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STAFFORDSHIRE & STOKE-ON-TRENT LOCAL AUTHORITIES & STAFFORDSHIRE POLICE

JOINT PROTOCOL ON CHILDREN WHO RUN AWAY OR GO MISSING FROM HOME OR CARE

STOKE-ON-TRENT LOCAL ARRANGEMENTS (D08)

Version 16 June 2015

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SECTION 1 - BACKGROUND

Introduction

The Children's Society '*Still Running*' survey estimated that around 100,000 children under the age of 16 run away from home or care each year across the UK. We know that many of these children stay with friends or family members, but there are some who do not have or don't access these support systems, or who are forced to stay in environments that are harmful to their safety and well-being, and so end up engaging in activities that may put them at risk

There are strong links between children involved in sexual exploitation and other behaviours such as running away from home or care, bullying, self-harm, teenage pregnancy, truancy and substance misuse. In addition, some children are particularly vulnerable, for example, children with special needs, those in residential or foster care, those leaving care, migrant children, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, those forced into marriage and those involved in gangs.

The majority of children who go missing are not in care and go missing from their family home however, children who are looked after are much more likely to run away than those who live at home, and over 50% of young people in care have run away at some point. This is not to presume that the care system necessarily *causes* young people to run away. In many cases, a pattern of running away may have been established at an early age and may have been a factor in the young person's admission to care. It is also important to remember that the majority of looked-after children do not necessarily go missing.

Whilst each case needs to be considered on its merits, children who run away are at a heightened risk of being victims of crime, being sexually exploited, being involved in substance misuse or of becoming involved in crime and disorder. Additionally, research shows that the level of risk to the individual child escalates with each episode they go missing and repeat episodes have been identified as a significant indicator of high risk to the child or young person.

Migrant Children

It is estimated that some 50% of unaccompanied migrant children who are detained and released into the care of the local authority go missing within 48-72 hours, often never to be seen again. When suspected migrants particularly unaccompanied migrant children are detained, full consideration should be given to their status as potential victims of trafficking and that a referral to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is made in appropriate circumstances. It is important therefore to ensure that biometric data is secured as well as undertaking safeguarding liaison with local care authorities to provide effective 'wrap around care', particularly in the critical first few days when the child is most vulnerable. Those responsible for the 'missing' portfolio

in your force area engage with the local authorities to ensure that they are meeting the requirements detailed within the following guidance: Care of unaccompanied and trafficked children. Statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children; [Department for Education July 2014](#) (Click on the link to view the document).

Legislation and Context

This policy has been jointly developed by Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent local authorities and the Staffordshire Police Service in accordance with the following national guidance on missing children:

1. In July 2009 the DCSF published Section 7 guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care to assist local authorities in meeting the requirements of National Indicator 71.
2. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (March 2011) strengthens the role of the Independent Reviewing officer (IRO) and extends the role of the Independent Visitor. Both have key roles in relation to children who go missing from care.
3. In December 2011 the Home office produced 'Missing Children and Adults – A Cross Government Strategy' with the aim of reducing the number of people who go missing, reducing the risk of harm to those who go missing and providing missing people and their families with support and guidance
4. The Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation plan issued in 2011(DfE) highlights the strong links between children being sexually exploited and going missing or running away.
5. The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) is working to integrate new services for missing children in its operating model and, through a partnership with the charity 'Missing People', provides 24 hour, free and confidential, support and advice to missing children and adults and their families. The helpline also enables those who are missing to re-connect with their families or to gain the assistance of the police.
6. On 18 June 2012 the All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers published their 'Report from the Joint Inquiry into Children who Go Missing from Care'. The report emphasises the vulnerability of children who go missing from care to sexual exploitation.

7. The Ofsted report 'Missing Children' produced in February 2013 suggested that some local authorities were inconsistent in applying and meeting the requirements of the existing statutory guidance
8. The ACPO Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons 2013 introduced the updated definition of 'missing' and 'absent'
9. Between June and September of 2013 the DfE carried out a consultation on updated Section 7 guidance: 'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care'
10. Statutory guidance issued by the DfE January 2014 Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care'

Scope

1. These procedures relate to:
 - Children and young people "looked after" by Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Local Authorities, placed in either Local Authority or privately run Children's Homes within Staffordshire or Stoke-on-Trent
 - Children and young people placed in foster care within Staffordshire or Stoke-on-Trent.
 - Children and young people "looked after" by other responsible local authorities and placed with care providers within Staffordshire or Stoke-on-Trent.
 - Children and young people missing from their home address or other non-care related address, including schools or hospitals.
2. For the purposes of this protocol, a child is defined as anyone who is under 18 years of age.
3. A missing child will be defined as one where the missing episode has been reported to the Police and or recorded on the Staffordshire Police COMPACT database.
4. The local authority retains responsibility for children looked after and placed outside the Local Authority boundaries. In these cases the Local Authority will require the placement provider to comply with this protocol and protocols local to their area.

5. Other local authorities placing children within 'the Local Authority' boundary will be required to comply with this protocol.

Named Responsible Officers

- The Detective Sergeant, within safeguarding in Staffordshire Police is the designated lead officer with primary strategic responsibility for children missing from care and home.
- Staffordshire has designated the Strategic Lead Specialist Safeguarding Delivery as their lead officer with primary strategic responsibility for children missing from care and home.
- Stoke-on-Trent has designated the Strategic Manager Safeguarding and Quality Assurance as their lead officer with primary strategic responsibility for children missing from care and home.
- Both Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent SCB Managers will help to ensure that reporting arrangements are managed in accordance with this procedure.

Principles

The following principles should be adopted by all agencies involved with young people who may go missing:

1. Going missing is a dangerous activity and can have short and long-term consequences. All individuals have a responsibility to report a child if they are missing. If a parent or carer does not report a child missing within a reasonable timescale when their whereabouts are unknown, this should be seen as displaying compromised parenting and should be considered as a potential safeguarding concern
2. It is imperative that services working with children are able to and actively do identify those who are commencing a pattern of running behaviour and provide the appropriate interventions at the earliest opportunity to prevent future incidents which may place them, or others, at risk.
3. The Children's Society through its research has identified the following risk factors that can precede a missing incident in a young person, otherwise known as 'push' factors:
 - Arguments and conflicts at home including being told/forced to leave
 - Poor family relationships including specific step-parent issues
 - Physical and emotional abuse including Domestic Abuse
 - Personal wellbeing – feeling depressed, needing someone to talk to

- Problems with alcohol and/or drugs
- Problems at school

'Push' factors also include placement instability for looked after children and children who are placed at some distance from their family and friends.

Significant 'Pull' factors are:

4. Children running to be with family particularly if contact arrangements are problematic.
5. Grooming for potential sexual exploitation – young people will run away or go missing following grooming by adults wishing to exploit them
6. Many children will exhibit normal adolescent behaviour in testing boundaries and it is not helpful to consider every incident of lateness or absence for all people as high risk. However, some will need to be treated as missing immediately due to their vulnerability. This protocol is based upon the principles of sound individual risk assessment, by carers and agency professionals and by Staffordshire Police in classifying and responding to the incident.
7. Accurate and up-to-date information from the person's past and present is key to appropriate risk assessment and response to missing, and other, incidents. Information from previous assessments, immediate welfare checks or Full Return Interviews should be fed back to Police, carers and social workers so this picture of behaviour and experiences can be developed.
8. The police will only become involved after the Reporting Individual has completed all reasonable checks to locate the individual. Missing children and young people remain the responsibility of the person / organisation which has legal Parental Responsibility (PR) for the child, even after they have been reported missing.
9. The primary function of the Police is to investigate the disappearance and attempt to locate the young person prior to any harm befalling them or the general public. Police response and associated actions will be based on a police risk assessment of the incident and knowledge of the individual(s) concerned, which will utilise information from partners' and those who know the person.
10. Children and young people's views must continue to be taken into account when responding to incidents and any expectations put on young people through this policy should be discussed with them, as part of the care planning and review process and during other interventions for children not in care.

Definitions and Explanation of Terms

The current ACPO definition of missing is:

Missing - “Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.”

Absent – “A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.”

The ‘absent’ category should apply when individuals are not presently where they are supposed to be **and there is no apparent risk**

Police classification of a child as missing or absent will be based on an on-going risk assessment. Note that ‘absent within this definition would not include those defined as ‘away from placement without authorisation’ (see below).

A child whose whereabouts are known would not be treated as either ‘missing’ or ‘absent’ under police definitions; Guidance on how the police will apply these new definitions to children was issued by ACPO in April 2013

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 the carer has concerns or the incident has been reported to the local authority or the police

Looked After – A child is ‘looked after’ by a local authority if they are ‘in care’ and subject to a court order, or if they are provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by agreement with parents or with the child if they are aged over 16

Accommodated – A child is accommodated if they are looked after by the Local Authority with the voluntary agreement of parents, or the child if they are over 16 years old

Responsible Local Authority – The authority that is responsible for the young person’s care and care planning

Host Local Authority – The authority in which the young person is placed when placed outside of the responsible authority’s area

Care Leaver – an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989

Young Runaway – A child or young person under the age of 18 who has run away from their home or from care, or feels they have been forced or enticed to leave, or whose whereabouts are unknown

Missing Person Coordinator – Approval of the new ACPO definition is conditional on the role of missing person coordinator or someone performing this function in each police force. ACPO advise that ideally the role has close links with arrangements to deal with Child Sexual Exploitation

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, ASBOs) or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings

Child Abduction - Where a child has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence, this is a 'crime in action' and should be reported to the Police immediately.

Forced Marriage - Some young people run away because they are at risk of abuse. Forced marriage in particular can lead to young women running away from home

Further guidance can be found at Stoke-on-Trent SCB procedures:

www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk

SOT [D07 Forced Marriage](#) and [Forced marriage gov.uk](#)

Child Sexual Exploitation - Boys and girls may run away or go missing from home or care following grooming by adults who are seeking to exploit them sexually. Children can also be exploited for the purposes of criminal activity

Further guidance can be found at:

www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk

SOT [Section D 14 Child Sexual Exploitation](#)

Child Trafficking - Some missing children subsequently become trafficked, often for the purposes of sexual exploitation. They may be trafficked across both small and large geographical areas.

Guidance for practitioners regarding child trafficking can be found under the respective SCB websites:

[Stoke-on-Trent Procedure F04](#)

<http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/professionals/procedures/>

Children Missing from Education (CME)

Children and young people miss education either because they do not have a school place, or they are having some other difficulties in attending school. This makes them vulnerable and more likely to be at risk of neglect or abuse.

Certain groups of children and young people are more likely to miss education, they include:

- Young people who have committed offences
- Children living in women's refuges
- Children of homeless families, perhaps living in temporary accommodation
- Young runaways
- Children with long-term medical or emotional problems
- Looked After children
- Children with a gypsy/traveller background
- Young carers
- Children with transient families
- Teenage mothers
- Children who are permanently excluded from school
- Migrant children, whether in families seeking asylum or economic migrants
- Trafficked children

For detailed guidance on Children Missing Education see "Revised statutory guidance for local authorities in England to identify children not receiving a suitable education (DCSF January 2015).

SECTION 2 – STRATEGIC ARRANGEMENTS

Governance Arrangements

1. This procedure has been approved by the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board and Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB)
2. The Staffordshire SCB Performance Management subgroup and the Stoke-on-Trent SCB Performance, Monitoring & Evaluation (PM&E) will need to receive quarterly reports regarding compliance with this procedure, including statistical analysis of local needs arising and any identified gaps in service delivery.
3. Exception reports, including any issues pertaining to joint commissioning, will be reported to the Stoke-on-Trent SCB and the Staffordshire SCB
4. The Chair of the SCB's will include details regarding the quarterly analysis of this procedure in reports to the Children's Overview & Scrutiny Committee in Stoke-on-Trent and the Safeguarding Scrutiny Committee in Staffordshire

Strategic Review

- 5 In Stoke-on-Trent, there are monthly contract monitoring meetings and quarterly reviews with Staffordshire Police, Brighter Futures, Specialist Commissioning Team and the Strategic Manager Safeguarding &QA. Biannual reports to Stoke-on-Trent SCB and Corporate Parenting Panel
- 6 In Staffordshire, the Runaways Strategic Group will consider the quarterly reports received and provide biannual reports to the SSCB and Corporate Parenting Panel.

Training and Induction

- 7 The contents of this protocol should be shared with all key members of staff within each agency. The protocol should be part of the induction of residential staff, foster carers, social workers, social work assistants (and pod coordinators), EDT and foster carer support staff. It should be part of the induction of the following staff within the police force; supervisors within force control and Local Policing Units commanders.
- 8 Inter-Agency/Multi-agency training to support effective implementation of this procedure will be provided by the two SCB's.

Local arrangements

The two local authorities work closely together with Staffordshire Police to ensure good outcomes for children who run away go missing from home or care. While there are shared principles, due to the different local arrangements for return interviews, the procedure for each local authority is detailed in two separate documents under the overarching joint protocol.

SECTION 3 – CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME

Principles

1. A co-ordinated response is equally required for children who are missing from home. This may include sharing information about children missing from education, presenting at accident and emergency or are known to the Youth Service
2. Children who are going missing from home and education are at an increased risk of sexual exploitation and all agencies should be alert to the relevant risk factors and risk indicators
3. Anyone who ‘takes or detains’ a child under 16 years of age without lawful authority may be prosecuted under section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984 (see appendix 6)
4. Children and young people who go missing and are under the age of 16 are not considered as being able to live independently away from home Young people over the age of 16 who are living away from home can be vulnerable and consideration should be given to a child’s physical and emotional needs and the potential risk of harm in making a professional judgement about their individual circumstances.
5. There is an expectation that parents or guardians will report their child as missing. Failure to do so should be considered as a potential child protection issue and if appropriate the Stoke-on-Trent SCB procedures followed

Reporting a Child as Missing

6. In the first instance parents/carers are expected to make reasonable efforts to locate the missing young person, providing that it is safe to do so, they should:
 - Search their bedroom and house including any outbuildings and vehicles;

- Contact known friends and relatives where the child or young person might be;
 - Visit locations where the child is known to frequent if it is safe to do so.
7. When all reasonable steps have been *exhausted*, parents and anyone who has care of a child or young person should inform the police and if appropriate, children's services through the Advice & Referral Team, based in the multi-agency service hub (M.A.S.H).
 8. To inform the police about a missing young person **dial 101. In exceptional circumstances if a very vulnerable child goes missing and an immediate, urgent response is needed dial 999, explain the circumstances of the child's disappearance and the reasons for your concern.** The police will need to know:
 - The child's name
 - The child's date of birth
 - Where, when and with whom the child went missing
 - What the child was wearing
 - A description of the child
 - Agree to provide a recent photograph
 - Their medical history
 - The time and location they were last seen
 - Circumstances of going missing
 - Details of any friends or associates
 - If they are pregnant
 - It would be useful if the police were provided with a recent photograph
 9. Officers will conduct a risk assessment forming the basis for resulting proportionate actions. They will make on-going enquiries, sharing information with parents and other agencies as appropriate.

Return of the Child

10. Family or friends locating a child missing from home should return them to their home address.
11. Where a risk is present, a police officer may accompany the family or the police may be requested to return the child to the place of residence only if it is safe to do so.
12. Parents must inform the police when a child returns of their own accord.

13. The police will conduct an interview known as a 'safe and well check' to establish the young person's wellbeing and safety, and to establish whether they were the victim of abuse or a crime whilst missing.

Referral to Children's Social Care

14. Where the Police or other agencies assess that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm an onward referral to the Advice & Referral Team in the MASH on **01782 235100**, out of normal working hours, the Emergency Duty Service on **01782 234234** must be made.
15. The Police risk assessment will be informed by:
 - Individual circumstances, including family circumstances in which the child has gone missing;
 - The child's motivation for running away;
 - The child's possible destination; and
 - The child's recent patterns of absences (if any);
 - whether the parent/s appear unable, or unwilling, to work to support and meet the needs of children.
16. Upon receipt of referral concerning a child missing from home the Advice & Referral Team in the M.A.S.H will assess whether a referral as a child in need (section 17) or a child in need of protection (section 47) is required.
17. Whether a child's case is processed as a child in need or a child protection referral, the **lead social worker/pod member should liaise with Brighter Futures in respect of the of any information gleaned at their return interview**
18. Where no onward referral to Vulnerable Children & Corporate Parenting Services is made, the police are still obliged to notify the missing episode to the local authority who will record the information as a contact.
19. Police Missing Coordinator sends referrals to Brighter Futures so they can undertake return interviews
20. The return interview should be carried out within 72 hours of the child being located or returning from the missing episode and this is particularly important if they have been missing before and/or there is risk indicators suggesting potential child sexual exploitation, involvement in crime or if they have been hurt or harmed.

21. The completed Return Interview Pro Forma should be completed by Brighter Futures Missing worker and returned to Police Missing Coordinator and the pod coordinator where the case is open to VCCP.
22. Should the Brighter Futures missing worker undertaking the return interview identify support is required, they should refer to the appropriate service or locality
23. The return interview record should be saved to the child's record (under safeguarding on the electronic social care record) where the case is open to Vulnerable Children and Corporate Parenting

SECTION 4 - CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE

Pre-Placement

24. Prior to each accommodation arrangement for a Looked After Child, the placing 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 their parent/carer should be involved in the planning process and it should be related to that individual's needs, previous history and views. Missing episodes prior to the child becoming "looked after" must be taken into account.
25. Care should be taken when establishing where the child or young person should be accommodated:

Is the home able to meet the needs of the young person?

Is the placement a good match in terms of other young people in the placement?

Are there external factors in the area of the placement which need to be taken into account when considering the placement (including information from the Staffordshire Police Child Exploitation Team)?

26. When placing outside the placing (home) Authority, it is even more critical to properly assess the above issues. If there is a need to discuss specific risks or issues, the placing Authority should speak to the Safeguarding Unit in the Authority in which the child will be living. When a placement is confirmed, the Placing Authority with Parental Responsibility **must always** follow the **Formal Notification Process** as detailed in 'Working Together' to inform the new Authority that a 'Looked After' Child is being placed in their area

27. The initial placement plan is an opportunity for the care provider and the social worker to discuss with the young person issues around going missing and absent and to explain the rules and responsibilities of all involved. It is also the opportunity to provide the carer with details of the young person and their family and history. This will help carers to understand any risks to the young person or themselves if they go missing and it may help to locate the young person. The Placement Plan should cover:
- Trigger points for absence or missing episodes,
 - Risks to themselves, the public and/or the carer before, during or after a missing episode including when being picked up.
 - What steps can be taken to reduce the likelihood of the child going missing and coming to any harm or harming others.
 - Friends and family details and contact numbers as well as addresses commonly found at
 - Expectations of the young person: for example, curfews and, when and how to make contact, and the consequences of lateness etc
 - Expectations of the care provider: for example at which point the Police will be notified, what processes will follow an incident, who will collect a child if they are missing, details of who conducts immediate assessments on their return and arrangements for full return interviews.
 - Agreements around rules for staying overnight at friend's houses or going on trips. This is frequently cited as a major issue by young people who wish to behave like their peers who are not looked after. Local Authority Circular (2004) 4, suggests that *"decisions on overnight stays should normally be delegated to foster carers and residential care staff. Arrangements for such decisions should be written into the Placement Plan or equivalent."* There is no statutory duty for DBS checks to be carried out on adults in a private household where a child/young person may stay overnight and so restrictions should only be placed on looked after Children if there are exceptional circumstances.
28. Care Providers together with Local Authorities and all other relevant agencies should operate a system of intervention strategies designed to reduce the possibility of a child or young person going missing again, as stated under Standard 5 of the Children's Homes: National Minimum Standards 2011. These must relate to the individual young person and take into account their experiences and needs.
29. A 'Missing from Care Risk Assessment and Action Plan' template can be found at **Appendix One**
30. If there are specific concerns or risks to young people the consideration by placing social workers should be given to liaison with local community policing, to the extent of sharing potential addresses and locations where children might

run to and possibly engaging the police in speaking to the young person about potential dangers in the local area.

Corporate Parenting Responsibilities

31. When a child or young person is reported 'Missing', the carer(s), Local Authority with Parental Responsibility (PR) and the police have a joint responsibility for protecting the wellbeing of the individual. Whilst the police are the lead professionals for the investigation of 'Missing' people, any child who is "Looked After" by the Local Authority remains the responsibility of that Local Authority at all times.
32. A police officer will attend all reports of missing children or young people and will require the carer to provide information to assist the investigation of the missing child or young person, specifically:
 - known acquaintances and addresses frequented
 - any previous history of being missing and circumstances where found
 - the name and addresses of the child or young person's GP and dentist
 - details of when the child or young person was last seen and with whom.
 - a recent photograph
 - mobile phone number of child or young person, email and bank account details (to help with tracking)
33. A Missing Persons template 'Information for Staffordshire Police' can be found at **Appendix Two**, consideration of completing this form in advance should be given where the young person going missing is likely or predictable.
34. The act of reporting a child or young person MISSING by staff at the care establishment or foster home does not absolve the carers from their 'duty of care' to the individual and of a continued duty to do what a 'reasonable parent' would do in the circumstances.

Responsibilities of the Reporting Individual

35. Categories of 'absence' have been agreed between Staffordshire Police and the Local Authority. If a child is absent from care, the local authority or Independent Care provider will decide which of the three categories the absence will fit;
 - Missing, or
 - Away from placement without authorisation and/or,
 - Absconder

36. In deciding the category of absence, all staff must consider the circumstances of the child and their absence. This will include detailed consideration of:
- The circumstances of the absence.
 - The child's care plan.
 - The age of the child.
 - The maturity of the child.
 - Any physical or cognitive disability of the child.
 - Any continuing or urgent need for the child to have medication or treatment.
 - The legal status of the child.
 - Previous behaviour and history of the child.
 - Danger posed by the child to themselves or others.
 - General vulnerability of the child.
 - The child's tendency to drug/substance misuse.
 - Whether the child is perceived as running to, or running from, someone or something.
 - Any circumstances within the placement, say with carers or other residents that may be relevant to the absence.
 - The risk of offending.
 - The influence of peer groups, families or friends.
 - Predatory influences on the child. These may relate to others wanting to use the child for crime, sex or drugs.
 - Any known risk of abduction.
 - Environmental factors including weather, time of year, community events or tensions
37. Children who are absent from their placement are considerable concern to carers and there is a need to locate them and ensure that they are safe. These children can be thought of as being on a continuum, with there being little cause for concern at one end, and with significant cause for concern at the other.
38. Children who are a few minutes late home from school would not normally give rise to concerns; they may 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.
39. 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. Indeed 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 child's vulnerability.

40. The fact that the child 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. The categories and consequent actions are outlined below:

Away from Placement without Authorisation

41. Clearly some children absent themselves for a short period and then return, with their whereabouts known to the carer. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed, either on purpose to test boundaries, or accidentally. Examples of situations where Unauthorised Absence is likely to apply are:
- Running away after a dispute.
 - Failing to return on time
 - Staying at a known location with a friend.
42. If the carer assesses that the child is at risk due to any factor/s known to the carer, then the child should be reported missing without delay and the believed risk communicated to the Police.
43. If the assessment of the carer is that there is no apparent risk for their immediate safety but are away from home without permission it is still important that staff/carers record these incidences as reported absences in the child's record. In addition to this staff/carers should always start a dated/timed record of their contacts, risk assessment and decisions throughout the episode from the point that they are aware of the child's absence, in case the level of risk changes and decisions are auditable.
44. A period of six hours should normally be regarded as the absolute maximum for any child whose whereabouts are not known and who cannot be contacted, to remain categorised as absent, rather than being formally reported as missing; in many cases a shorter period will be appropriate. 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.
45. If the child's whereabouts are known or suspected, the Local Authority staff will decide whether to allow the child to remain at that location, albeit temporarily, or to arrange for their return. If the decision is to arrange their return and there is reason to believe that there may be public order difficulties, the Police will assist. Police assistance in these circumstances does not mean that the child is categorised as missing. Each such occurrence needs to be

evaluated based upon the factors mentioned above and upon other information gleaned from the child, friends, family and associates.

46. Instances of children' being away from placement without authorisation' should NOT be reported to the Police and the Police will NOT routinely record absences.
47. The responsibility for managing Unauthorised Absences lies with the staff of the residential home or carer. It is not the responsibility of the Police to influence or determine the decision of whether a person is missing or reported as 'Unauthorised Absence'.
48. A clear assessment needs to be made by the carer in each individual case as to the length of time that elapses before a child who is reported absent becomes categorised as missing.
49. A reported absence must be kept under regular review by the appropriate carer.
50. It is important to consider whether the circumstances of the disappearance would now render the child at risk of harm, for example: The child requires medication at a set time or, weather conditions have severely deteriorated

Before contacting police

51. When a child or young person is identified as not being at a location they are expected to be, the reporting individual (care provider / foster carer / social worker etc) must take proactive steps to trace the child's whereabouts prior to contacting the police. Such steps would include:
 - a. Physical checks of the residence, including the child's bedroom and any other location the child may be hiding within the house / building.
 - b. Physical checks of any garden, garage, sheds, grounds and surrounding area(s)
 - c. Attempting to contact the missing person directly, via mobile phone, text, or social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook.
 - d. Contacting the missing person's family and friends
 - e. Make reference to any risk assessments, placement plans or action plans that allow for some leeway with curfews for 'boundary testing'.
52. If the child is located through such enquiries, they should not be reported as missing to the police unless there are significant safety issues with the child being at the location. In such circumstances, the reporting individual should contact the police and request a "safe and well" check

53. It should be recognised that police powers to return an individual to a care address are limited unless they are on a care order or Police Protection is considered necessary. Children / young people **must not** be reported missing as a behaviour management tool and Police Protection **must not** be considered merely as a tool to return an individual
54. Carers must also inform without delay:
- The parents/those who have parental responsibility (unless indicated otherwise on the care plan).
 - The key social worker or appropriate team manager.
 - The emergency duty service, if out of hours, and the social worker and appropriate team manager at the start of the next working day.

Going Missing on an external activity

55. After careful consideration of the new ACPO definitions, if a child or young person goes 'missing' whilst on an external activity, the carer or responsible staff member will be required to:
- Arrange an initial search of the area the child or young person was last seen.
 - Notify the local Police immediately. This should be the Police Force responsible for the area where the child or young person was last seen. This report should NOT be delayed until the carers have returned to their home area
 - Notify the child or young person's social worker or team manager both locally and within the placing authority.
 - Notify the senior manager at home (if applicable)
 - Notify the emergency out of hours duty team (if applicable)

Absconders

56. An absconder is a child or young person who is absent from the placement without permission and 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, PACE detention or ASBOs), or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings. A child or young person in this category must be reported to the police without delay.
57. If an absconder is under the age of 18 years, or if the absconding does not involve a power of arrest, the Police will treat the case as either a Missing Person or an absconder this will be informed by colleagues in Probation who would apply for any potential breach.

58. If they are considered to be a missing person this will lead to a proactive Police investigation managed locally by the Police on the 'COMPACT' computer system. Moreover, the individual will be circulated nationwide via the Police National Computer System.
59. However, if the person is aged 16 or over and is liable to arrest the Police will treat the person solely as an absconder and not as a Missing Person, unless there are grounds to suspect that factors other than the absconders desire to evade justice are involved in their disappearance. If the Police treat the case solely as one of absconding, in these circumstances they will actively seek the absconder for arrest. Notwithstanding, absconders in this category must also be reported to the police without delay.

Reporting to the police

60. If the child or young person is not located, the reporting individual should contact Staffordshire Police without delay either by dialling 101 or, if there are immediate concerns and you feel that a child may be at High Risk, ring the emergency number on 999. In all cases the Police will provide an incident number and it is important that a note is kept of this number in the child's case record
61. Parents and carers with parental responsibility for the child or young person should be notified at the time reports are made to the Police and also on the young person's return provided that it does not put the child at any additional risk for example in cases of forced marriage

See **Appendix Two** for details of information to be made available to the police.

SECTION 5 – POLICE RESPONSIBILITIES

Initial Report and Risk Assessment

62. An initial risk assessment is made by the call taker and used to determine *the classification of the incident and the appropriate level of response*.
63. At the point of initial report, it will be necessary for the call taker in Staffordshire Police to determine whether the person is missing or absent and all reports of absent or missing will be subject to an initial and ongoing risk assessment.

A secondary risk assessment is conducted as a result of an officer being deployed to take a **missing** person report. Using all the information available,

the officer will determine the level of risk of danger to the missing person, which in turn informs the extent and urgency of the enquiries to be made.

64. Questions to assist in the assessment of risk are available as part of the 2010 Guidance and on the Police Online Knowledge Area (POLKA).
65. The following set of questions, informed by the National Decision Making Model (NDMM) should be used to define the status of the missing episode.
 - a. What is the specific concern in this instance?
 - b. What has been done so far to trace this individual?
 - c. Is this significantly out of character?
 - d. Are there any specific medical needs?
 - e. Are they likely to be subjected to crime?
 - f. Are they likely to be the victim of abuse?
 - g. Are they currently at risk of Sexual Exploitation?
 - h. Are they likely to attempt suicide?
 - i. Do they pose a danger to other people?
 - j. Is there any other information relevant to their absence?
66. Where a report is categorised as **Absent**, a record should be created and the time frame within which the case will be reviewed should be established, based upon the circumstances of the report, and this will be agreed with the informant at the time of report. **Absent** cases will automatically be considered as **Missing** after 24 hours and will be notified to local policing
67. All reports of missing children or young people will be subject to a risk assessment by the Police. This is a subjective assessment and determines the appropriate level of investigation. It is an on-going process and will be reviewed throughout.
68. In accordance with National Protocol the police will inform The National Missing Person Bureau of any High Risk cases after three hours has elapsed
69. The Compact system will send an automatic notification after 72 hours has elapsed for all Medium Risk Cases
70. A child or young person who is missing from Care will never be treated as **Low Risk** and any child under 12 years of age will never be reported as absent.
71. After considering this and other information the Police will decide the risk level to be assigned to the case, this will either be high:

High Risk

The risk posed is immediate and there are grounds for believing that the child or young person is in danger through their own vulnerability; or may have been the victim of a serious crime **or** the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing the public is in danger.

Medium Risk

The risk posed is likely to place the child or young person in danger or they are a threat to themselves.

In the event of any dispute arising over the level or risk posed to any individual child, the matter should be referred expeditiously to the Cadre Inspector via the Operational Communication Department on the 101 phone number.

Children who have gone missing may come to the attention of the Police in a variety of circumstances. Where the Police locate a child who they believe may be missing, although not officially reported, assessment and enquiries based on the child's account of the circumstances will be made. These should include checks of Police systems i.e. PNC/COMPACT/Storm as well as enquiries at the home address.

In the event that a missing child has not been reported by parents/carers this should trigger further enquiries and assessment by the Police and other relevant agencies in accordance with safeguarding procedures.

Planning for Return

When a child's absence is reported as 'missing' the child's social worker, residential unit or foster carer placing authority and placement provider (and if possible and where appropriate in consultation with the parents and police) should commence planning for when the child is located. Such plans should include:

- Whether the child will return to the same placement;
- How and by whom they will be conveyed there;
- Do the police wish to interview the child before they return to their placement? This would only occur if the young person was an offender or a victim of crime;
- Create a sensitive environment for the child's return;
- Identify and arrange for an appropriate professional person, independent of the child's placement, to talk to them prior to their return to the placement;

- Police will visit the child to conduct a 'Safe and Well Interview'. This should not be confused with the role of the Independent Interview. This is especially relevant to cases concerned with child abduction and child trafficking.
72. Whoever finds a young person has a responsibility to try and find out why the young person ran away. This may be the only opportunity a young person has to report abuse, bullying or mistreatment in a care setting. In the event of significant concern the young person should be reported under Section 47 Child protection Procedures to the Advice & Referral Team which is situated within the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on **01782 235100** or out of hours to the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) on **01782 234234**

Longer Absences

73. When a child has been absent for a period of 48 hours the child's social worker should inform the relevant strategic lead for their service via the usual line management route. If there is significant concern the strategic lead should be alerted immediately.
74. Throughout the enquiry, carers and the police will continually review the case. After the young person has been missing for 3 days, **or earlier, if deemed appropriate**, the police and child's social worker will hold an urgent case review meeting. It will involve police officers, carers, the child's social worker, and any other care professional involved in the care of the child.
75. The meeting will review:
- What action has been taken so far by the police and care professionals;
 - What action needs to be taken by the police and care professionals;
 - Whether the young person should return to that placement when located;
 - Any other relevant information;
 - Date of further meeting to be agreed by all parties should the missing episode continue;
 - Decide if procedures should be invoked under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.
76. Minutes of the case review should be provided to the Strategic Lead for Missing Children, and the child's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who chairs their 'looked after' reviews.

77. All police missing person's files will remain live until the person is traced or until a senior police officer, in consultation with the respective senior lead, is satisfied that all lines of enquiry have been exhausted. They will then forward the file to their appropriate line managers who will take the final decision to file or otherwise. The Strategic Lead must be informed of all such cases.
78. Where the decision to file has been made, Staffordshire Police will be responsible for bringing forward the file on persons who remain missing for review by the appropriate senior managers, 12 months after the file date. Further such reviews will take place at least every 5 days thereafter or earlier, if deemed appropriate.

Return of the Young Person

79. If the whereabouts are known or suspected, it is the responsibility of the local authority or independent provider to arrange for a young person's return.
80. However, there will be exceptional circumstances when, in the interests of the safe return of the young person, the police may agree to requests from the local authority or independent provider to assist in recovering the young person. The police will provide assistance in cases where they may be a perceived risk. However, the police will not agree to requests purely to provide escorts for young runaways, which would involve officers leaving their normal areas of patrol.
81. **It is the responsibility of the carer to contact the police by telephone and to confirm that the missing child has returned to the home.** The police will accept confirmation from care professionals; however, they may still conduct a safe and well check. This will lead to the police closing the missing person investigation and the case being cancelled on the police national computer.

Child Protection Concerns

If it is apparent, upon the return of a young person, that they have been the victim of a crime whilst absent, or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person arising out of circumstances that have occurred whilst they were absent, then the police must be called and asked to attend without delay. This is vital for the protection of the child and for the speedy recovery of evidence. A parallel referral is also required under [Stoke-on-Trent SCB section 47 procedures](#)

82. Where runaways from one local authority present themselves in another local authority it is important that the host authority works with the responsible local authority to ensure they get access to the help and support services they need.

83. Responsibility for making child protection enquiries rests with the Host Authority, it may negotiate with the Responsible Local Authority to continue with these enquiries (section 47, Children Act 1989).
84. In such circumstances, the missing persons clothing, mobile phone and trace evidence from their body, fingernails or hair may be crucial. In cases of sexual abuse the child should be discouraged from washing and immediate advice sought from the police. If carers become aware of the location of the scene of any crime committed against the young person, or of the location of any crucial evidence (i.e. a used condom) they must notify the police without delay. This will enable the police to take steps to secure and preserve evidence.
85. In cases where there is suspicion of sexual abuse the police have access to specially trained officers, doctors and facilities designed to care for the victim and obtain evidence.
86. Additionally, in matters of child sexual exploitation, or any other situation which indicates that the child may have been subject to, or at risk of, significant harm, a referral must be made to ART in the M.A.S.H. in accordance with [Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board's multi-agency Policies and Procedures](#).

The Return

On the young person's return, carers should make clear to the young person that they are relieved to see the young person is safe and well. Their general condition should be assessed immediately, and if appropriate, medical attention should be arranged. Food and drink should also be a priority. The safety and welfare of the young person should also be ensured especially if it seems that they have run away because of bullying or harassment.

87. Parents, police, social workers and all others informed of the absence should be advised of the young person's return without delay. They should be informed of any information gathered on their return.
88. Consideration should be given to whether a strategy meeting (Children Act 1989) is required if for example a pattern of running away is developing. Any of the partner agencies of this protocol can request a strategy meeting following consultation with their first line manager if it appears that there is significant risk to a young person or there are child protection concerns. A strategy discussion will enable formal consideration to be given to the need to invoke child protection enquiries.

Voluntary Return

89. The police should be informed immediately following the return of a young person who has been reported missing. The police will make a return phone call to a residential home/foster home to ensure that the notification of return is genuine. The police may choose to visit the children's home to verify a young person's return; this will be dependent on individual circumstances. If verification of a return to a foster home can be provided by a social worker, verification by the police can be delayed until a mutually agreed time.

Independent Return Interview

This is a more in-depth interview and is best carried out by an appropriately trained practitioner independent of providing care to the young person. In Stoke-on-Trent, there will be a visit by a Brighter Futures worker who will liaise with the lead social worker and/or pod members to follow-up any actions that emerge and will inform future care planning and development of an individual risk management plan.

Many young people need to build up trust with somebody before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they decided to run away so while it is good practice to identify with the young person if they wish for someone else to conduct the return interview, preferably before any incident occurs. This could be a teacher, family member or other agency professional. Every effort should be made to have that person conduct the interview, even if it has to wait longer than usual and if this is agreed by the young person.

The purpose of the return interview is to:

- Identify factors which led to the missing episode.
- Prevent further missing episodes.
- Inform any subsequent missing person investigation
- Share intelligence and information

Particular attention should be paid if a child is suspected of being involved in or at risk of trafficking or exploitation as they may be fearful of giving information.

Consent

Prior to any interview conducted with a young person the interviewer should inform the young person who this information will be shared with, when and why and gain consent before sharing. If they are unwilling to speak to anyone at all for fear of confidentiality issues arrangement should be made for the child to speak to an independent advocate or suitable voluntary agency.

It is crucial that any information gained through this interview, whether conducted by a local authority worker, Independent Service, teacher or wider family member, is fed back to Police and to any intervention meetings so that a picture is built up and any issues can be dealt with. This should only be done if consent is given and if the information is critical to safeguard the person from harm. For this purpose, the return interview record has been developed **Appendix Five**

Scaled Intervention

The role of care planning

90. Every looked-after child must have a care plan based on a comprehensive assessment of their needs that takes into account their wishes, feelings and aspirations for the future. All care plans must be kept under review. The review meeting must be chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).
91. The statutory review should consider the adequacy of the Care Plan in addressing why a child has gone missing and in ensuring adequate strategies are in place to address future missing episodes. The review should consider all push/pull factors in relation to missing episodes (e.g. sexual exploitation, running to spend contact time with family).
92. Alongside the care plan, a Placement Information Record should be completed between the responsible LA and the provider of the child's placement. The expectations as to how they will meet the child's needs should be sent out in the PIR.
93. Staffordshire Police, Vulnerable Children & Corporate Parenting, health partners, and other relevant partners will operate an escalating system of interventions to reduce the likelihood of a child repeatedly going missing
94. Intervention meetings should take place in the event of repeat episodes of children going missing from care. For these meetings to work, and thereby improve our collective responses, appropriate attendance and clarity of purpose are essential. The intervention meetings should be held **within five working days**. The meetings should be chaired by a social worker and recorded and the increased levels of concern reflected in the seniority of those attending. For children and young people who are placed in Stoke-on-Trent by other local authorities, these meetings should be convened and attended by the placing social worker.
95. **After three episodes within a 90-day period:** This has been labelled as 'three strikes and you are in.' The young person and advocate (except in exceptional circumstances), their parent or those with parental responsibility, the child's social worker (chair), the relevant police officer, residential

worker/foster carer/fostering social worker (as appropriate), person who conducted return interview should all meet and agree a plan of action.

96. In the event that at the Independent Return Interview certain issues become evident; it would be appropriate to invite relevant professionals to this meeting to benefit from their specialist knowledge. **It should be noted that it is not necessary to wait for 90 days to elapse; this meeting should be initiated as soon as three missing episodes have been reported.**
97. This meeting should try to identify any 'push' or 'pull' factor in the case and any other voluntary or statutory agency, which has an interest, or may take an interest, in the missing person's welfare and circumstances. In the case of 'pull' factors it may be necessary to target those in the community who harbour the missing person or exploit them with regard to crime, sex or drugs.
98. It is appropriate at this point to assess the risk should the young person go missing again within a 90 day period. It may be appropriate to keep a photograph of the young person to be used to help locate them should any further instances occur. The photograph should be stored in a secure location.
99. **After five episodes within a 90-day period a meeting should be convened to include:** The relevant Practice Manager (chair), young person and advocate (except in exceptional circumstances), parent or those with parental responsibility, Principal / Practice manager from children's services, relevant police officer, residential manager/assistant or fostering team Practice / Principal manager (as appropriate), social worker, representatives from health and/or education (as appropriate) person who conducted return interview. This level of intervention meeting is the crucial stage in avoiding serious escalation and must, therefore, be given high priority by all concerned.
100. **After nine episodes within a 90-day period:** The Strategic Manager Safeguarding & Quality Assurance, young person and advocate (except in exceptional circumstances), parent or those with parental responsibility, Children's team manager, fostering team manager, police missing person coordinator/champion, residential manager (as appropriate), social worker, representatives from health and/or education (as appropriate) person who conducted return interview if different to above. The Independent Reviewing Officer should be invited, although capacity may prevent this. They should in all circumstances be provided with minutes of the meeting.
101. It should be noted, however, that the **number of incidents** is not the only reason to launch an intervention or to escalate the level of intervention. The following are both examples of other reasons to launch or escalate interventions:

- Any case where the risks involved in even a single future-missing episode is very high.
 - Cases where it has been identified that immediate action is necessary to ensure the well-being of the person.
 - A quick succession of missing episodes eradicating the need for 90 days to elapse.
102. Meetings at this level should be rare provided that this protocol has been followed with regard to earlier intervention meetings and return interviews. In addition to seeking to reduce future missing episodes and reduce any apparent risks to the young person/child, this meeting should also quality assures compliance with the protocols and the efficacy of earlier intervention meetings and return interviews.

Out of City Placement

103. Children 'looked after' by Stoke-on-Trent but placed out of the local area should be subject to equal rigour of care planning as those placed within Stoke-on-Trent's borders. They should be subject to escalation meetings, reporting requirements and return interviews as specified in these procedures.
104. The Placement Information Record (PIR) and Care Plan should clearly detail a young person's needs in relation to missing episodes. Critically, the PIR should detail the expectation that all missing episodes are reported by the placement provider to the case-holding social worker.
105. Standards for return interviews and escalation meetings should be maintained for children placed outside the local authorities' borders.
106. In order to maintain a full overview of children missing from care, the allocated IRO is required to report the number of missing episodes and the adequacy of responses to these episodes following each statutory review of a looked after child placed outside of Staffordshire. This will inform strategic planning and reporting. The IRO should inform the relevant team manager of any escalation meetings/return interviews for children placed out of county have not been managed in accordance with these procedures.

Other Local Authority Placement

107. All Independent Providers operating residential provision within the local authority area will be provided with a copy of these procedures. They will further be informed of the training which supports these procedures, as provided by the Stoke-on-Trent SCB. Such providers have a responsibility to

comply with these procedures and also to comply with any other processes specified in the placing authorities missing from home and care procedures.

108. Other local authorities placing children within Stoke-on-Trent are required to inform Stoke-on-Trent LA of their placement. Upon receipt of this notification, a record of the child and their placement will be recorded within CareFirst
109. All missing episodes reported to the police are recorded and shared with Vulnerable Children & Corporate Parenting for strategic monitoring and planning purposes.
110. Upon receipt of a missing notification regarding a child placed in Stoke-on-Trent by another LA, a letter will be sent to the placing local authority by the Advice & Referral Team (ART) advising them of the missing episode.
111. Where a child placed in Stoke-on-Trent by another LA is identified to be suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm, child protection procedures will be enacted.
112. Where a child placed in Stoke-on-Trent by another LA has gone missing 9 times in a 90 day period the Head of Strategic Safeguarding in the placing LA will be informed in writing and asked to ensure that all appropriate measures are in place for the future care and safety of that child. Formal written details will be required so that the child's CareFirst record can be updated. A copy of this letter will be forwarded to the police missing person champion with the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent MASH

Where missing episodes continue to escalate despite the above noted intervention, the Strategic Manager Safeguarding & QA will consider necessary further actions.

Appendix One

Missing From Care - Risk Assessment and Action Plan

To be completed for all looked after children where a risk of running away has been identified or after the first occasion a child or young person has run away.

Planned Placement: To be completed at pre placement planning meeting
Emergency Placement: To be completed within 3 working days

The meeting should always include the carer and social worker, also family placement officer when applicable. The meeting will usually also include the child or young person and her/his parents unless this is deemed inappropriate. If issues are complex, consider consultation with the Police Missing from Home Officer. This assessment should be updated on a regular basis (minimum every 6 months).

Name of Child:

BP number

Date of Birth:

Age:

Legal Status:

Date of Meeting:

Date of Review:

Any child **12 years or under** whose whereabouts are unknown will automatically be considered as at **higher risk** and classed as **missing or absconded**. They **must** be reported to the police immediately. For children 13 years and above, this risk assessment must be completed and be based on age, current circumstances, experiences, background and ability. This will help to establish an assessment of their vulnerability. The risk indicators should prompt the assessment and any relevant information, which should be included under the section "risk assessment information".

Risk indicators	Risk assessment information
Pattern and History	
What are the usual circumstances of the child going missing i.e. is the child running <i>to</i> someone or <i>from</i> a situation? When does the child usually leave the home?	
When was the last episode and is there a pattern?	

Where do they usually go? i.e. with family or friends or with people who are unknown or undesirable. Is there any specific risk if they go there?	
Level of maturity child has shown in being able to make decisions about themselves or others. How able is the child to cope without adult support?	
Past method of return i.e via family or on their own?	
Concerns/Vulnerabilities	
Any concerns about mental health?	
Risk of suicide/self-harm and what are the indicators of this?	
Medication/medical condition?	
Physical or learning disability/difficulties?	
Likely use of drugs/alcohol/solvents and what type and amount?	
Risk of sexual exploitation and have sexual exploitation protocols been activated (meeting to discuss strategy to address sexual exploitation)	
Any previous harm suffered while absent?	
Any concerns about new friends / partners /associates?	
Past involvement of offending and in what form?	
Is the child's behaviour likely to be a risk to the community and in what way?	

Are they experiencing bullying/racial and/or homophobic abuse? Any signs or indicators that child is experiencing difficulties or abuse in the placement?	
Does the child want to live in the current placement?	
Any concern of abduction or being prevented from returning? Is there a risk of forced marriage?	
Are there any known issues/events happening in the child's family or close friends?	
Current Circumstances	
What are the agreed coming in times?	
Do they have access to any money and how if necessary will they obtain this?	
Is the child able to use public transport?	
Does the child usually carry a bus pass?	
Is the child familiar with the surrounding area?	
Do they have a mobile phone?	
Any further information and knowledge	

This risk assessment grid above should be used as a guide and involve discussion and pooling of information to agree an informed risk assessment. In cases of little knowledge or where there is disagreement, the child or young person should be considered as being at higher risk.

Concluding risk assessment in the event of the child failing to return.

Action plan to be implemented

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

Parents Yes/No

Grandparents/other family members Yes/No

Brothers/sisters Yes/No

Friends Yes/No

If whereabouts are known, the child is absent without authority. What steps need to be taken to enable their return?

4. Addresses where child is known to go:

Address	Level of known risk at address	Action to be taken (including the need to make a “Concern for Welfare” report to the police?)*	Maximum time before reporting to police

***If the child is not judged to be safe at any of the above addresses, then report to the police without delay.**

5. Action to take if whereabouts are not known:

If absent for more than _____ hours after due back regard as Missing from Home and start 'Missing From Home' procedures

N.B. The maximum period to delay a Missing Report is 6 hours from when the child is due to return. This is the maximum period and in most situations, much shorter periods may be appropriate.

Where risks are identified, the missing report should be made without delay.

If the child does not return within the agreed interval and there is no additional information that reduces risk, or if there is information that increases risk, the child's needs to be reclassified as missing, and necessary action taken.

Any further action to be taken to reduce the likelihood of the child going missing (in bullet points, including support and prevention strategies)

Social Worker to visit following return withindays (within 1 after 1st episode, to a maximum of 3 days for subsequent episodes)

Signature of residential staff member/foster carer:

Print Name

Date

Signature of social worker:

Print Name

Date

Signature of young person:

Print Name

Date:.....

Signature of parent:

Print Name

Date

Signature of Family Placement Officer:

Print Name

Date

Signature of Principal / Practice Manager (social work team):

Print Name

Date

Appendix Two

MISSING PERSONS FORM

Information for Staffordshire Police

Surname:	Forename:
D.O.B.	Ethnicity:
Gender:	Date:

Home Address:

Description		
Height:	Eye Colour:	Hair Colour:
Build:	Glasses?	Facial Hair:
Accent:	Hair Style:	
Photograph available: Yes/No		

Clothing at time of disappearance:
Last seen with:
Time & Date last seen:

Distinguishing Features (scars tattoos etc):

Previous history of going missing: Yes/No

Details:

Known acquaintances:

Relevant medical information:

Circumstances of increased risk:

Immigration & nationality status(if relevant):

Completed by:

Signed:

Date:

Appendix Three

Sexual Exploitation Risk Matrix

Risk Indicators	Yes/No
Bruising consistent with physical or sexual assault	
Reports from reliable sources that young person has been taken to hotels, night clubs, out of area by adults without parental permission	
Reports from reliable sources that a child has been seen in localities (hot spots) where CSE perpetrators frequent	
Frequented by adults involved in targeting, harbouring and grooming children for CSE	
Being contacted by unknown adults (male or female) in person or by mobile telephone, text, email/chat rooms or letter	
Development of a relationship, usually with someone older, who encourages emotional dependence, loyalty & isolation from safe relationships & controls the relationship by manipulation, violence and threats	
Persistent absconding or late return with no plausible explanation	
Being picked up by unauthorized adults in cars	
Returning from absconding looking well cared for, despite having no known base	
Estranged from family	
Acquisition of money or possessions without plausible explanation	
An adult loitering outside the home to meet the child	
Self harming/ offending behaviour	
Alcohol and other drug misuse	
Persistent truanting from schools	
A young person spending long periods of time in 'chat rooms'/given access to inappropriate web sites	
Sexually transmitted diseases and/or unplanned pregnancy/ies	
Low self esteem/self worth	

NB: If there are two or more of these risk indicators or risk factors present, the child should be considered to be at risk of Sexual Exploitation. For DfE guidance on the next steps click on the link below:

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/step%20by%20step%20guide.pdf>

Also refer to the SCB guidance, 'Safeguarding Children from Sexual Exploitation (CSE) which can be found on the SCB website:

www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk



Appendix Four

Gathering Intelligence about Child Sexual Exploitation

Staffordshire Police have devised a process by which agencies, parents, carers and young people can provide information about perpetrators and is gathered and used in situations where there may be no evidence available or the victim is either unwilling or unable to provide a police statement. This occurs in the vast majority of cases of sexual exploitation. Therefore, the opportunity to provide intelligence means that the police can build a sufficient picture over a period of time and act upon it. This could potentially interrupt and disrupt criminal activity where young people are being exploited.

What to collect?

Information on child sexual exploitation includes details on;

- Suspects – names, nicknames, addresses, dates of birth and descriptions of suspects of CSE
- Vehicles – registration numbers, partial registration numbers, make and model, colour and distinguishing features or marks of vehicles used by suspects
- Telephones – details of phone numbers and mobile phones used by suspects and details of any text messages or phone calls made by them or to them
- Locations – details of locations where offences have taken place or suspects/victims frequent
- Offences – details of criminal offences that have not been recorded by the police either because the victim has not been identified or the victim denies them or refuses to cooperate with the police
- Date and times – that incidents occurred or suspects or vehicles seen
- Links – between suspects, vehicles, locations and young people identified at risk of CSE

The more detailed and precise the information is the better the quality of intelligence. The intelligence forms are not to be used for the following:

- To report a crime
- To pass information to the police about a crime that is already being investigated
- To raise a child protection concern

Intelligence can be reported from 3 perspectives:

1. Disclosure by a Young Person at Risk
2. Incident Witnessed by a Professional
3. Information from another Person

Once completed submit the completed intelligence forms onto the CSE team based at the MASH.

Please note – the Police CSE information Report is **NOT** a referral form. The process for making referrals has not changed and agencies should still follow the same process for making a referral to either the Advice and Referral team based at the MASH (or First Response Team if based in Staffordshire). This form is to collect intelligence ONLY – which may then be used to assist police in building a case. The current form can be downloaded from the SCB website or by clicking the link below

[Police CSE Information Report](#)

Appendix Five



Missing & Absent Children Referral Form
 please contact info@brighter-futures.org.uk or call 01782 286862

Referrer Information		
Name:	Email: missing.children@staffordshire.pnn.police.uk Office Telephone: Mobile Telephone:	
Public Protection Co-ordinator MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub)	Date of Referral: Time of referral: Risk Assessment Completed: Yes If no, reasons as to why.	
Young Person's Information		
Full Name:	Number of Referrals included	
Address:	Telephone number of young person: (Landline & Mobile)	
Postcode:	Can we contact the young person direct: Yes/No Please ensure alternative contact details below Name of Parent/Guardian/Social Worker of young person:(In all cases)	
Is the young person living with family? N (If not living with family please give details of current location and contact details)		
Date of birth:	Age:	School attended:
Ethnicity:		
Local Authority:		

Additional Information relevant to referral (Family/Property/Pets)

Total times missing :	Times missing last
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Including: How many previous recorded incidents/Amount of time absent/In company with if known & Circumstances of return i.e. found by police etc (include last 2 return circumstances)

Please indicate any additional areas of risk you are aware of

Risk	Yes	No	Comments / Useful Information
Has the young person had contact with the criminal justice system?			
Is there a history of violence and aggression?			
Does the young person have any physical health issues? (e.g. disabilities)			
Is the young person a risk to themselves or others?			
Has the young person had contact with mental health services?			

Please send completed referral information to:

Jayne.hulme@chepstowhouse.cjsm.net **CHANGE THIS**

Passed to Operational Manager:	Name:	Date:
Passed to Support Worker:	Name:	Date:

APPENDIX SIX



Staffordshire Police Brighter Futures Return Interview

Date Referral Received		Time	
Date Contact Made (within 24hrs)		Time	
Date of Interview (within 72 hrs)		Time	
Date Returned (within 24 hrs of interview)		Time	
Submitted by		Tel:	
Name of Young Person			
D.O.B		Age	
Address			
Agencies already involved			
New referrals made			
Identified/Known Risks			

*Please provide information: Include as much detail as possible elaborate and probe where possible re **reasons went missing: where to: who with: names: descriptions: vehicles addresses: locations: associates: telephone numbers: etc***

Appendix Seven

Sample of Staffordshire Police Child Abduction Warning Letter



Date:

Dear

RE:

DOB :

I am writing on behalf of Staffordshire Police, with regard to the above named child.

I understand that the above child has been associating with you and has been with you in your care.

Please note that the child is in the lawful control of _____, their lawful parent/guardian. _____ does not agree to the child remaining with you.

Please note that under the Child Abduction Act 1984, it is a criminal offence for a child to be removed from, or kept from the lawful control of someone who has, or is entitled to have, the lawful control of the child. The offence may be committed even where the child willingly leaves the person with lawful control and stays away from them. You would therefore be at risk of prosecution if the child is found in your care again. This is a serious offence which carries a maximum sentence of 7 years imprisonment on indictment.

In order to avoid the risk of prosecution and to help safeguard the welfare of the child, I would be grateful if you could telephone the Area Communications Room on 0300 123 4455 should the child return to you.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact _____ on 0300 123 2345.

Yours sincerely

I, _____ have received a copy of this Notice

Date..... Time..... Signature.....

www.staffordshire.police.uk



Date :

Dear

RE:

DOB :

I am writing on behalf of Staffordshire Police, with regard to the above named child.

I understand that the above child has been associating with you and has been with you in your care.

Please note that the child is in the lawful control of _____ their lawful parent/guardian.
_____ does not agree to the child remaining with you.

Please note that under the Child Abduction Act 1984, it is a criminal offence for a child to be removed from, or kept from the lawful control of someone who has, or is entitled to have, the lawful control of the child. The offence may be committed even where the child willingly leaves the person with lawful control and stays away from them. You would therefore be at risk of prosecution if the child is found in your care again. This is a serious offence which carries a maximum sentence of 7 years imprisonment on indictment.

In order to avoid the risk of prosecution and to help safeguard the welfare of the child, I would be grateful if you could telephone the Area Communications Room on 0300 123 4455 should the child return to you.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact _____ on 0300 123 44 55.

Yours sincerely

I, _____ have received a copy of this Notice

Date..... Time..... Signature.....

www.staffordshire.police.uk



Appendix Eight

Other interventions

Surveillance in Small Group Homes (SGHs)

To ensure that young people living in SGHs are protected from significant harm, it may be necessary to undertake additional supervision. All surveillance must be lawful, proportionate, necessary and non-discriminatory.

Tailing a young person

A carer may tail a young person when they are thought to be leaving the home to engage in criminal behaviour or visiting places that pose high risk to themselves or others.

Electronic Devices

On occasions door sensors/chimes can be used within the home to alert carers that young people are accessing a part of the building that requires direct observation.

Electronic Tag

Some young people may be required by the court to be at home at specific times, this is to discourage criminal behaviour. Young people will have a tagging device fitted to their ankle that will send a signal to the monitoring service to alert them that they are within the boundaries applied by the court.

All of the above additional surveillance methods, would be implemented following completion of detailed risk assessments that has a hazard rating of 10 or above and only with the permission of the young person's social worker. The electronic tag is an exception to this as it is implemented by the court.

Time away

Taking a child (including a parent(s) in some circumstances) to holiday accommodation in remote places with appropriate staff whom child knows has been used positively as an alternative to secure accommodation when concerns about child's safety when missing.