



FACT SHEET: Missing from Home or Care and Runaways

The purpose of the Sheffield Runaways Action Group is to bring together the key agencies working with children and young people who run away or go missing from home (children in care and children and young people with their families). The group is accountable to the Sheffield Safeguarding Children's Board; SSCB. The operational work will be undertaken by the Children and Families Service (CFS) and South Yorkshire Police (SYP) who are committed to working together with regard to the safeguarding of all children, including looked after children, and the management of their absent and missing periods. This will include effective and appropriate information sharing and decision making in the best interest of individual children and young people. There are two dedicated South Yorkshire Police Missing Persons Officers who work closely with the local authority, as part of their role, to reduce the number of repeat running away episodes and to keep children safe within the city.

Definition

The multi agency approach to the management, recording and investigation of missing children is designed to ensure that potential risk is assessed in every situation and that each incident is given the correct priority and the most appropriate response. The missing episode itself should not be seen as a discrete incident but will almost certainly be a symptom of other ongoing issues. It is important to deal with the missing episode, locate the missing child and ensure that they are returned safe and well. It is also important that ongoing work to identify the causes of missing incidents occurs and thus prevents them reoccurring in the future.

The definition of 'missing child' is as follows:

- Missing – 'Any child whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the child may be the subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.'
- Absent – 'A child not at a place where they are expected or required to be.'

Missing children will be categorised as 'Absent' if they are not at a place where they are supposed to be and there is no apparent risk. Absent cases will not be ignored by the police. They will not be actively looking for the child or young person but, they will continue to monitor and review the case and if there is a change to the circumstances that increases the level of risk then they may be escalated to 'Missing'.

Reporting

When the police receive a report about a child, they will seek to establish what the concerns are and determine which definition applies. All children defined as 'missing' will be actively investigated by the police. When a child is categorised as 'Missing' or 'Absent' then the police will notify the Children and Families Service by sending a 'missing / absent email notification' to the Central Hub Business Support team (CHUB).

The CHUB will undertake all relevant record checks and forward the Initial Response Form to the appropriate service. CHUB will circulate a daily list of missing and absent children to managers in order that progress can be continually monitored.

Initial Response and Strategy Meetings

An Initial Response form should be completed within 24 hours of the first missing incident and updated if the child goes missing again within 28 days.

When the level of risk identified in the Initial Response form is such that a multi-agency response is required to meet the needs of the child, a Strategy meeting/Core group/TAF should review the risks and the child's plan. A Strategy meeting should always take place if:

- A child has been missing for a period of 72 hours
- A child has gone missing 3 times in any 28 day period
- A pattern of missing incidents indicates risks of significant harm
- The risks identified in the initial response are significant

If the child was already known to Children and Families services then the meeting will be convened by the social worker or the lead professional. Where the child was not known, their case will be managed by the First Response Team initially. When a child goes missing from school during school time and this is a cause for concern or they are deemed to be at risk, the school should inform the Community Youth Team (Police) Officer (CYTO) attached to the school. The CYTO will then inform the CHUB for actioning.

On Return

On return the police will carry out a 'Safe and well check' on all 'missing' children and refer them to Safe@Last to undertake a follow up visit to offer the child the opportunity to talk to someone independent.

South Yorkshire Police will report all 'Safe and Well' visits to the CHUB via email. If there are concerns as a result of these checks the police will record these on a Gen 117 form, which will be sent to the CHUB, who will pass them on to the relevant area Screening/FRT for actioning.

Where the child is looked after, living in fostering or residential care, the carer must inform the social worker and the CHUB of the child's return. If a Looked after child goes missing or absent on three occasions within 28 days then a strategy meeting/core group meeting will be called to discuss the reasons for the missing incidents and develop a plan to tackle these with all agencies involved with the child.