



Policy No: SJD/YP/18	Authorised by: Davina Powell	Review Date: 10 th August 2023
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MISSING FROM CARE		

1. Introduction

It is the intention of SJD Homes to ensure the safety of every child and young person who:
runs away from home
is absent without authority
absconds

We recognise that it is highly risky when vulnerable children or young people run away repeatedly and are more likely to develop long term problems or be subject to abuse.

These procedures aim to:

- aid early identification of risks and vulnerability
- assist in the investigation and tracing of the missing person
- make valuable use of any information received from the return to care and 'independent interview' to prevent further incidents.

The most effective assessment and support comes through good information sharing, joint assessments of needs, joint planning, professional trust between agencies and joint action in partnership with families.

These procedures should be read as guidance, which cannot anticipate every situation. All agencies should use their professional knowledge and judgement to take any action that is deemed necessary to safeguard the child/young person, based on an assessment of risk for each individual.

2. Reasons why Children go Missing

The Children's Society through its research has identified the following risk factors that can precede a missing incident.

- Arguments and conflicts
- Poor family relationships
- Physical and emotional abuse (Including domestic violence)
- Step-parent issues
- Boundaries and control

If a child is absent from care the Local Authority need to decide which of the three categories the absence fits: unauthorised absence, missing or absconder.

Children and young people who are absent from their care placement can be a matter of considerable concern to their carers and there is a need to locate them and ensure they are safe. Children and young people who are a few minutes late home from school would not normally give rise to concerns; they have missed the bus, or they may be exhibiting normal adolescent testing out to establish the boundaries of acceptable behaviour or to show their disagreement with aspects of their placement.

It is not helpful to consider every momentary absence as warranting a formal missing person report, and such instances should be considered as unauthorised absences.

However, at some point, depending upon the child or young person and the circumstances, their absence will give rise to justifiable concern and require a formal missing person report to the police. Whilst there can be no substitute for a considered judgement, based on a sound assessment of the young person and the circumstances, it is the purpose of this framework to assist staff to structure their thinking with regard to the two categories of absence.

Each case must be decided on merit and a formal missing person report to the police may be actioned earlier in some circumstances than in others.

For a small number of young people, it may be appropriate to immediately report them as a missing person. Normally this will have been previously agreed as part of the Care Plan because of the young person's vulnerability.

The fact that the young person may have gone missing on a number of previous occasions does not reduce the risk. In fact, children who repeatedly go missing are often being enticed away from their placement by activities that they see as exciting or by predatory influences. Furthermore, short absences may be as risky as lengthy ones.

In deciding the category of absence, all staff must consider the circumstances of the child or young person and their absence. See the Missing from Care Risk Assessment (Appendix 1) for risk indicators to consider.

3. Prevention

Preventative work should be completed with children and young people by educating them on the dangers of going missing. This is an integral part in safeguarding and in supporting young people to keep themselves safe. It is important to identify the risk factors in order to formulate strategies to ensure safety.

All staff have a duty of care to report to the authorities when a child goes missing. Effective communication with partnerships are essential for information sharing, problem solving and performance management.

Prevention work relating to children going missing is of paramount importance. The prevention of children and young people going missing requires:

- Awareness and training for all staff.
- Awareness and safety training sessions for children and young people.
- Multi agency assessment procedures, including CAF, should include the risk indicators for running away.
- Consistent implementation of this protocol and procedures to relevant professionals.
- Monitoring of compliance with the protocol and the monitoring of outcomes through monthly performance reports.
- Use of existing legislation such as Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984.

Planning Before Event/Prevention

It is the responsibility of all new children's homes to notify the Police prior to any children and young people moving into the home. This will enable local policing procedures/policies to be prepared should children subsequently be reported missing from the home. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a shared responsibility and depends upon joint working between agencies and placement.

Care Plan

Prior to each accommodation arrangement for a looked after child, the social worker must consider within the care planning process all potential risks to the child including an assessment of the potential for them to go missing. The child and parent or carer if appropriate, should be involved in the assessment and planning process. "Missing from home episodes" prior to the child becoming "looked after" need to be taken into account during the assessment and care planning.

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is key to assisting agencies who are providing services for children to identify and respond effectively to these risks. Going missing should be seriously considered as a possible outcome, and appropriate support put in place to prevent any potential 'missing incidents'.

All relevant information should be included in the placement plan and in the child's Care Plan. Where there is a risk of a child going missing, the placement plan and care plan should include intervention strategies to prevent the child from going missing. A Missing from Care Risk Assessment and Action Plan should also be completed (see Appendix 1) which details action to be taken by carers and identified prevention strategies. As part of this assessment it may be appropriate to consult with the police to share information that may be of relevance. The Police Missing from Home Officer (SPOC) may be consulted for advice in relation to the action plan. This Missing from Care Policy and Risk Assessment are an essential part of this procedure. They will enable staff to be clear what the risks are for the particular child or young person and the risks they pose for the public.

The Missing from Care Risk Assessment and Action Plan (Appendix 1) in this procedure should be completed for all children in residential care.

The Missing from Care Risk Assessment should be used as a guide, to encourage discussion and to help bring together information. An accurate and current risk assessment will assist staff to decide a category of absence, inform the timing of reporting children and young people missing to the police and enable the fullest and most accurate information to be shared with the police and other concerned agencies.

The Risk Assessment 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?

It is important not to dismiss the significance of multiple episodes of running away or going missing by a child or young person. It should be noted that children who repeatedly go missing are at greater risk of vulnerability.

The Risk Assessment and Action Plan should be completed prior to a planned placement within the placement planning meeting. In emergency placements, it should be completed at the earliest opportunity and no later than 3 working days following the placement. The meeting should always include the carer, Social Worker, and Family Placement Officer when applicable. The meeting will usually include the young person and their parents unless this is deemed inappropriate (e.g. where issues of risk or non-engagement preclude this). If issues are complex, consider consultation with the Police Missing from Home Officer.

The Risk Assessment should be reviewed regularly, at a minimum every 6 months. It should be included in the child or young person's care plan and considered at each Looked After Review.

Photograph

Should a child/ young person go missing it is vital to the recovery of the child that a recent photograph 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. 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 ICMEC www.missingkids.co.uk website.

The consent of a young person, or 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 be gained.

It is important to understand that children and young people, who go missing under the age of 16 are not legally considered as being able to live independently away from home

For children and young people over the age of 16, consideration should be given to their physical and emotional needs when making a judgment as to whether they can live independently away from home.

4. Unauthorised Absence

There are a number of situations where young people will be considered absent without authority. Most commonly this is when young people are accidentally or deliberately late home to the placement or when their whereabouts are known and do not jeopardise their safety or well-being.

Here, as with lateness, it is not usually expected that the first response of staff will be to report the young person as missing to the police. Before doing so, staff should, within the constraints of the care setting, take the steps a responsible parent would take to try to locate the young person and persuade them to return.

However, if there is a concern the child may be at significant risk of harm to themselves or to others then police should also be notified in order that appropriate safeguarding measures can be taken. This should not be confused with reporting a child missing.

5. When a Young Person's whereabouts are not known:

Aged 12 and Over:

Staff should check the child's 'missing from home risk assessment and protocols' to follow in the event. If this specifically allows the young person to be classed as 'unauthorised absent' for a limited period of time, then the staff should follow the agreed action plan, unless there are specific current circumstances that give rise to concerns (considering the factors, circumstances and causes that led to the absence) insofar as their impact on the risk to the young person. If in any doubt, report the young person as missing to the Police.

If the child is missing for a period of 6 hours this should be regarded as the absolute maximum for any child whose whereabouts are unknown and who cannot be contacted to remain categorised as unauthorised absent rather than being formally reported as missing. It will not be appropriate for any child whose whereabouts are not known and who cannot be contacted to remain out overnight without being formally reported as missing.

If there is no Missing from Home Risk Assessment or if the Risk Assessment does not specifically address this situation, then the young person Must be reported as Missing to the Police.

A young person with learning difficulties should be considered in relation to their level of functioning, not their chronological age.

Aged 12 and under:

Any child that is aged 12 and under whose whereabouts are not known will be automatically classified as 'Missing' and must be reported to the Police immediately.

If the child's whereabouts are known, staff should refer to the Missing from Home risk assessment and Action Plan in relation to the action they need to take. This will inform the decision whether to allow the child to remain at the location temporarily or to arrange for their return. If the action plan is not available and the risks at the address is not known, the Police should be contacted to request assistance in returning the child home.

Where, initially the decision was made that this absence should be regarded as 'unauthorised' rather than 'missing', it does not apply for this category. The situation should be monitored and reviewed for up to 6 hours.

If the child continues to be absent for 6 hours it will automatically be considered to fall within these procedures. This does not mean that the initial report should be delayed for 6 hours. This is the maximum period, and in most situations much shorter periods will be appropriate. (ACPO Manual of Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons 2005) . If the young person has not returned by the maximum cut-off point of 6 hours and there has been no agreement given for the child to remain at the location on a temporary basis, then they should be reported as 'missing'.

6. Actions when Children go Missing from Care

When a child or young person goes missing from care it is expected that staff will act in the capacity as a "good parent". They should act to encourage him/her to return as quickly and safely as possible, ensuring s/he is treated positively on return.

This means that:

- Every reasonable effort will be made to locate the child or young person, both prior to them being reported to the police and throughout the enquiry. By searching their room.
- Children and young people will not be reported missing as a behaviour management tool.
- On return, children/ young people will be given care and support with their immediate needs being met i.e. offered a hot drink, food and medical attention.
- Children and young people will be given the opportunity to talk about their experiences and their concerns taken seriously.
- When the child or young person returns other than with a police officer, the police must be informed that the child has been located.
- A return interview will be conducted by staff or by an independent agency.

Child protection procedures must be initiated in collaboration with children's social care services whenever there are concerns that a child who is missing may be suffering, or likely to suffer significant harm.

- Ensure that a strategy meeting is arranged as soon as practicable and in any event within 7 days. If the child has returned prior to the date of the strategy meetings, it is not a requirement for the meeting to go ahead. However, if there has been an escalation of missing incidents the meeting should go ahead. Representatives from the Police Missing Persons Unit, Social Worker and Child Abuse Investigation Team should attend the strategy meeting and other practitioners involved with the child.
- Additionally, investigation should be made to what led to the missing incident, including the appropriate staffing.

- If a looked after child/young person is reported missing 4 times in 1 month or 6 times in 2 months or if information comes to light which gives cause for concern.

7. Information to be Readily Available

Each child/young person should have a profile in their files with relevant personal information and a daily running log and record. When a child goes missing the following information must be immediately available to the Police:

- 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)
- The Missing from Home Risk Assessment and Action Plan details if details if already completed.
- Family and known acquaintances addresses
- Any previous history of running away or going missing
- The name and address of the child's GP, school and dentist
- Circumstances which increase the risk to a child should be drawn to the attention of the Police. Particularly any health concerns with details of any medication and the need for any time- based treatments e.g. diabetes
- Legal status of the child or young person (e.g. Sec 20 / Sec 31; absconder or missing) Legal status - who has parental responsibility? Any action agreed or taken
- Length of time in current placement (if applicable)
- Overall length of time "Looked After"
- Reason for the missing person being "Looked After"
- Immediate circumstances prior to disappearance (e.g. phone call received, visitor etc.)
- Missing person's demeanor immediately prior to disappearance (excited, anxious etc.)
- When the person making the report 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.

SJD Homes will ensure that sufficient information and knowledge about a looked after child/young person is recorded to enable staff to provide the information for the police to complete the Missing Person Report should the child/ young person go missing in the future. This will be undertaken by the Police Officer, who will also complete a search of the property and immediate vicinity.

The home manager should consider the most appropriate ways to meet the above requirements and should ensure that the child/ young person is made aware of what will happen if they go missing, including their right to be interviewed by an independent person on or prior to their return, and be given a choice as to who that may be. They should be given information leaflets and contact details of advocacy services and other services that they can access or that can be accessed on their behalf.

8. Arrangements for the Return of Child / Young Person Home

Staff should notify the Social Worker or EDT of the plans to ensure the child's safe return home when necessary. Every effort should be made to have the young person returned to their placement without Police involvement. However, Police may have to be asked to assist with the child's return if there are safety concerns or if risks at the location are not known.

Return Interview

The Police will conduct a "Safe and Well" return interview for ALL children reported missing.

Social Workers Visit

In all cases the allocated Social Worker must visit and meet with the young person alone as soon as is possible after his/her return. This should be within one working day for all first absences, and for subsequent absences at an interval agreed in the Risk Assessment Action Plan, not exceeding 3 days. The Social Worker will ask the young person if they wish to speak to an independent person of their choice e.g. an advocate from the Children's Rights Service or independent visitor. If the social worker is not available it is the responsibility of the manager to arrange the meeting.

9. Police Authority

For children who are subject to a Care Order or Emergency Protection Order, an application for a Recovery Order (section 50 of the Children Act 1989) may be considered.

It is recognised that Police will categorise the risk (high, medium and low) upon attending the residence from which the child is missing, taking into account other factors that are not directly associated with the child. This categorisation will inform the level of police resource allocated to the recovery of the child.

In every case where the Police have been involved and the level of risk to the child is deemed to be HIGH, the worker must report the matter to the directors of SJD Homes Ltd.

Although in many cases young people that go missing from home are already known to agencies and in receipt of support before they run away, all agencies need to be able to recognise and respond to risk factors that could lead to missing incident.

10. Risks to the Child

The immediate risks associated with going missing include:

- No means of support
- Involvement in criminal activities
- Victims of abuse
- Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and exploitation
- Alcohol or substance misuse.
- Deterioration of physical and mental health
- Missing out on schooling and education
- Increased vulnerability

The long-term risks may include:

- Drug dependency/alcohol dependency
- Crime
- Homelessness
- Disengagement from education
- Child sexual exploitation
- Poor physical and/or mental health

11. Records

Throughout the process identified within this procedure a full report must be kept of all actions taken and messages received and given. In the case of a child missing from a children's home, this will be made in the log book and on the child's individual file. The allocated Social Worker will be informed and updated at all stages and this information must be considered in the care planning and review process for the child.

12. Definitions

The following definitions apply to this policy and relate to children and young people under 18 years old who go or have gone missing. The definition of running away is taken from the SEU (young runaways report 2002) and includes references to young people who self-define as being forced to leave because, for example they do not believe that they have an alternative.

a) Missing from Care: Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be subject to crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another

b) Absent: A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.

c) Away from placement without authorisation: A looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and staff have concerns or the incident has been notified to the Local Authority or the Police.

d) Absconded. When a child or young person has gone missing who is subject to an order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process e.g. remands, curfews, tagging, conditions of residence, other bail conditions or ASBO 's or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings. A child in this category must be reported to the Police without delay. If the absconder is under the age of 16, the Police will treat the case as both a missing child and an absconder. If the expiry date of the order is not known, the child or young person will be classified as a 'missing person' not an absconder.

e) Runaway: A child or young person, who is absent from their home or placement without permission for any length of time where their age and experience, background and ability make this a concern or who has been forced to leave by their parents or staff.

f) Unauthorised absence: Absent for a short period of time and after a careful and thorough risk assessment the absence does not raise concern for their immediate safety or that of the public. In accordance with the ACPO Manual of Guidance 2005 this period of absence should not exceed 6 hours.

g) Looked After Child: A child is looked after by a local authority if they are 'in care' by reason of a court order, or if they are provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by agreement with their parents or with the child if they are aged 16 or more.

Missing Child Risk Assessment Record

Name of Child _____ Date _____

Address from which missing _____

Factor	Details and Explanation
15 up to 18 years of age	
Has a Child Protection Plan	
Needs essential medication or treatment not readily available to them e.g. asthma inhaler, insulin	
May not have the physical ability to interact safely with others or in an unknown environment, e.g. visually impaired, history of abuse or inappropriate adult/stranger relationships, Downs Syndrome etc.	
An able awareness of the risks associated with running away, incl. learning disabled.	
Know to associate with adults or children who present a risk of harm e.g. Sexual Offenders, Offenders against children.	
Mental illness or psychological disorder that may increase risk of harm to themselves or others.	

Family/relationship problems or recent history of family conflict/abuse		
Employment problem		
Financial problems		
School or college problems		
On-going victim of bullying, harassment, or exploitation e.g. racial, sexual etc.		
Previously disappeared and suffered or was exposed to harm whilst missing		
Victim or potential victim, of forced marriage, FGM or trafficking, incl. for sexual exploitation		
Known to associate with gang members and other violent offenders		



Summary of Risk

Planned Actions to Take

1. Thoroughly search the building and immediate surrounding area.
2. Try to contact the young person on their mobile
3. Contact family/ relatives/ friends as follows:

a) Parents: **Yes/No**. Details:

b) Grandparents/ other family members: **Yes/No**. Details:

c) Brothers/ sisters: **Yes/ No**. Details:

d) Friends: **Yes/ No**. Details:

4. If whereabouts are known: the young person is absent without permission and the Police do not need to be notified unless there is a 'concern for welfare' report needed (see below). What steps need to be taken to enable the young person's return? See above re. curfew, public transport, etc.



5. See list below of addresses known to be visited by the young person and what the response should be if located there. If the young person is judged to be unsafe at any of these addresses, the police should be notified immediately but as a 'concern for welfare' report, rather than a missing report since the individual's whereabouts are known.

Address	Level of known risk at address	Action to be taken (Is there need to make a "Concern for Welfare" report to police)*	Maximum time before reporting to police

6. If whereabouts are not known:

If absent for more than 24 hours after due back and no contact has been made then initiate MFC procedures and report to Police who will conduct their own risk assessments but utilising the information contained here. Do not delay reporting to Police for a period longer than 6 hours. You should inform the Police of any delay before reporting so this can be taken into account.

7. On Return:

- The young person will have an initial immediate welfare check either by the Police or by a member of staff in the home.
- The young person to be offered full return interview with Independent Agency: **Yes /No.**

Details of services available:

A full return interview should be properly explained to the young person and be encouraged, particularly in circumstances where there is believed to have been risky behavior involved or the incident was out of character.

- Social Worker will visit following return within ___ days.

8. This risk assessment has been explained discussed and agreed by the following people. It will be reviewed at least every 6 months and more frequently if there are changes to the situation or concerns arise.

Review Date for Actions Decided

Completed by: Full Name	Signature
Name	Name
Name	Name

This Risk Assessment is an aid to action and for information sharing and recording.

Aid to action: As an action tool the purpose of the Risk Assessment is to inform single and multi-agency decision-making and planning to locate a 'missing' child. The Risk Assessment provides an indication of:

- The urgency of inquiries
- Areas of inquiry e.g., where drugs are available or that certain adults frequent, country of origin or country children are trafficked on to etc.
- Type of specialist knowledge that might be needed
- The supervision that may be required
- Agencies who may be first alerted e.g., local Accident & Emergency services

Aid for information sharing and recording: At the time that a child goes 'missing' the completed Risk Assessment should be shared with all agencies working with the child and kept on the child's file in each agency. In cases where new information becomes available and/or the child remains absent for a protracted period, the risks should be re-assessed, shared with the agencies and kept on the child's file in each agency. The most recently completed Risk Assessment should remain on the child's file in all agencies working with the child.

