At this Initial Strategy Meeting, consideration must be given as to who is best placed to maintain contact with parents/carers ensuring that all parents/carers with responsibility are considered, despite whether the child is living within the family unit or not.

Cases of where a child continues to be missing

This section of the procedure should be followed in all cases where any child continues to be missing.

If a child has been missing for 72 hours, the National Charity “Missing People” and the National Crime Agency (NCA) will be automatically notified via the Police automated electronic data system. If there is a need for either organisation to be involved, the Police will request their assistance and the MASH will be informed. Close liaison should be ongoing between all partners and other relevant agencies by the key worker.

Following the multi-agency Strategy Meeting, **if a child continues to be missing after 72 hours, weekly multi-agency review meetings should be convened** and chaired by a senior representative of Children’s Social Care and the Police.

If a child is missing for 7 days, a Command Team Review should be led by the Police and the Director of Children’s Services (DCS) should be informed at this point (if not informed previously).

At this stage the Council and Police Communications Press Offices must always be informed (if not informed previously) and a joint Press/Media Strategy should to be implemented. This will be considered via the Strategy Meeting.

At 28 days the Police will refer to the Merseyside Public Protection Unit to review the progress of the investigations.

Regardless of how long a child has been missing, upon their return an Independent Return Interview should be offered to all children and young people who have been missing from home. The individuals who undertake Missing Children Independent Return Interview in the local

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area should be informed of the missing incident and contact the family to offer the Independent Return Interview. The Record of the Return Interview should be recorded on the child's records. The completed Independent Return Interview form should also be provided to Merseyside Police local area Missing Co-ordinator, so this can be recorded on Police electronic systems, to any future missing occasions or investigations. If safeguarding concerns are raised during the interview a referral should be made to the MASH and if an Early Help Lead Practitioner is currently involved they should be informed of the referral to the MASH urgently. If any concerns regarding child criminal and / or sexual exploitation are identified the PAN Merseyside Child Exploitation Procedure should be followed and a referral should be made to the MASH using the Child Exploitation Screening tool. If concerns are raised that a child or young person has been trafficked, the LSCB trafficking procedure should be followed and a referral should be made to the MASH.

If a child or young person is missing from home on more than **3 occasions within a 30 day period**, the reasons for the child / young person going missing must be discussed within a case discussion in the MASH, to determine what action is required to be undertaken. If safeguarding concerns are identified a multi-agency Strategy Meeting must be convened. This discussion must be recorded on the child's electronic record. If the child is subject of an Early Help Plan, the agencies involved in the Plan should consider the issues raised regarding the missing episodes and whether the current Early Help Plan addressed these needs / risks.

If the child has been reported missing **on 9 occasions in 90 day period**, a further discussion must take place in the MASH, as to what services are appropriate to meet the child's needs and / or address risks. The Early Help Lead should co-ordinate a multi-agency meeting to review the Early Help Plan in place to ensure this addressed any needs / risks identified.

2.3 CHILDREN KNOWN TO CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE AS SUBJECT OF AN ASSESSMENT OR CHILD IN NEED (CIN as per Section 17 Children Act 2004)

This section relates to children who live at home with their parent / carer and are known to Children's Social Care as a 'Child In Need' (CIN as per Section 17 Children Act 2004).

All Police missing notifications communicated to the MASH should immediately be forwarded to the allocated Social Worker within Children's Social Care. The allocated Social Worker must immediately consider informing all the agencies involved with the child's CIN Plan and must also inform the Attendance and Welfare Service. **A Strategy Meeting should be held within at least 72 hours if the child has not returned by this point.** However, the nature of Children's Social Care Child in need (CIN) involvement may indicate the need for a **Strategy Meeting to be held prior to 72 hours of a missing period.**

In cases where a child continues to be missing, the activity outlined in the previous section of this Procedure should be followed.

An Independent Return Interview should be offered to all children, and if agreed to, be undertaken and be available to be recorded on the child's electronic social care record within a 72 hour timescale. The child's Social Worker should be aware of the discussions held during the Return Interview to inform the child's CIN Plan. The completed Independent Return Interview should also be provided to Merseyside Police so this can be uploaded to Merseyside Police electronic systems, so information can inform any future missing occasions or other investigations.

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If any safeguarding concerns arise during the Return Interview the Independent Return Interview Worker should contact the allocated Social Worker to be informed. If the Social Worker is not contactable the relevant Social Care Team Manager should be informed. Consideration should be given by the Social Worker and Team Manager to undertaking a Strategy Meeting and if a meeting is not convened, the reasons for this decision must be recorded on the child's record and discussed with all agencies involved in the assessment or CIN Plan. **If any concerns regarding child criminal and / or sexual exploitation are identified the PAN Merseyside Child Exploitation Procedure should be followed, enabling a Child Exploitation Multi Agency / Strategy Meeting to be convened.** If concerns are raised that a child or young person has been trafficked, the LSCB trafficking procedure should be followed and a referral should be made to the MASH.

If a child subject of a CIN Plan, or during the period of undertaking a Child and Family Assessment, is missing on more than **3 occasions within a 30 day period, the reasons for the child / young person going missing must inform a decision as to whether a Strategy Meeting should be convened or if a Missing Child CIN Multi agency meeting can address any needs / risks identified.** This decision must be taken by the allocated Social Worker and their Team Manager, if a Strategy Meeting is not convened the reasons for this decision must be communicated to the agencies involved in the child's CIN Plan and recorded on the child's electronic record. **After each occasion of going missing the child's CIN Plan must be reviewed and updated by their allocated Social Worker, according to the risks identified and issues discussed within the Independent Return Interview.** Consideration must always be given to whether if the multi-agency support interventions within the CIN Plan are appropriately able to safeguard the child or young person.

If a child has been missing for 3 occasions in 90 day period, consideration must be given by the multi-agency partnership if the Plan the child is subject of is meeting their needs and addressing any safeguarding concerns / risks.

If the child, who is subject of a Child In Need Plan, **has been reported missing on 9 occasions in 90 days a multi-agency Missing Child CIN meeting must be convened by either Children's Social Care / Safeguarding Unit, involving all agencies involved in the CIN Plan and Merseyside Missing from Home Co-ordinator, to ensure appropriate services are involved in the CIN Plan to meet the child's needs and / or address risks.**

2.4 CHILDREN MISSING WHO ARE SUBJECT OF A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

Any child or young person subject of a Child Protection Plan has already been deemed to be at risk of likelihood or actual significant harm.

If the child has been reported as missing by their family the actions outlined in the Child In Need section of this procedure should be followed.

If a child has been missing for 3 occasions in 90 day period, consideration must be given by the multi-agency partnership if the Plan the child is subject of is meeting their needs and addressing any safeguarding concerns / risks.

If the child, subject of a Child Protection Plan, has been reported missing on 9 occasions in 90 day period (not with their parents / family), a further discussion must take place all agencies involved in

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the Child Protection Plan and Merseyside Missing from Home Co-ordinator, to ensure appropriate services are involved in the Child Protection Plan to meet the child's needs and / or address risks. The allocated Child Protection Chair should ensure that the Plan is appropriately safeguarding the child.

If a child subject of a Child Protection Plan goes missing with their parents, consideration of the risks posed to the child must be undertaken by Children's Social Care and a multi-agency Strategy Meeting should be considered. The timing of the decision to hold a Strategy Meeting must be based upon the individual child's circumstances and the risks associated.

As soon as the allocated Social Worker is concerned that, or is informed that a child subject of a Child Protection Plan is missing with their family and there are safeguarding concerns for any child who is subject of a Child Protection Plan they must:

- Notify their Team Manager and Service Manager and agree arrangements for a multi-agency Strategy Meeting to take place.
- Notify the Service Manager with responsibility for the Safeguarding Children's Unit, and the allocated Child Protection Chair.
- Notify all agencies/professionals involved with the child and their family.
- Maintain contact with a parent or carer and anyone else with parental responsibility wherever possible.
- In the event that a child is missing for more than 7 days, the Child Protection Conference must be reconvened as soon as practically possible.
- Complete all relevant paperwork as soon as possible to ensure that the child's social care electronic records are amended and the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) are notified of the circumstances.

The Team Manager and relevant Service Manager must ensure that Merseyside Police are informed to take relevant action to ascertain the child's location.

Upon a request being made by Children's Social Care, the Children's Safeguarding Unit will notify all Local Authorities, designated/named health professionals and members of the Local Safeguarding Children Board of the missing child/young person via secure e-mail or letter.

During the period the child subject of a Child Protection Plan is missing with their family, a Review Strategy Meeting must be convened on a weekly basis, to consider the actions being taken and contact and support with the parents or carers. **The Review Strategy Meetings should include all members of the Core Group to ensure they are all aware and are able to contribute to the decision making process.** Decisions should also be taken in relation to what action is required when the child/young person returns, depending on the circumstances of them being missing. The review meetings must take place on a weekly basis. After 28 days the police will conduct an Independent Review. Child Protection Review Conferences will resume when the child has been found. These will be held at a frequency to be decided by the final Strategy Meeting.

Upon the return of all children subject of a Child Protection Plan, the child should be visited by the allocated Social Worker on the day of their return, or at least within 48 hours. If the allocated Social Worker cannot undertake a visit during this timescale they must inform their Team Manager. It is the Team Managers responsibility to ensure that the child is visited within at least 48 hours. A Multi Agency Strategy Meeting must be considered to discuss the plan to safeguard the

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child and action which is to be taken as per the LSCB Safeguarding Children Procedures. A multi-agency risk assessment must be undertaken on the first occasion that a child is missing and should be updated following any subsequent missing episodes. This should be shared with all professionals and carers.

All children subject of a Child Protection Plan should be offered an Independent Return Interview. The allocated Social Worker must request this is undertaken by Independent Return Interview Worker and recorded within the child's electronic record in time for the interview to be undertaken within 72 hours. This information should inform decisions as to the plan to safeguard the child.

If there are concerns that a child subject of a Child Protection Plan has been taken out of the Country, if the social worker knows detail of the Country the child has been taken to, the allocated Social Worker should also inform the Social Services Department for that Country, as well as the above stated notifications to the Sefton Safeguarding Children Unit. If a country of origin is not known, consideration should be given to the level of presenting risk and whether Merseyside Police should undertake an All Port Customs Office Alert, in that all Ports are notified of the potential risk of a child being taken out of the Country via the Port (Merseyside Police Missing Persons Procedure outlines the responsibilities of Merseyside Police regarding all children taken out of the Country.)

If there are concerns that a child subject of a Child Protection Plan has been trafficked the LSCB Trafficking Children procedure should be followed. (See [Children from Abroad, including Victims of Modern Slavery, Trafficking and Exploitation](#)).

2.5 CHILDREN IN THE CARE OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

2.5.1 Absent / 'away from placement'

When a looked after child is not 'missing', and is deemed to be '**absent**' and **away from placement**, they may still be placing themselves at risk because of where they are. For example, they may choose to stay at the house of friends where the carer has concerns about the risk of child sexual exploitation or misusing substances, or they may be staying with family members from whose care they have previously been removed. Discussion needs to take place with agencies involved in the child's Care Plan to analyse risks associated with a child being 'absent' and their location is known but there are still risks involved. If there are concerns that a young person is being sexually or criminally exploited the LSCB Child Exploitation Procedures should be followed (see LCR Child Exploitation Procedure).

Where there has been an initial decision that an 'absence' / away from placement behaviour does not fall within this procedure, this decision will be reviewed every hour throughout the period of unauthorised absence by the Care Home Manager / Foster Carer, if the child does not return or his/her whereabouts are not known, or, if risks are considered to increase the Police should be contacted.

If they keep going 'absent' / away from placement a 'looked after child' Care Planning Meeting must be convened by their allocated Social Worker and Team Manager, to discuss if the child's Care Plan and Placement Plan are safeguarding the child.

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When considering whether to report a child ‘missing’ it is expected that the response of their carer will always firstly be that of a responsible parent and they should make all attempts to find the child and support them to return to their placement. Consideration should be given to the age and maturity of the child, whether they are known to self-harm, misuse substances, are at risk of child sexual and or criminal exploitation, and whether it is known where the child had gone or may actually be, or, whether the child is alone. There may be an element of the looked after child’s Care Plan, or, a specific legal requirement, which advises an alternative course of action, for example, when a child is in breach of bail conditions and the police wish to be informed immediately.

2.5.2 Before Contacting the Police

Where a looked after child is placed in a Children’s Home or in foster care, it is acknowledged that their carer will use their knowledge of the child, and make decisions based on that knowledge and take action as a reasonable parent would. Although the carer naturally will be concerned about the child, they may decide to allow a period of time to elapse before contacting the Police, dependent on, for example, the age and maturity of the child and any existing looked after child Care Plan, Placement Plan and associated Risk Assessment.

When a child or young person is identified as not being at a location they are expected to be, the reporting individual (care provider / foster carer / social worker etc) must take proactive steps to trace the child’s whereabouts prior to contacting the police. Such steps would include:

- Physical checks of the residence, including the child’s bedroom and any other location the child may be hiding within the house / building.
- Physical checks of any garden, garage, sheds, grounds and surrounding area(s) or any location the young person is known to frequent.
- Attempting to contact the missing person directly, via mobile phone, text, or social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook.
- Contacting the missing person’s family and friends.
- Make reference to any risk assessments, placement plans or action plans that allow for some leeway with curfews for ‘boundary testing’.

Carers should call Merseyside Police to report the child as missing via calling 101, or, in an emergency via 999. Any carer reporting a missing episode must call the police and not wait to notify the Out of Hours Social Care Emergency Duty Team or allocated Social Worker, as this causes double reports of missing incidents and there can be a delay in ascertaining the child’s whereabouts. If the child or young person has a history of being missing, their Care Plan and Placement Plan should reflect the actions the carers should take upon a child being absent or missing. The child’s allocated Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) should ensure the Care Plan and Placement Plan are regularly reviewed to address ‘missing’ and ‘absent’ behaviour and associated risks.

2.5.3 Looked after children – responsibilities of Children’s Social Care

A child may be ‘accommodated’ (s.20 Children Act 1989), or ‘looked after’ as subject of a Care Order (s.31 Children Act 1989). Where a child is ‘accommodated’, the local authority does not have parental responsibility and are caring for the child or young person on behalf of a person with parental responsibility. Where a child is subject of a Care Order (including Interim Care Orders s. 38 Children Act 1989) the Local Authority shares parental responsibility with the parent or others

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who hold it. The response from the Local Authority must be the same for any child who is missing from their care with cause for concern, regardless of whether they are 'accommodated' or 'looked after' and must be treated seriously. The concern may relate to a variety of factors, e.g. where the child may have gone, who they may be associating with, disability, special needs, potential for self-harm etc.

Children can be placed inside the geographical boundary of the Local Authority who is looking after them, or, outside of the Authority. Regardless of where they are placed, the response to them going missing must be the same.

Upon placing a child out of the Borough, their child's social worker should ensure they are aware of the Independent Return Interview arrangements in the area they are placing the child in. Arrangements for who will undertake the Independent Return Interview should be detailed in the child's placement contract and Placement Plan. All Independent Return Interviews undertaken should be returned to the child's allocated Social Worker, to inform the child's placement, Care Plan and Looked After Children Reviews.

All children upon entering the care of the Local Authority should have a Placement Plan. All Placement Plans should consider the risk of a child running away from their placement or already known such behaviour. Upon a child going missing, their Placement Plan should be referred to and appropriate action should be taken according to the individual child, their needs, behaviour and risks. In the cases of a child who already has a pattern of missing behaviour, a full Risk Assessment should have been completed and should include:

- What is the risk that the child or young person might go missing?
- What risks might the child or young person or public face if they do go missing?
- With whom is it permissible for them to stay overnight and in what circumstances?
- Making decisions based on what is appropriate given the cultural circumstances.

If a child or young person has been assessed as at risk of or experiencing child sexual and / or criminal exploitation and is subject of a Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Plan (MACE Plan) the carers must be provided with a copy of the MACE Plan by the child's allocated Social Worker. The MACE Plan should identify action that should be taken by agencies and carers when a child or young person is absent or missing and this is associated to child sexual and / or criminal exploitation risks.

2.5.4 Actions to be undertaken when a 'looked after child' is missing

Whenever a looked after child goes missing (be they a residential child care worker, social worker, foster carer or duty social worker notifying the Police) they should make the following information immediately available to the police:

- A description of the child (including description of clothing, if known).
- When the child was last seen and with whom.
- A recent photograph (including the date of the photo and confirmation that it is a true likeness of the missing person).
- Family addresses.
- Known acquaintances.
- Any previous history of running away or going missing.
- The names and address of the child's GP, school and dentist.

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- Circumstances which increase the risk to a child should be drawn to the attention of the Police and any health concerns and details of any medication e.g. the need for any time-based treatments such as diabetes.
- Legal status of the child or young person - absconder or missing.
- Any action agreed or taken.
- Length of time in current placement.
- Overall length of time in the Care System.
- Reason for the missing person being in 'care'.
- Immediate circumstances prior to disappearance (i.e. phone call received, visitor etc).
- Missing person's demeanour immediately prior to disappearances (excited, anxious etc).
- When the Alerter is or has been made aware of the location of a missing person, this must also be disclosed.
- Details of all actions that have already been undertaken to locate the child or young person - i.e. names and telephone numbers of family and friends already contacted by the residential staff in an attempt to locate the missing person.

It would also be helpful for a copy of the 'Missing' Risk Assessment to be made available to the Police.

Consideration must be given as to whether to convene a Strategy Meeting, based upon the individual child, missing circumstances and Placement Plan, Risk Assessment and Care Plan. In the event that a Strategy Meeting is not felt to be appropriate at that time, the reason for not undertaking a Strategy Meeting must be recorded on the child's records by the Social Worker's Team Manager as a manager's decision case note.

After three MFH episodes within a 30 day period the Social Care Team Manager, Social Worker should convene a multi-agency meeting and invite the local police officer / Police Divisional MFH SPOC, residential worker or foster carer and family placement worker, and other professionals who are working with the young person. If missing for more than 72 hours this must be a multi-agency strategy meeting. This meeting should try to identify any 'push' or 'pull' factors as well as any other agencies that could provide support. In the case of 'pull factors' it may be necessary to target those in the community who may be 'harbouring' the missing person, or exploiting them with regards to crime, sex or drugs. The meeting should also establish which other agencies are already involved in working with the child/young person.

If the child continues to be missing, the Strategy Meeting must agree a review date, to consider the actions being taken and contact and support with the parents or carers. The review meetings must take place weekly, until either the child has been found or has returned or the 10 week review threshold has been reached. Looked After Child Review Meetings will resume when the child has been found. These will be held at a frequency to be decided by the final strategy meeting, but the first must be held no more than 28 days after the child's return.

Consideration must be given as to whether to convene an early statutory 'looked after review meeting in relation to the child or young person, depending on the circumstances and history relating to the child. The child young person's parents and family must be updated appropriately and involved to try and communicate with the child / young person to support them to return to their placement.

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Upon the child's return the allocated social worker and allocated IRO should be informed. The Social Worker should visit the child within 48 hours. Parents and carers must be immediately informed that the child/ young person has been found. When the child is located by agencies other than the Police, or returns to their home address, the attending adult (parent / guardian / carer) is to notify the Police of the child's return (and location) without delay.

The Social Worker should complete the child found element of the child's electronic record and ensure the Independent Return Interview worker is asked to visit the child within the 72 hour timescale. If the social worker is unable to undertake the visit to the child within the 48 hour timescale they should inform their manager of this and the reasons why.

The Independent Return Interview Worker should offer to undertake the Return Interview, and if agreed, undertake this and record the Independent Return Interview on the child's electronic record. This should also be provided to Merseyside Police, so this can be uploaded to Police electronic systems and inform future missing occasions or other investigations. **If any safeguarding concerns arise during the Return Interview the Independent Return Interview officer should contact the allocated Social Worker to be informed. If the Social Worker is not contactable the relevant Social Care Team Manager should be informed. Consideration should be given by the Social Worker and Team Manager to undertaking a Strategy Meeting, and if a meeting is not convened, the reasons for this decision must be recorded on the child's record and discussed with all agencies involved in the child's Care Plan. If any concerns regarding child criminal or sexual exploitation are identified the LSCB Child Exploitation Procedure a Child Exploitation Strategy Meeting should be convened. If concerns are raised that a child or young person has been trafficked, the LSCB Trafficking Procedure should be followed.**

If a child has been missing for 3 occasions in 90 day period, consideration must be given by the multi-agency partnership if the Plan the child is subject of is meeting their needs and addressing any safeguarding concerns / risks.

When a looked after child has been reported missing on 9 occasions in 90 days, a Care Planning Meeting, or LAC Review (as considered appropriate to the individual child and their circumstances) must be convened, to analyse if the placement is meeting the child's needs and can safeguard them, or if the child's Care Plan needs to be changed to ensure this. These meetings must involve all agencies involved in the looked after child's Care Plan and the relevant area's Police Missing from Home Co-ordinator, to ensure appropriate services are involved in the Care Plan to meet the child's needs and / or address risks.

2.6 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PLACED WITHIN MERSEYSIDE BY ANOTHER LOCAL AUTHORITY

When another Local Authority places a child in the Merseyside area, they are required to notify Children's Services in the area the child is being placed of the placement (See Notification of a child in the care of another Local Authority (CICOLA) being placed within the Local Authority boundary & Notification of a child being placed out of the Borough in a neighbouring / Distant Local Authority Procedure).

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All looked after children placed within the Merseyside area by another Local Authority should be recorded on the Local Authority where they are residing ICS (Liquid Logic) system, as an Out Of Borough Placed Child. If the Notification form identifies that the child has a history or is at risk of going missing or being absent the Notification should be communicated to the local Merseyside Police Missing Police Co-ordinator, so they are aware that a child or young person who is at risk of being reported missing is living as a looked after child within the Merseyside area and can make contact with the Placement and allocated Social Worker to ascertain what actions are required to be undertaken if the child is reported as missing.

Any incidents regarding a child placed within the Merseyside area going missing, the carer should inform Merseyside Police. The Police notification should be communicated to the local MASH and the social worker from the placing Local Authority. The child's placement also has a responsibility to inform the child's allocated Social Worker.

The MASH should record this missing notification on the Other Local Authority (OLA) placed looked after child records on their Liquid Logic data system.

If there are any concerns related to child sexual and / or criminal exploitation or that the child may have been trafficked, the PAN Merseyside Child exploitation Protocol local area LSCB Pathway should be followed.

The placing Local Authority Social Worker has responsibilities to their looked after child to follow the guidance as stated by the host Authority Local Safeguarding Board Missing Children procedures. The placing Social Care Team Manager should chair a missing child strategy meeting, upon 3 occasions of a child going missing in a 30 day period. If they do not undertake this, this should be escalated to the placing Local Authority Looked After Children's Service Senior Manager.

If a child has been **missing for 3 occasions in 90 day period**, the placing Local Authority must be contacted by the MASH or Missing from Home Police Co-ordinator and ask them to consider if the Care Plan and/or placement is meeting the child / young person's needs and addressing any safeguarding concerns / risks.

If the child has been reported missing on 9 occasions in 90 days the Safeguarding Lead for the Local Authority the child is placed in must escalate their concern to the placing Local Authority Looked After Children's Service Senior Manager, asking them to consider if the placement is meeting the child's needs and can safeguard them. If there is any concern the placing Local Authority is not addressing this concern this should be escalated to the Director of Children's Services (DCS), for them to make contact with the DCS of the placing Local Authority.

2.7 CARE LEAVERS

Most young people remain in care until they are 18. However some, particularly those who were accommodated subject to S.20 of the Children Act, do exercise their right to leave care between 16 and 18. The local authority discourages young people from leaving care before they are 18 but if they do, attempts to find accommodation that will provide the maximum support for the young person – for example supported lodgings or semi-independent accommodation.

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The local authority must ensure that care leavers live in 'suitable accommodation' as defined in regulation 9(2) of the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010.

The Local authority should ensure that pathway plans set out where a young person may be vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking or going missing, and put in place support services to minimise this risk. The local authority continues to have responsibility to support the young person and to address any risks that may impede or prevent their smooth transition to adulthood.

In a few cases a young person may live independently before they are 18. Their history of going missing should be taken in to account when considering how likely they are to manage independent living successfully before 18. Where risks are identified, ways to manage this should be written in to the pathway plan, for example support from a vulnerable tenants worker, or increased level of visiting from the Personal Advisor.

It is more usual for care leavers of 16-17 to live in some form of semi-independent accommodation either with visiting support or staff living on the premises but not caring for the young person. In these circumstances if a young person goes missing we would expect this to be reported to Children's Services either via EDT or MASH Team in a similar way to those in care.

As young people approach 18 they often develop relationships and behaviours that mirror those of adults, but these can also put them at risk of sexual exploitation, substance misuse, and criminal behaviour. As up to a third of young people return to their families once they leave care, this is also the time when many go missing from their accommodation and stay with family members. Although no longer looked after, our response to episodes of going missing in this age group would be similar to that for looked after children, bearing in mind responsibility usually lies with the birth parent (where they have been S.20 Accommodated) and not with the local authority. We should visit the young person within 48 hours, and offer them the opportunity for an independent return interview.

2.7 FOREIGN NATIONALS AND UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN

[Statutory guidance](#) for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children

Some of the children who are looked after by the Local Authority may be Unaccompanied Asylum-Seekers or other migrant children, and there is a possibility that some may have been trafficked from abroad. In such cases, those professionals involved should be aware that such children are likely to remain under the influence of their traffickers. Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours. A photograph must be taken of the child. The Care Plan is of critical importance in these cases, and should be based upon a thorough assessment that addresses:

- The child's background before coming to the UK.
- The reasons the child came to the UK.
- An analysis of the child's vulnerability to remaining under the influence of their traffickers.

In conducting such assessments, the Local Authority should work in cooperation with the UK Human Trafficking Centre who may be familiar with patterns of trafficking into the UK. Immigration staff who specialise in trafficking issues should be able to advise on whether information about the individual child suggests that they fit the profile of a potentially trafficked child.

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It may be necessary to make provision for the child to be in a safe place before any assessment takes place, and there is the possibility that they may not be able to disclose full information about their circumstances immediately. The location of the child should not be divulged to any enquirers until their identity and relationship with the child has been established, if necessary with the help of the police and immigration services. In these situations the role and responsibilities of care providers must be fully understood and recorded in the placement plan. Proportionate safety measures that keep the child safe and take into account their best interests should also be put into place to safeguard the child from going missing from care or being re-trafficked.

It is also essential that the police and immigration staff are fully involved in discussions about any crimes that may have been perpetrated against the child. The local authority should also share information with the police and immigration authorities concerning risk to other children or other relevant immigration matters that may arise.

The publication 'Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked' contains practical guidance for agencies likely to encounter, or have referred to them, children and young people who may have been trafficked. Where it is suspected that a child has been trafficked, the local authority should refer them to the UK's victim identification framework, the National Referral Mechanism. The Trafficked Children Toolkit, developed by the London Safeguarding Children Board, has been made available to all local authorities to help professionals assess the needs of these children and to refer them to the National Referral Mechanism.

The [NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre](#) provides specialist advice and information to professionals who have concerns that a child may have been trafficked. Phone 0808 800 5000 Monday to Friday 09-30AM to 04-30PM. Alternatively, email help@nspcc.org.uk.

2.8 PHOTOGRAPHS

Should a child/young person go missing, it is vital to the safe recovery of the child that a recent photograph of the child is made available. The photograph must be a good likeness of the child/young person, and the date the photograph was taken should be endorsed on the back of it to identify its relevance to the enquiry. All unaccompanied asylum seekers must have their photograph taken as part of the assessment process. The photograph will be used by the police to help them identify the child or young person whilst conducting enquiries. In very serious cases, where the child is believed to be at severe risk, the police and local authority may decide to use the photograph more widely, including publishing the photograph to national or local media, and circulation on the Police / Missing Persons National website and make a Child Rescue Alert to the National Crime Agency.

On becoming 'looked after' the consent of a person with Parental Responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any subsequent missing person investigation. If possible the consent of the child/ young person should also be gained.

For most parents or carers, this would be something that would normally be available immediately. However, for some children looked after there may not be a recent or any photograph of the child or young person. The parent or last carer may be able to provide a photograph, but this may not always be possible. In order to ensure that a photograph is available of all looked after children, a recent photograph should be requested from the parent or carer to be included with the child's looked after information, and updated copies of photographs to be attached as the child or young

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person develops. Consent must be sought from the person(s) with parental responsibility and the child must be notified that the photograph is being kept. The photograph will be returned if the child returns home or moves to another carer and is no longer 'looked after'.

SECTION 3

3.1 DESIGNATED RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE GOING MISSING AND MULTI-AGENCY MONITORING

Each area should have a designated 'Missing From Home Strategic Partnership lead who should ensure that Missing Children remains a priority by having an oversight of the following:

- Implementation of "missing from home and care" protocols and procedures.
- Reporting information about patterns of absence among looked after children to the Director of Children's Services and to councillors responsible for "Corporate Parenting".
- Providing data monitoring information to the LSCB and themes to inform the partnership agencies actions to address these, to aim to reduce future missing episodes for children and young people, aiming to ensure they are safeguarded from exploitation.

3.2 ROLE OF THE LOCAL SFEARING CHILDREN BOARD

The LSCB should monitor agencies compliance with this Procedure and ensure that children and young people going missing or absent are effectively safeguarded by individual agency action and the partnership working effectively together.

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Glossary

| | |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------|
| ACPO | Association of Chief Police Officers |
| CAF | Common Assessment Framework |
| CAMHS | Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services |
| CIN | Child in Need |
| CSE | Child Sexual Exploitation |
| DfE | Department for Education |
| EDT | Emergency Duty Team |
| LSCB | Local Safeguarding Children Board |
| LAC | Looked After Child |
| Missing | See Definitions |
| MFH | 'Missing From Home' |
| PACE | Police and Criminal Evidence (Act 1984) |
| SPOC | Single Point of Contact |
| IRO | Independent Reviewing Officer |

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WIRRAL, ST HELENS and KNOWLSEY - CATCH 22 COMMISSIONED TEMPLATE