



**Sheffield procedures for
responding to children who go
missing from home or care**

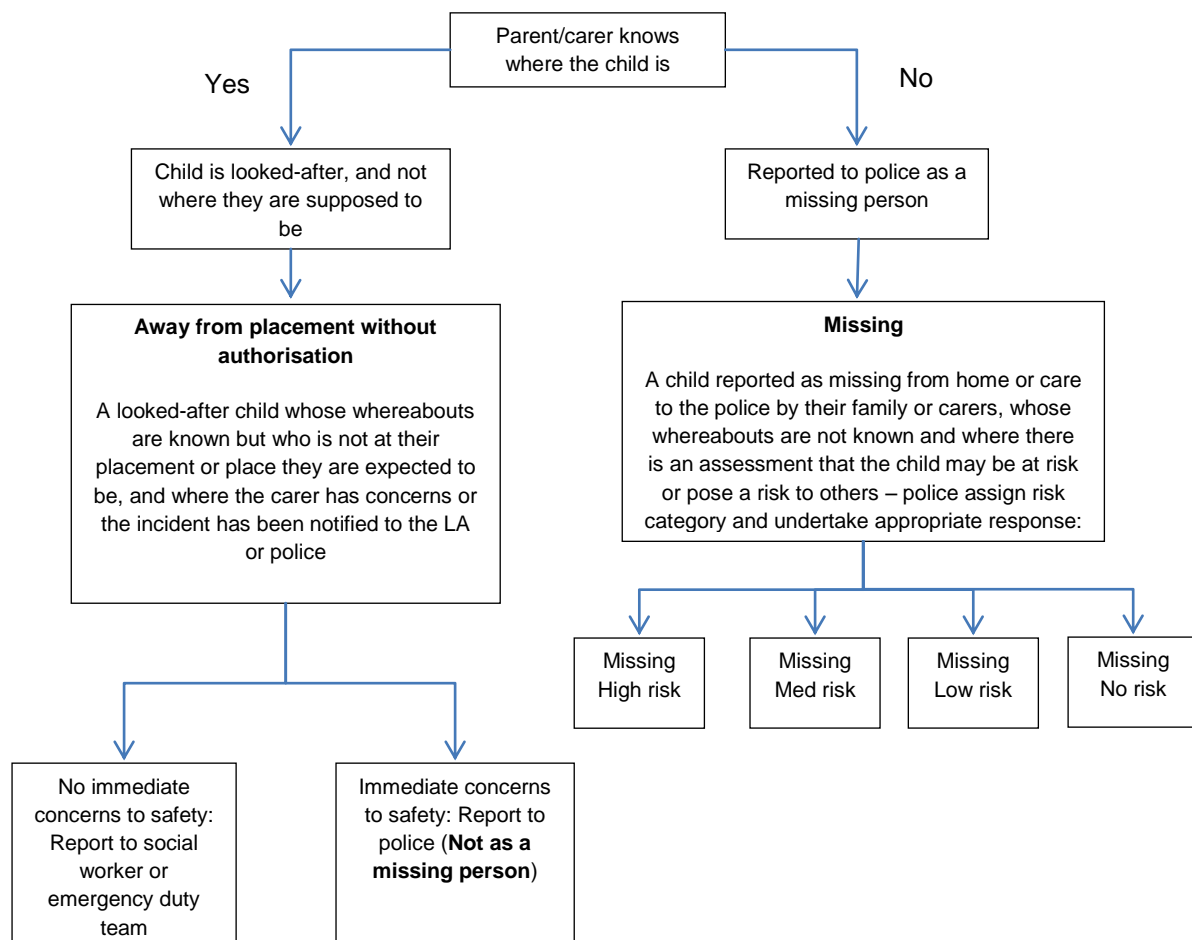
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1. Introduction

- 1.1. These procedures are to be read in conjunction with the 2014 Department for Education statutory guidance and the 2017 South Yorkshire multi-agency protocol for children who go missing from home or care.
- 1.2. They are agreed by the Vulnerable Young People Executive Board Operations Group and will be reviewed annually.
- 1.3. As set out in the South Yorkshire protocol, depending on their circumstances a child may be categorised as “missing” or “away from placement without authorisation”. The latter of these does not require the child to be reported ‘missing’ to the police, as outlined below:



- 1.4. It is **highly unlikely** that a missing child would **ever** be categorised as ‘No Risk’.

- 1.5. Repeatedly going missing should **not** be viewed as a normal pattern of behaviour; repeat episodes of a child going missing can indicate sexual exploitation for example.

2. During the missing episode

2.1. Notification by police

- 2.1.1. The Missing Young People Team are automatically notified by email when a police missing report is filed.
- 2.1.2. Out of hours, the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) are passed information from call handlers in order to decide if the case requires an immediate social work response.

2.2. Initial checks

- 2.2.1. When the Missing Young People Team receive notification that a child is missing they complete a missing young person notification record on Liquid Logic and make the following checks:

- Liquid Logic – to establish whether the child is known/open to Children and Families social care.
- Capita One (One) – to establish whether the child is known/open to Multi-Agency Support Teams (MAST).
- Capita One – to establish which school the young person attends
- Core+ – to establish whether the child is known/open to the Youth Justice Service (YJS).
- Core+ – to establish whether the child is known/open to Community Youth Teams (CYT).
- Core+ – to establish whether the child is known/open to the Sexual Exploitation Service (SES).

2.3. When a child from another local authority area, placed in Sheffield, goes missing

- 2.3.1. The Missing Young People Team sends an IRF to the home authority for the allocated social worker to complete. They may need to seek information from services in Sheffield to ensure it is up to date. It is requested that they will return it to the Sheffield Missing Young People Team but should also share it with their equivalent team or service in the home area.

2.4. When a child from Sheffield, placed in another local authority area, goes missing

2.4.1. When a Sheffield child, placed in another local authority area, goes missing, their carers should notify our Missing Young People Team (via EDT if out of hours). If they do not, the equivalent team in the local authority area should pass the police notification on to the Missing Young People Team. In either case this may cause a short delay in the process.

3. Children and young people away from placement without authorisation

3.1. Definition

3.1.1. A looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be **and** the carer has concerns **or** the incident has been notified to the local authority **or** the police.

3.2. Reporting

3.2.1. If a child is away from placement without authorisation (see flow chart at 1.3 above), a judgement needs to be made by the carer whether there is an immediate safeguarding concern.

3.2.2. If there is not an immediate safeguarding concern then the social worker (or EDT if out of hours) needs informing by the carer.

3.2.3. If there is an immediate safeguarding concern then the police need informing by the carer though this should not be reported as a 'missing person' report.

4. On the child's return

4.1. Notification

4.1.1. Family or carers should be advised to ring 101 to report that a child has returned.

4.1.2. When a child who was missing has returned and the police are notified, they visit to perform a "safe and well check". When this is recorded on the police systems, the Missing Young People Team are automatically notified by email of the return.

4.2. Return home interviews

- 4.2.1. The purpose of a return home interview is to provide an opportunity to uncover information that could help protect a child from going missing again, from risks they have been exposed to while missing, or from risk factors at home.
- 4.2.2. Because they will ask the child about their home or care setting, the return home interview should be carried out by somebody who is not involved in the child's care (i.e. the child's usual carer(s), allocated social worker, or staff from the home where they live). The interviewer should also be suitably trained and able to follow up any actions that emerge.
- 4.2.3. An exception can be made where a child has a strong relationship with a carer or social worker and has expressed a preference to talk to them, rather than an independent person about the reasons they went missing.
- 4.2.4. The child may already have a trusting relationship with someone who is not directly involved in their day-to-day care. If the child nominates someone who they would like to talk to, this should be accommodated if possible, bearing in mind the criteria above.
- 4.2.5. The Missing Young People Team allocates the return home interview to a Sheffield Futures Return Interviewer unless there is a more appropriate person to undertake this (see 4.2.3).
- 4.2.6. For a Sheffield child living in another local authority area, or another local authority child living in Sheffield, agreement must be reached on which authority will carry out the return home interview and how. According to statutory guidance, it is the home authority's responsibility to ensure this takes place; but it will sometimes be more practical and useful for someone from the host authority region to actually carry it out. The four South Yorkshire authorities have an agreement that they may, therefore, share these arrangements for children placed within another South Yorkshire authority area should resources allow.
- 4.2.7. Within South Yorkshire, the underlying principle of work across borders in relation to missing young people is one of co-operation, and best practice will be followed in relation to sharing information in relation to specific vulnerabilities.
- 4.2.8. The host authority will initiate a conversation with the responsible authority to agree who is best placed to complete the interview and how information and actions arising will be shared.

- 4.2.9. The return home interview should take place within 72 hours of the child returning home. However, if this deadline passes, attempts should still be made to complete it within a reasonable timescale.
- 4.2.10. Where there is difficulty contacting the child, persistent attempts should be made, through a range of channels. As far as possible, at least 3 attempts at contact using 3 different methods should be made. These attempts should be recorded on the Return Interview Form (RIF) – see appendix. If the child (or their parent/carer) refuses the opportunity of an interview, this fact, and any reasons given, should also be clearly recorded on the RIF.
- 4.2.11. Where children refuse to engage with the RIO, parents and carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence of which they may be aware. This should help to prevent further instances of the child going missing and identify early the support needed for them.
- 4.2.12. The interview will cover the following issues with the child:
- Their view of the missing episode(s)
 - What the circumstances leading up to the missing episode(s) were
 - What they did while missing
 - Their feelings, wishes and state of mind, at the time and now
 - What could change so they do not go missing again
- 4.2.13. These discussions are recorded on a RIF. There is also space on the RIF to record any other discussions had or information gathered; the worker's professional judgement of the missing episode, and risk of going missing again and what actions are required as a follow-up. These sections should be completed even if an interview has not taken place.
- 4.2.14. The RIF is returned to the Missing Young People Team (whether or not the interview successfully took place) where it is quality-assured for completeness by a manager to ensure that all relevant risk and safeguarding issues have been identified, and that the identified actions have been taken. The RIF is then shared with allocated professionals and stored on Liquid Logic.
- 4.2.15. Where there is no lead professional already allocated, the person undertaking the return home interview will initiate follow-up actions, including making any recommended referrals. This may include referral to MAST for assessment and support, and/or referral to social care, via the Sheffield Safeguarding Hub, so that a strategy meeting can be initiated (see 4.5.2 below).

4.3. Social care follow-up

- 4.3.1. If the child is open to social care, the social worker reviews information about the missing episode and from the return home interview and decides if the plans and arrangements for the child need to be reviewed.
- 4.3.2. If placement is identified as a cause of repeated missing episodes, the social worker may refer the child for consideration at Case Review Panel.
- 4.3.3. If the child is looked after, their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) should be made aware of any missing episodes and away from placement without authorisation events and will address the reasons for these and develop a strategy to avoid future episodes at their next statutory review or earlier if required.
- 4.3.4. Child protection conference chairs should be informed by the responsible local authority of all missing episodes and away from placement without authorisation events where a child is subject to a child protection plan. This ensures that child protection plans are revised in response if necessary.
- 4.3.5. If a young person aged 16 or 17 is found or presents themselves, but states that they are unable to return home, they will be jointly assessed by a Housing Solutions Officer and a Social Worker (as for any young person who presents as homeless). One outcome of this may be being voluntarily accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, and therefore becoming looked after.

4.4. MAST follow-up

- 4.4.1. If the child is open to MAST, the allocated worker reviews information about the missing episode and from the return home interview and decides if a Team around the Family (TAF) meeting or updated Family CAF assessment is required. This will determine if the child or family need additional support.

4.5. Strategy meetings

- 4.5.1. A missing young person strategy meeting should include everyone who may have involvement with the child (and their family/household where applicable). The meeting will cover:
 - The recent pattern of missing episodes
 - The child's views as captured in return home interview(s) or elsewhere
 - Risks to the child and/or risks they pose to others
 - Actions in place to reduce risk and prevent repeat episodes and how effective these have been
 - Revising plans for the child.

4.5.2. The triggers to hold a missing young person strategy meeting are:

- The child has been missing for 72 hours or more; and/or
- The child has been missing three times or more within a 28-day period; and/or
- The child is felt to be at risk of significant harm as a result of their missing episode(s); and/or
- There is any other pattern of behaviour which causes concern.

4.5.3. The meeting should take place within five working days of the start of the missing episode that has triggered it. If there is a timely multi-agency meeting already scheduled (such as a social care review or core group meeting, or a Team around the Child/Family meeting), then it is acceptable for the missing young person strategy meeting to form part of this agenda, as long as the appropriate participants are invited.

4.5.4. The strategy meeting is convened and chaired by the child's social worker if allocated. If not open to social care this will be undertaken by the social worker undertaking the screening. A representative from every service involved with the child (and their family/household where applicable) should be invited, as well as any that would likely be involved in work to prevent future missing episodes and stabilise risk. It may also be relevant to invite the person who completed the most recent return home interview, particularly if the child engaged well and/or disclosed new information.

4.5.5. For a Sheffield child living in another local authority area, or another local authority child living in Sheffield, it is the home authority's responsibility to arrange the strategy meeting. Relevant representatives from the host local authority should be invited and it may be more appropriate for it to take place in the host area.

4.5.6. The strategy meeting and accompanying risk assessment must be recorded accurately on Liquid Logic. Decisions about actions and strategy going forward must be communicated to any professionals not represented at the meeting.

5. Data and analysis

5.1. Recording and retention

5.1.1. The information pertaining to missing episodes is limited to missing notifications on Liquid Logic; IRFs; RIFs; and records of strategy meetings. Information pertaining to other circumstances, behaviour or casework should be retained on the relevant case management system.

- 5.1.2. If the child is known to Children and Families social care, all information is stored on the child's file in Liquid Logic and eventually weeded and destroyed in line with the information management policy.
- 5.1.3. Where the child is not known to any service, all information is stored on Liquid Logic and eventually weeded and destroyed in line with the information management policy.
- 5.1.4. Information is also stored on the national database for looked after children as part of the local authority statutory returns.

5.2. Daily list

- 5.2.1. On a daily basis (Monday-Friday), the Missing Young People Team circulates lists of children who are currently missing or who have returned in the last few days. Children who have been reported missing over the weekend, even if they have already returned, are added to the Monday list.
- 5.2.2. The purpose of the daily list is to inform key services missing episodes for the children they work with. The recipient lead person or Business Support Team should make the relevant members of staff (e.g. allocated worker, duty worker) aware.
- 5.2.3. The list contains the following information:
- Liquid Logic ID and details of the child
 - Details of the missing episode
 - Number of days missing
 - Missing episodes in last 28 days
 - Services and allocated workers
- 5.2.4. The circulation for the daily list is:
- Assistant Director for Provider Services
 - Lead and deputy lead managers for the Missing Young People Team
 - Nominated lead person within each Fieldwork area
 - Service Managers in Fieldwork and Permanence and Through Care
 - Service Managers for Fostering, Adoption and Residential services.
 - Business support in MAST for dissemination to Team Managers and SWPIs
 - IRS Service Manager & business support for dissemination to relevant IROs & Child Protection Co-ordinators.

5.3. Monthly data/analysis

5.3.1. Sheffield Futures produce a monthly report outlining the number of missing episodes, analysis of return home interviews and contextual information around episodes as appropriate.

5.4. Quarterly performance

5.4.1. A set of performance information is set out in the South Yorkshire multi-agency protocol for children who go missing from home or care. This covers all stages of the process as set out above.

5.4.2. The Priority 6 sub-group provides a quarterly update to the Corporate Parenting Board, covering actions and statistics from the area of work.

5.4.3. A similar update is provided to the Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board and Youth Justice Service Partnership Board.

5.5. Less frequent reporting

5.5.1. The Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board receives a thorough annual update on children who go missing from home or care and work to tackle this.

6. Intelligence and prevention

6.1.1. Weekly meetings take place between South Yorkshire Police, Social Care and Sheffield Futures staff to share intelligence, discuss frequent and high risk missing young people. This is shared at a wider monthly meeting where 'hotspots' and suspected perpetrators are discussed along with disruption plans.

Missing Young Person – Return Home Interview

If an interview took place, complete Parts A, B and C of this form. If the interview was declined or you have been unable to contact the young person, complete Parts A and C.

Return the form to missingyoungpeople@sheffield.gcsx.gov.uk and CC MissingTeamRIFS@sheffieldfutures.org.uk

PART A – Basic information and chronology

Outcome of interview (to be completed by the worker who undertook the interview before form is returned)							
Interviewed		Declined		Unable to contact		Interview not required (special circumstances only)	

Child's name and Liquid Logic ID:		Date of Birth:		Age:	
Worker for Return Interview:		Date and Time of Interview or Date and time of decline:			
Venue of interview:		Date and time of first contact attempt: (e.g. young person, parent, school etc.)			
Current address:		Gender:			
		Parent/Carer details:			
Address reported missing from:		Telephone Numbers:			
Home Local Authority:		Host Local Authority (if applicable):			

Professional involvement (name allocated worker if known):	Social Worker		MAST	
	CYT		YJS	
	CCE		CSE	
	School		Other	
Child in Care:	YES/NO	Care Status:		
INTERVIEWS REQUIRED: Date/time Missing:			Date/time Returned:	
INTERVIEWS COMPLETED: Details of other missing episodes in last 3 months:	Date missing	Time missing	Date returned	Time returned

Chronology

Please record details of the present missing episodes and all attempts to contact the child/young person and arrange a Return Home Interview.

Date of Event	Event (T/C, Visit etc.)	Worker

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If the interview took place, continue to Part B. If it was declined or you have been unable to contact the young person, skip to Part C.

PART B – the Independent Return Home Interview

This page is for visit use only, and should be returned to the Missing Young People Team as soon as it is completed.

Confidentiality – We will routinely share information with other relevant professionals, including police, to ensure people are working together to keep you and other young people safe now, and in the future.

If you raise any issue separate from the circumstances of your missing episode and you wish for advice or support, then this information can be kept confidential unless we feel you or someone else could be at risk of harm.

If you have any queries about confidentiality or how we record your information, please speak to the worker who is visiting you today.

The young person's voice: What happened?
How was the young person feeling before , during and after the missing episode? Did they feel unsafe or in danger?
Has the young person engaged in alcohol use? If yes, please give details:
Has the young person engaged in substance use? If yes, please give details:
Has the young person engaged in sexual activity? If yes, please give details:

Did the young person have any money with them? If yes, please give details:

What can we do to prevent the young person from going missing again? Does the young person want support or services provided?

Continue to Part C.

PART C – other information, professional judgement and recommendations

Any other information gathered that is not directly from the young person (e.g. parents / carers / peers)

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Provide a summary of this missing episode (including professional judgement whether the young person was running to/from something):

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What is your assessment of the likelihood of the young person going missing again?

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Disclosures of offences		Comments
Has an offence been committed?	Yes/No	
Has the offence been reported to the police?	Yes/No	

Identified reasons for missing episode (to be completed by Return Interview Officer - tick all that apply):

	RUNNING	RUNNING		RUNNING	RUNNING
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	FROM	TO		FROM	TO
Bullying			Arguments or difficulties within the home/placement		
Offending behaviour			Education		
Drugs			Sexual Exploitation (Perpetrator)		
Alcohol			Sexual Exploitation (Victim)		
Contact with friends			Gang involvement		
Contact with family			Young person didn't consider themselves missing		
Contact with partner			Reason unknown		
Domestic violence / abuse			Mental Health		
			Other (please state)		

Continue to Recommendations

What recommendations are now needed?		
Recommendations	Responsible Person	Timescale
Share Return Interview Form with allocated professionals	Missing Young People Team business support	ASAP

OFFICE USE ONLY

Name of manager responsible for QA	
Date of QA	
Comments	