

# Missing Children Protocol

## Procedures regarding children missing from home and care

July 2022

### Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. DEFINITIONS	3
3. Responding to Missing Occurrences - Levels of Intervention Model	4
4. Risk Assessment	8
5. Police Responsibilities & Powers	10
Police Powers	11
6. Responsibilities of the Local Authority when children in care are reported missing Initial action to be taken by carers, when a child is missing	12
Informing the police	12
Reporting procedure	13
Information to be made available	14
Philomena Protocol	14
Missing during external activity	15
Longer absences	15
Recording	16
Planning for return	16
Planning before the event	16
7. THE RETURN	16
General principles	16
Police interview or 'Prevention Interview'	17
Independent return interviews	17
8. REPEAT MISSING	18
9. 16- & 17-year-olds – Transition / supported accommodation	19
10. OUT OF AREA PLACEMENTS	19
11. Child Abduction	20
12. SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION	22
13. Missing, Slavery, Exploitation, Trafficking (MSET) Group	22

	2
Background	22
Information sharing and data collection	23
14. FINDING YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT REPORTED MISSING TO THE POLICE	24
15. INFORMING THE MEDIA	24
16. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)	25
17. CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION (CME)	25
18. SUPPORTING AGENCIES	26
National Crime Agency Missing Persons Unit	26
Missing People	26
UK Missing Kids Website ( <a href="http://uk.missingkids.com">http://uk.missingkids.com</a> )	26
Child Rescue Alert	26
19. Further Information	27
APPENDIX 1: MISSING FROM CARE FLOW CHART	28

## 1. INTRODUCTION

These procedures refer to situations when children go missing from home or when children who are looked after by the local authority go missing from residential or foster care.

It defines the roles and responsibilities of agencies and staff concerned with safeguarding children and young people.

This document should be read as guidance, which cannot anticipate every situation. Police, Children's Services staff, parents and foster carers should use their professional judgement to take any action they feel necessary to protect the safety of the child based on an assessment of risk for each individual child.

All parties involved in the protocol should be clear about the definition of a "missing person" – This guidance should be read alongside the most up to date guidance from Northumbria Police as this will include a definition of "missing" and the actions taken on each occasion.

Children who go missing are at increased vulnerability of being abused and/or exploited. As well as short-term risks there are also long-term implications; Adults experiencing significant and serious problems have often gone missing as children.

The reasons for running or going missing are often varied and complex and cannot be viewed in isolation from their home circumstances and their experiences of care.

Every 'missing' episode should attract the proper attention from the professionals involved with the missing person and they must collaborate to ensure a consistent and coherent response is given to the missing person on their return.

The statutory guidance on children who go missing from home or care can be accessed [here](#) including a summary written specifically for care workers and foster carers.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

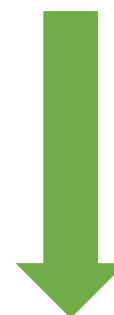
Based on the 'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care' ([DfE 2014](#)) the definitions which should be used when working with children, young people and their families are set out as follows:

Child:	Young runaway:	Missing child:	Looked after child:	Care leaver:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.</li> <li>'Children' and 'young people' are used throughout this guidance to refer to anyone under the age of 18;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a child who has run away from their home or care placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989;</li> <li>Care leavers cover young people from aged 16-24s</li> </ul>

Responsible local authority:	Host local authority:	Missing from care:	Away from placement without authorisation:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority's area;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts is not known;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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;</li> </ul>

#### Police definition of missing:

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



It should be noted this is the definition used by police in England and Wales. For those who oversee children placed elsewhere eg. Scotland, the definition will differ.

When a child's whereabouts is known, they would not be classed as 'Missing' to Police. However, where there are concerns because of the child's vulnerability or there is a potential danger to them or the public, a **safeguarding response** from Social Care and/or Police may be required.

### 3. Responding to Missing Occurrences - Levels of Intervention Model

Responding effectively to a missing child requires a partnership approach in which the police, parent/carers, the local authority and other partner agencies work together in the best interests of the child to ensure their wellbeing and safety.

The level of intervention required when a child is not where they are expected to be, should be proportionate to the concerns held, together with the child's assessed vulnerability and the risk relating to that missing occurrence.

The assessed risk to a child and the situation can alter rapidly. Parents/carers and agency actions and responses should adapt accordingly.

Where there is imminent risk to the child or wider public it is always appropriate for police to be involved.

In other cases, when a child is not where they are expected to be the parent/ carer holds the initial responsibility to contact and locate the child to ensure their safety and wellbeing and where possible their return; as shown in the below [Levels of Intervention model](#).

This would include making an initial search of the child's home and any grounds; attempting to contact the child's friends, family members and known associates (where appropriate) to establish the child's whereabouts.

Where a parent or carer due is unable to undertake physical searches due to practical reasons, contingency planning regarding how and who should undertake these should have been agreed in the child's Placement Planning /Missing Assessment /Plan.

### Levels of Intervention

Levels of Intervention		
Assessed level of concern	Intervention	Actions and Outcomes
<b>No Intervention</b> The parent/carer is not concerned for the child's safety or the safety of others based on the information they have about the child and the circumstances of the missing occurrence	Based on the information known about the child and the circumstances of the missing occurrence, the parent/carer makes an informed decision to wait some time, to see if the child returns of their own accord.	(a) Actions (a) The parent /carer considers if there has been any precursor behaviour or trigger incident that warrants the child being immediately reported to the police as missing. (b) (b) The parent /carer/child's social worker continually tries to contact the child by phone, text, and social media. C)c) The parent /carer undertakes a search of the home and surrounding areas (or agrees with the child's social worker who will do this if they are unable to). (d) The parent /carer undertakes a search of the place the child was expected to be and the place the child was last seen (or agrees with the child's social worker who will do this if they are unable to). (e) The parent /carer/child's social worker contacts family and friends. (f) If possible and safe to do, the parent /carer/ child's social worker visits locations and addresses where the child may be. (g) The parent /carer and the child's social worker continue to liaise until the child is found or returns. Outcomes (a) The child returns of their own accord. (b) The child contacts the parent /carer (or another). (c) The parent/ carer contacts the

			<p>child.</p> <p>(d) Contact is made and the child agrees to return home independently.</p> <p>(e) Contact is made and the child agrees to be collected. This is arranged by/between the parent /carer and the child's social worker.</p> <p>(f) Contact is made and what the child says raises the level of concern to police intervention, so the child is reported as missing to the police.</p> <p>(g) The parent /carer/ child's social worker receives information that raises the level of concern to police intervention, so the child is reported as missing to the police (h) The child is located but to ensure their safe return / the safety of others, police support is required so the police are contacted.</p> <p>(i) The parent /carer/ child's social worker has conducted reasonable actions to locate the child, and allowed the child a reasonable time to return of their own accord, but the child has not been located, so the level of concern raises to police intervention and the child is reported as missing to the police. (j) If the child is reported as missing to the police, the parent /carer/ child's social worker shares the relevant missing documentation with</p>
<p><b>Parent/Carer Intervention</b></p>	<p>The parent/carer has some concerns about the child and their whereabouts, but at the outset of the missing occurrence the parent/carer does not have any immediate concerns about their safety of the safety of others that would warrant contacting the police immediately.</p>	<p>The parent/carer takes responsibility for trying to locate the child and ensure their safe return.</p>	<p>Actions:</p> <p>(a) The parent/carer considers if there are any reasons that warrant the child being immediately reported to the police as missing.</p> <p>(b) The parent/carer tries to contact the child by phone, text and social media.</p> <p>(c) The parent/carer undertakes a search of the home and surrounding area , the place where the child was expected to be and where last seen(or agrees with the child's social worker who will do this in the event they are unable to).</p> <p>(d) The parent/carer/child's social worker contacts family and friends.</p>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(e) If possible and safe to do, the parent/carer/the child's social worker visits locations where the child may be.</li> <li>(f) The parent/carer/child's social worker continues to try and contact /locate the child.</li> <li>(g) The parent/carer and the child's social worker continue to liaise until the child is found /returns.</li> <li>(h) Where contact with the child is successful and they agree to return, this is arranged by/between the parent/carer and the child's social worker.</li> <li>(i) The child is located; however, to ensure their safe return / the safety of others, police support is required and provided.</li> <li>(j) Contact with the child is unsuccessful and there are now concerns for their safety. The parent/carer/child's social worker reports the child as missing to the police and shares the relevant missing documentation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Police Intervention</b></p>	<p>Based on the information the parent /carer has about the child and the circumstances of the missing occurrence, the parent/carer is worried about the child's safety.</p> <p>The parent /carer has been unable to contact the child, or they have made contact, but have assessed that the child or others are not safe.</p>	<p>The parent/carer/child's social worker reports the child as missing to the police, or if whereabouts known, details the safeguarding concern.</p>	<p>(a) Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) The parent /carer/child's social worker shares their concerns with the police.</li> <li>(b) Where applicable, the child/ child's social worker shares the child's Missing Assessment / Plan / Incident form with the police.</li> <li>(c) The police complete a risk assessment and either record the child as missing or inform the parent /carer/ child's social worker that they disagree that level of risk lies within the police intervention band of the levels of intervention model and delays police deployment.</li> <li>(d) If the police have recorded the child as missing, the police conduct enquiries to locate the child</li> <li>(e) The parent /carer /the child's social worker continues to try and locate /contact the child.</li> <li>(f) If the police have delayed police deployment and the parent /carer/ child's social worker disagrees with that decision, the parent /carer/</li> </ul>

			<p>child's social worker escalates the case to a Senior Officer on duty who has operational command responsibility.</p> <p>(g) The police, the parent /carer and the child's social worker continue to liaise until the child is found /returns.</p> <p>(h) When the child has returned or has been located, a Prevention Interview and Independent Return Interview takes place, and any specific arrangements agreed and recorded in the Missing Risk Incident form or Philomena Protocol form.</p>
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#### 4. Risk Assessment

In assessing the significance of any child's missing episode, a risk assessment must be conducted.

Where a child is missing, carers, relevant staff from Northumberland Council and Northumbria Police, must consider the above definitions alongside the Levels on Intervention Model, and take into consideration guidance already agreed on and incorporated into the child's care plan and factors listed below, when assessing risk.

Out of hours this will usually involve the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) social worker with police. If a young person is not looked after by the local authority the police will use the same criteria to assess the risk following discussions with parents.



Professional's must consider:

 <p>What is the legal status of the child (e.g. Emergency Protection Order, Full or Interim Care Order, remanded, curfew conditions etc)?</p>	 <p>Why are you worried about the missing person?</p>
 <p>Is this out of character?</p>	 <p>Does the child have any physical or mental health needs?</p>
 <p>Is the child at risk of harm to themselves or others? (inc. is child likely to self-harm or commit suicide?)</p>	 <p>Is the child at risk of being exploited?</p>
 <p>Is there any suggestion that the child may be involved in extremism or at risk/vulnerable to radicalisation?</p>	 <p>Is the child suspected to be the victim of a significant crime in progress, e.g. abduction, exploitation?</p>
 <p>Is the child in the company of a person who may cause them harm?</p>	 <p>Any other particular circumstances at the time of the incident influencing the risk assessment?</p>

All children who go missing must be reported to the police. The Police will determine the level of risk (low/medium/high) based on the information shared with them.

All professionals must ensure that all known information held on a child/young person is shared with the Police to ensure that the correct level of risk is applied – including if the child is Looked After or any other vulnerabilities.

Where a child is assessed as at risk of exploitation an **'SE' marker** will be evident on the child's police information system.

The assessment of risk is a dynamic process and should be reconsidered and challenged at every point during a child or young person's absence. As a **minimum requirement** the risk assessment should be reviewed every change of police duty team, and the level of prevailing risk agreed by carers and other professionals responsible for that young person's health safety and wellbeing.

## 5. Police Responsibilities & Powers

Police will investigate all cases falling within the 'missing' definition and will respond in accordance with the Northumbria Police Missing Person policy and procedure, keeping a record on the appropriate missing person report / computer system.

The table below sets out the definition of each category and what each category means in terms of operational response:

DEFINITION OF RISK	OPERATIONAL RESPONSE
<p><b>HIGH RISK</b> The risk of <b>serious harm</b> to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely</p> <p><b>Serious Harm:</b> <i>a risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological can be expected to be difficult or impossible.</i></p>	<p>This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of police resources.</p> <p>Police Silver commander will be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels and allocation of ownership.</p> <p>Such cases will always have allocated a named investigating officer. There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies.</p>
<p><b>MEDIUM RISK</b> The risk of harm to the subject or the public is likely but not serious</p>	<p>This category requires an active and measured response by police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.</p>
<p><b>LOW RISK</b> The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but minimal</p>	<p>Proportionate enquiries should be carried out to ensure that the subject has not come to harm.</p>

### Northumbria Police do not use the category 'No Apparent Risk – Absent' for children.

As part of the daily triage process, Northumbria Police Missing Persons lists are checked for children/young people that have been or are currently missing and MASH staff check that a Child Concern Notification (CCN) has been submitted. If there is no CCN present, one is created within the Police MASH.

MASH staff will share details of the missing episodes with Northumberland Adolescent Service (NAS) staff who will allocate a worker to carry out the return home interview, where possible that day, and in any case within 72 hrs of the child returning home.

When MASH staff identify a child that is open to children's social care or early help, and is also recorded as a current missing child, they will access the missing report and record on the additional information section who the allocated worker is and contact details for liaison during the missing enquiries.

Where a missing child is Looked after by another local authority, that authority will be notified by staff within ICS.

The Police MASH staff advise workers of any identified concerns regarding exploitation and missing, inviting the worker to consider MSET referrals and risk assessments.

Where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, **significant harm**, there should be a strategy discussion/meeting (as set out in [statutory guidance](#) and NCASP *safeguarding procedures: [Child Protection Enquiries - Section 47 Children Act 1989](#)*).

Children's Social Care (CSC) will work collaboratively with police during any enquiry to locate a missing child. When Police locate a child reported as missing, Police will return the child to parent/carer/home. Sometimes it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home and in all such cases Police will contact CSC (EDT out of office hours) for an evaluation of their safety.

Even after reporting a child missing, parents and carers should recognise that they are responsible for children in their care at all times and this responsibility remains when they have reported a missing child to the Police.

In all cases, police will inform CSC of all children who are reported missing within 1 working day via CCN.

### Operation Endeavour

Operation Endeavour is a joint operation between Northumbria Police and Northumberland Children's Services to safeguard children and young people at risk of harm from going missing. The CCN notifying MASH that a child is missing will be sent to the DSL within the child's education setting. This enables the setting to provide support to the child on their return.

### Police Powers

Police powers are limited and difficulties can arise when missing children are found but do not want to return to their home or it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home

Under Section 46 of the Children Act 1989, where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child could suffer significant harm the police can take that child into Police Protection and remove them to suitable accommodation, which could include the home from which the child originally went missing.

The Police are not given the power to use force to take a child into Police Protection, but reasonable force may be used to prevent a child suffering significant harm.

Where Police Protection is taken Police will inform the Local authority during office hours, or EDT will be contacted out of hours.

Any child who is unlawfully at large from a secure unit or penal establishment may be arrested and returned by Police. If the child is on remand without conditions, the Police will return the child to the designated placement. If the child is on remand with conditions (e.g. curfew) they will be detained and appear before a court.

## 6. Responsibilities of the Local Authority when children in care are reported missing Initial action to be taken by carers, when a child is missing

### Carers must take all reasonable and practical steps to:

- Establish the whereabouts and well-being of the child or young person
- Determine the level of risk of harm to the child or young person
- Determine the nature and reasons for going missing make reasonable attempt to ascertain the likely intentions of the child or young person before contacting the police

### Actions should include those in the Levels of Intervention table (pg4), including:

- Searching their own premises, immediate locality, and where the child is likely to be
- Make enquiries with other children and young people in the home/school /workplace (using social media where appropriate)
- Make enquiries with other professionals
- Make enquiries with relatives unless it is considered not in the child or young person's best interests
- Consider recent events
- Telephone/text the child and young person to establish their safety and well- being and use social media where appropriate

### All issues/decisions/actions should be fully documented

#### Informing the police

Every child goes who goes 'Missing' must be reported to the police immediately where there is imminent risk to the child or wider public. In other cases, initial enquiries should be made by the parent/carer to establish their whereabouts.

Whenever a child goes missing from a children's home or foster home then **the foster carer or the Lead Person on duty** in a children's home should also ensure that the following individuals and agencies are also informed as soon as possible and in all cases within 24 hours.

- The parents or those who have parental responsibility (where appropriate)
- The Social Worker or Team Manager
- The Emergency Duty Team (if out of hours)

## Reporting procedure

Once a decision has been made to report the child or young person missing the carer should contact police using the non-emergency telephone number (101) unless they have significant concerns about the welfare of the child.



The carer, in consultation with other professionals responsible for the young person's health, safety and well-being, must be explicit when reporting an episode to the police so that the level of perceived risk to the child or young person is clear from the outset. **This will determine the level of police response.**



The carer will be given a unique reference/log number, which should be retained and used in any future contact with the police.

## Information to be made available

When reporting to the police the following minimum information is required;

Description of the child or young person including their clothing;	
Details of where the child or young person was last seen and with whom;	
Recent photograph;	
Relevant addresses;	
Known associates and addresses frequented;	
Personal details of the child or young person;	
Previous history of absenteeism and circumstances of where found;	
Circumstances under which the child or young person is absent;	
Any factors which increase the risk to the child or young person; and	
Name of the staff member completing the risk assessment and / or the search of the home and locality.	

## Philomena Protocol

The Philomena protocol is used as best practice to share information on risk, vulnerabilities, associates and places frequented by a child who is at risk of going missing – for more information see [Philomena Protocol Leaflet](#)

When a child moves to another home, staff should complete [this form](#) (with the child where appropriate)

The information detailed on it can be used as an investigation plan for both parent/carer and police in the event of a child not being where they are expected to be. The protocol promotes joint responsibility for all agencies to work together to safely and quickly locate the child.

Philomena protocol can be used for non-looked after children where it would be of benefit to the child and other agencies.

## Missing during external activity

**If a child or young person goes missing outside of their area, the carer in charge of the external activity will:**

- Arrange a search in the area where the child or young person went missing
- Notify the local police for that area
- Notify the child or young person's parent or guardian
- Notify the child or young person's Social Worker or Team Manager
- Notify a senior manager of the home
- Notify the Youth Offending Team if the child or young person is on remand
- Notify the Emergency Duty Team, if out of hours

## Longer absences

A strategy discussion/meeting must be held **within 72 hours** if a young person is missing for a prolonged period of time. The meeting will be convened for the purpose of developing a strategy to locate and return that child or young person to safety (this may or may not include the initiation of s47 enquiries).

However a strategy meeting will be considered prior to 72hrs during a missing episode if identified risks are increased in line with their individual risk assessment.

Whenever a child or young person is missing for a longer period of time and in any case where the child or young person has been missing for 72 hours, a senior manager (including the Director of Children's Social Care ) in Children's Services will also be informed.

## The meeting will involve:

The Team Manager from Children's Social Care responsible for the child or young person's welfare;

A police representative from the Safeguarding Team and/or the Missing From Home Coordinator

The registered manager of the children's home or fostering service and foster carer where appropriate;

Other relevant staff from Children's Social Care and the Youth Justice Team

Other relevant professionals working with the young person (e.g. health, education etc); and

The meeting may also involve parents if relevant or appropriate.

These senior officers will review the actions taken up to this point and satisfy themselves that all possible steps are being taken to locate and return the child or young person.

A senior CSC manager would continue to review the detail of the missing episode, a senior police manager and the *Director of Children's Social Care* (or their nominated deputy) should jointly review the case and take any actions they consider necessary to locate and return the child or young person, at a point **no longer than 28 days**.

## Recording

Throughout the period that the child or young person is missing, parents/carers and social workers must keep a full record of all actions taken and messages received or given. Police will keep a record on the appropriate missing personal report/computer system.

The records should clearly include ***details of where the young person was found, any reasons the child has given for going missing and any actions taken*** in light of those reasons. This information is important for any future missing from care episodes.

## Planning for return

If a child or young person is missing the appropriate manager from the Children's Social Care, in consultation with social workers, parents/carers and police as appropriate, should prepare a contingency plan for when the child or young person is found.

### Considerations should include:

- Arranging for an independent person to talk to the child or young person about the reasons that they went missing Arrangements to escort the child or young person and support them on their return
- Whether the police wish to interview the child or young person before s/he is returned to placement.

## Planning before the event

When children become looked after, the assessment of their needs should consider whether they have ever been missing from home, staying in unknown, possible unsafe, places adopt a contextual safeguarding approach

Prevention and early intervention services should be reviewed, and effectiveness evaluated every year, gaps identified, and plans made to fill any gaps. A prevention or early intervention service working with those identified as being at risk of going missing or who have already gone missing should be in place to prevent the continuation and escalation of risk.

If the ICS of Children's Social Care receive three or more Police CCNs on the same child, in relation to missing episodes, a further discussion should be triggered, regardless of the outcome of each individual CCN. This will capture those children going missing on repeat occasions where each individual episode does not give cause for concern when viewed in isolation, however when viewed as a pattern of episodes more concerns may be raised.

## 7. THE RETURN

### General principles

When a child or young person is located the police, parents, social workers and any other person informed of the child or young person's absence should be notified without delay (unless these would place the young person at risk of significant harm).



For looked after children the general principle is that the children's services for the area from where the child is missing will be responsible for recovering the child and returning them to their home , unless the child is located by police.

In some instances it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home and in all such cases police will contact EDT for an evaluation of their safety.

If there are specific and identified issues of safety or public order associated with returning that child or young person then a coordinated approach to recover the child or young person should be agreed with the police.

Any out of hours referrals received by EDT involving a child or young person who has been reported missing or has returned should be forwarded to the relevant social worker or the ICS ).

### Police interview or 'Prevention Interview'

The police will interview all children when they return from a missing episode. The purpose of the interview will be, to confirm the identity of the child, that they have returned, to ensure they are safe and well, and to gather intelligence about the missing episode

If the child makes an allegation of crime that occurred whilst they were missing or that contributed to them going missing , the police officer will record this allegation and take appropriate action.

### Independent return interviews

Every child who goes missing will be offered a return home interview by staff within NAS. NAS. .

**Information from these interviews will be shared with Police Missing From Home Coordinators at the earliest opportunity to safeguard vulnerable persons and identify areas for policing activity.**

### Higher risk factors include:

Been missing for over 24 hours	Been missing on five or more missing episodes in a month	Engaged (or believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence has been exploited
Been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing (or this is believed to be the case)	Known mental health issues	Known risk of criminal or sexual exploitation

Information gathered, as part of the return interview will be recorded on the young person's electronic social care record and shared with the police Missing From Home Coordinator.

Intelligence gathered from all interviews each month will be shared at the monthly MSET meeting (see MSET)

Where any allegation of abuse is made or becomes evident, local child protection procedures must be implemented immediately – see [Responding to Abuse and Neglect](#) and [Report concerns about a child](#)

If a young person discloses information that leads the independent interviewer to be concerned that there is an **immediate risk** to the young person's safety then the **police and Children's Services** (ICS during office hours, EDT at other times) **should be informed immediately**.

Any disclosure of the child being the victim of an offence should be notified to police at the earliest opportunity to ensure safeguarding of the child and the wider community

If there is evidence that a child or young person has been a victim or perpetrator of crime, consideration must be given to securing evidence by police, including forensic examination (with appropriate consent).

It is essential to recognise that the welfare of the child or young person is paramount and careful consideration should be given to the potential effects of the procedures on the child or young person.

## 8. REPEAT MISSING

If a child or young person repeatedly goes missing **5 or more times in a month**) or causes specific concerns due to risk factors when missing, a **multi-agency strategy meeting** should be considered to develop a strategy to prevent future missing events and reduce the risk of harm to the child or young person should they go missing again.

### The purpose of the strategy meeting is to:

- Agree and record a pre-risk assessment
- Agree a reporting strategy
- Recommend the minimum enquiries to be undertaken by:
  - Carers
  - Children's Services
  - Police
- Agree an appropriate return strategy
- Consider contextual risks and appropriate interventions

Research has shown that there is no developing pattern in which the risks to a young person escalate the more often that they run away. **Short absences may present the same risk as longer ones** and should be viewed with equal seriousness and urgency.

It is not the number of previous absences but the particular information about what happened when the young person was away from home that indicates the level of risk that they might face should they go missing again.

- Consideration should be given to updating the risk assessment every time a young person goes missing. This would be a multi-agency responsibility and should inform any updates to the Disruption Plan where appropriate.
- Children who repeatedly go missing should be viewed with as much concern as children who go missing for the first time.
- If a child continues to go missing, this would suggest at least that the action following from earlier assessments should be reviewed and alternative options considered
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## 9. 16- & 17-year-olds – Transition / supported accommodation

**Supported accommodation** can be used as a positive choice to support looked after young people aged 16 and 17 to transition to independence.

**Supported accommodation is unregulated:**

### Unregulated provision

- These settings provide independent or semi-independent living, with staff available to provide advice and support to residents
- **Unregulated provision is allowed in law**
- Ofsted do not regulate this type of provision

### Unregistered provision

- is when a child who's being provided with some form of 'care' is living somewhere that is not registered with Ofsted
- **This is illegal**
- Once a provider delivers a care element as well as accommodation, they must register as a children's home - It's an offence not to

Careful planning needs to take place to support a young person towards independence whilst ensuring safeguards are in place to mitigate any risk. OFSTED Guidance: [Introduction to Children's Homes](#) can assist with this (see [indicators for supported accommodation](#))

When a young person does not return to their provision at an agreed time staff should be encouraged to use the [Levels of Intervention](#) to determine whether police involvement is required.

Where there is **no assessed imminent risk** to the young person, staff should **contact EDT** to notify them the child is away from home without authority. EDT and/or social worker will periodically review the risk and where there is assessed imminent risk police should be notified.

## 10. OUT OF AREA PLACEMENTS

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review statutory guidance and the associated regulations updated in 2013, outline duties on local authorities to notify other local authorities if they place a child in care within their area. It also requires children's homes to notify their host local authority when a child is placed with them by another authority.

Northumberland have agreed to notify Police of any out of area children they host, particularly where there is risk relating to missing, exploitation and radicalisation.

In cases where a child placed in the Northumberland area by another local authority goes missing from home, the **home authority** should call a **strategy meeting**. Ideally this will include the relevant organisations from both the home and host authority and will establish a plan, as above. Local procedures should be followed and the response should also be based on the young person's care plan.

**Where there is a history of the young person going missing, the home authority must inform the host authority as part of the placement agreement.** Appropriate details should be shared to support the home authority (who retain ownership) to manage the risk and informal care planning for the child. **Any information gathered as part of the return interview will also be shared with the host local authority.**

## 11. Child Abduction

Children and young people who go missing are at an increased vulnerability of being abused and/or exploited, and other forms of harm.

It is frequently the case that parents, foster carers or social workers know where the young person is staying but feel powerless to prevent the person in question from harbouring the child because there is no proof of a crime being committed against the child. In accordance with the missing children protocols, the police are usually called upon to assist with retrieving the child/young person, which involves their service in a great deal of time and resources, often with no positive outcome for the child.

In order to address this, Northumbria Police have adopted a **Child Abduction procedure** aimed at disrupting and prosecuting those who present a risk to children and young people who they enable to stay away from their home..

Guidance has been issued by Northumbria Police in relation to investigating and safeguarding children and young people through the use of Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWNs) (formerly known as Harbourers' Warnings).

Police officers can access this guidance via the force intranet and professionals from other agencies can seek further advice regarding Child Abduction Warning Notices from the PVP/Safeguarding Department. **The Warning Notices are issued by the police in accordance with Northumbria Police protocol and are not issued by other agencies.**

The guidance contained within this protocol is aimed at tackling those young people aged under 16 (under 18 if in local authority care) who are at risk of significant harm due to their associations and the forming of inappropriate relationships.

**Any report of a child abduction or immediate child protection will not fall under this procedure** – such cases will be considered a crime in action and the relevant force child protection procedures will apply and supersede this process.

There are **two types** of **Child Abduction Warning Notice** which can be issued by Northumbria Police:

#### Child under 16 who is not under local authority care

- To issue a Warning Notice for children aged under 16 and not in local authority care, the police will need a complainant statement from one of the parents.

#### Child aged under 18 who is in the care of a local authority

- Where young people are looked after *under section 31* the local authority will have full parental responsibility.
- In cases of interim care orders this responsibility can be shared.

#### A CAWN cannot be issued upon the child's parent

#### A warning notice can be issued by police to protect a child under 16 (or 18 if under local authority care):

1. Child is subject to reports suggesting a suspect has induced or incited them to run away from the responsible person, or their behaviour and association with a suspect is giving rise to significant safeguarding concerns

#### **OR**

2. Child has been in the company of a suspect in circumstances in which it is suspected that the facts amount to an offence of child abduction, but there is insufficient evidence to justify a decision to prosecute, and safeguarding concerns still remain.

The Police Missing From Home Sergeant, Harm Reduction Supervision or out of hours duty Inspector can authorise the issue of the Child Abduction Warning Notice.

If there is evidence that the terms of a Warning Notice have been contravened, for example if the child has been reported missing and found with the suspect after the Warning Notice has been served, then the subject could be arrested and interviewed on suspicion of having committed an offence under the relevant legislation.

#### Children's Services support to Missing Children incidents

There are occasions where family are complicit in the missing episodes of children. Children's Services should seek to agree with the child and their parents/family any contact/visiting arrangements.

Where necessary Children's Services should consider use of S34 Children Act 1989 to support non contact arrangements, as Child Abduction Warning Notices cannot be issued by Police upon a child's parents.

The Local authority can apply for a S50 Recovery order under the Children's Act 1989 when it has reason to believe a child subject of a care order, an emergency protection order, or in police protection, has been unlawfully taken away or kept away from the responsible person, is missing, or is staying away from the responsible person.

This is an effective tool to assist in safely finding children at risk of harm.

## 12. SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION

On each occasion that a child is reported missing from home or care:

### Northumbria Police – ACTION

- Police will submit a child concern to Children’s Services in accordance with Northumbria Police procedure within 24 hours (missing from home only).
- At the point of return a Police Officer will visit the child/young person. Where possible the young person should be seen alone, The officer will provide contact details to the child to allow future contact if child wishes.
- Police information will be supplemented by information from other statutory partners and where appropriate the voluntary sector. Information from return interviews will be shared with police and Children’s Services.
- Where there is any child protection concern, this will be followed up as part of the daily triage process and appropriate child protection procedures followed.

### Gateshead Children’s Social Care - ACTION

- A needs assessment should be considered by Children’s Social Care (CSC) so that their broader needs can be identified and addressed.
- CSC will provide early intervention and support where necessary to understand and address reasons for going missing .
- CSC should consider whether a S50 Recovery Order is applicable to this case.

## WIDER STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Northumberland will share with police any adverse findings of any OFSTED registered children’s home in the area (for support and to address any wider safeguarding issues).
- Northumberland Planning Authority will notify Police of any applications for new children’s homes or supported accommodation for children to enable police contribution to the *Location Risk Assessment* assessing the application from a safeguarding perspective.

## 13. Missing, Slavery, Exploitation, Trafficking (MSET) Group

### Background

Northumberland Safeguarding Children and Adults Partnership (NCASP) and its partner agencies have a commitment to safeguard those young people who go missing and who are at risk of exploitation and other forms of harm.

The MSET group monitors those children and young people who go missing from home or care and/ or are at risk of sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and/or trafficking/Modern Day Slavery.

The group meets monthly and is chaired by a Detective Inspector and is made up of representatives from a wide number of agencies including Children’s Social Care, Education Welfare, health organisations and drug & alcohol services.

The aim of MSET is to add value to plans that are unable to mitigate risk through traditional approaches; **MSET does not replace existing Child Protection (CP) processes.**

Any professional working with children and young people in Northumberland who recognises signs and concerns around missing and exploitation should submit a referral to the Front door Service (ICS) using the [online referral form](#).

The [Stage 1 Screening Tool](#) can supplement this referral process – see [MSET framework](#) for more details.

When existing child protection processes have been unable to mitigate the risk, the allocated social worker should complete the MSET *Stage 2 Risk Assessment and Disruption Plan* (on Liquid Logic) and submit to *Virtual MSET Worker* (once authorised by team manager). The case will then be discussed at Pre-MSET and considered for MSET panel.

### Information sharing and data collection

“Intelligence sharing” is a standing item on the agenda for each MSET meeting. This allows agencies to share information on “hot spots” and other areas of concern as well as discussing individual young people.

Information will also be shared on a regular basis between the police and Northumberland Council to enable them to identify patterns where a child has:

Gone missing on five or more occasions

Has been involved as a victim or perpetrator in criminal behaviour whilst missing

Known mental health issues

Known risk of exploitation (sexual or criminal)

Known risk of contact with persons posing risk to children

Incidents that have generated assessments of needs (CAF/Early Help, Child Protection/S47, or Child in Need/S17)

Aggregate data about the profile of missing episodes in the area will be collated by the police and shared with Children’s Services and other partner agencies through the Strategic Exploitation Group and monthly MSET meeting.

This together with case data recorded via the MSET will allow the NCASP to identify:



Information will be broken down by:



The data will be regularly reviewed and analysed by the NCASP and will inform a proactive response to patterns of going missing in the local area.

## 14. FINDING YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT REPORTED MISSING TO THE POLICE

When young people are located in circumstances where identified risk factors are evident, but have not been reported missing to the police by their families or carers, further investigation might be warranted.

It may be necessary to consider *police protection* and enquire into whether there are any continuing *child protection* concerns, or whether the young person and their family or carers should be offered family support services.

Information will be shared via a child concern in such circumstances.

## 15. INFORMING THE MEDIA

The police have responsibility for advising the media regarding children and young people who are missing in order to assist in locating that person or warning the public if the child or young person poses a significant threat.

Decisions to publicise children missing from care will always be made in consultation with the Children's Services who in turn will consult with parents and/or carers prior to any media coverage.



## 16. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

Some children in Northumberland may be unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Children in this group may have been trafficked into the UK and may remain under the influence of their traffickers even while they are looked after.

Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing, with many going missing within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours.

*Operation Innerste* identifies that if the presenting asylum seeker is claiming to be a child (aged under 18 years), then the response to the UASC by Northumbria Police and the Local Authority will be that of them being a potential victim of trafficking in the first instance.

Police will invoke police protection powers where appropriate and Children's Services within the Local Authority will take responsibility for welfare of the child.

A Section 47 Strategy Discussion will be convened which will include immigration services/National Command and Control Unit (NCCU)

The agency with the best rapport with the UASC should submit a referral to Nation Referral Mechanism (NRM) where appropriate.

See NCASP Procedure: [Children from Abroad, including Victims of Modern Slavery, Trafficking and Exploitation](#)

## 17. CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION (CME)

**Children missing education are defined as *children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll, not placed in alternative provision by a local authority, and who are not receiving a suitable education at home.***

Northumberland Council has a duty to identify children who are not receiving a suitable education either by being registered at a school or educated otherwise and there is a robust multi-agency process in place to prevent children from being 'lost' from the education system.

Northumberland Council produced their [Children Missing from Education Strategy Procedures and Guidance](#) to assist professionals in identifying and managing these children. This strategy ensures that all cases of children identified as CME are investigated by the named CME coordinator.

Initially it is the responsibility of the school or educational provision that the child is on roll with, to try to establish the whereabouts of the child by contacting parents or other family members, visiting the home address, contacting other professionals etc.

If they are unable to locate the child a referral to the CME coordinator should be made for further checks - Link to download [Children Missing Education referral form](#)

Referrals to other agencies such as Police, Children’s Social Care, MSET, etc should also be made where appropriate. The CME coordinator will contact partner agencies to establish the whereabouts of the child. **Police MASH should be the police point of contact.**

The CME coordinator is responsible for informing schools when a pupil can be taken off roll, if there is no destination for the Common Transfer File (CTF) schools are informed to upload it onto the School2School system.

## 18. SUPPORTING AGENCIES

Missing children cannot be managed effectively by the police service alone. There are a number of statutory and voluntary organisations that play a role in the prevention and management of all missing children.

**These organisations include:**

### National Crime Agency Missing Persons Unit

Police Notification should be made for all missing persons outstanding within 72 hours, and all foreign nationals missing in the UK or British nationals missing abroad

### Missing People

This is a charity dedicated to helping missing people, their families and those who care for them. Missing People receive information from police and other public, private and voluntary organisations, and from individuals. The following services are provided:

- Publicising missing person cases – on notification through police service.
- A national 24 hour helpline for people missing someone.
- A confidential sightings service; sightings can be passed confidentially to the police.
- Suicide TextSafe – partnership with Samaritans to support missing persons in MH crisis
- SafeCall – Home Office funded for children and families at risk from CCE
- Family Text – support to families of those who have been/are at risk of going missing
- Runaway Helpline: a 24 hour confidential helpline, email and free-to-text service for runaways, offering help and advice.
- Message Home: a 24 hour service that helps people contact their families or carers via a message or a three-way call.
- Provide advice and support to families who may wish to resolve their family's affairs using presumption of death legislation.

All phone services are Free Phone and can be accessed by Text or call 116 000 or email to 116000@missingpeople.org.uk

### UK Missing Kids Website (<http://uk.missingkids.com>)

This website helps the police to find missing and abducted children and enables the police to transmit photographs and other information to other police forces around the UK and abroad. This is a secure website maintained by police officers in South Yorkshire.

### Child Rescue Alert

This [scheme](#) is used within tightly defined criteria by the Police in relation to the abduction of a child. It should only be used in high risk cases and with the authority of the on-call SIO (Detective Superintendent).

## 19. Further Information

### Local/Regional

- [MSET Exploitation Framework: Screening, Assessment, Safeguarding and Disruption, and Review](#)  
This framework is designed to provide an effective and coordinated response to young people who are deemed to be at medium or high risk of exploitation.
- Shared regional procedure: [Children Missing from Care, Home and Education](#)
- [Missing Persons – Northumbria Police \(Philomena, Herbert and Winnie Protocols\)](#)

### National

- [Statutory Guidance: Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care](#)
- [NWG Criminal, Civil and Partnership Disruption Options for Perpetrators of Child and Adult Victims of Exploitation](#)
- [College of Policing – Missing Persons](#)

APPENDIX 1: MISSING FROM CARE FLOW CHART

**CHILD MISSING**

