

Missing from Care Policy

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Audience:	Directors, Responsible Individuals, Registered Managers, Senior Residential Care Workers, Residential Care Workers.

Policy Statement

This policy must be read in conjunction with:

- The local procedures for Children who go missing are 'Greater Manchester Runaway And Missing From Home And Care Protocol (RMFHC)'.ⁱ
- Working Together to Safeguarding Children 2023ⁱⁱ

If children placed out of their Local Authority run away, the local procedures should be followed, in addition to complying with other processes that are specified in the policy of the Placing Authority.

Policy Statement

Lighthouse Collaborative Care aims to always safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young in our care; as well as to effectively manage the potential risk they pose to members of the community. It is recognised that this requires joint working between agencies and professionals. When a child or young person goes missing or runs away, they are at risk. Safeguarding, therefore, includes protecting them from this risk.

Definitions

There are various terms which are used concerning missing children. Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (January 2014)ⁱⁱⁱ uses the following definitions:

- **Missing child:** A child reported as missing to the police by their family or adults. However, this should be used with the Police definition where 'missing' means; Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.
- **Missing from care:** A looked After child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g., school) and their whereabouts are not known.
- **Away from placement without authorisation:** A Looked-after child, whose whereabouts are known but who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be, and the adult has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.
- **Young runaway:** A child who has run away from their home or care placement or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.

See also, Police Classifications and guidance.^{iv}

The police classification of a person as 'missing' or 'absent' will be based on ongoing risk assessment. Police will not be sent to cases where children/young people are defined as being 'absent.' Instead, the onus will be on care providers to take steps to locate the child/young person, with monitoring by the police and escalation to 'missing' if there is a change to the circumstances that has increased the level of risk. It is expected that care providers should take all reasonable steps to locate the child/young person before making a report to the police. If they remain absent, and the care provider feels that they may be at risk of harm, then a report should be made to the police. Police will attend reports of 'missing' children/young people.'

Risk Assessment – What are we Worried about?

When a child/ young person goes missing from care there are many factors to take into consideration such as how well the child/ young person is known to adults, where they may have gone, what has been happening for the child/ young person before leaving, and the age and vulnerability of the child/ young person.

For this reason, each child/ young person will have their Missing from Care Risk Assessment on Clearcare. The Registered Manager will write this within the first 24 hours of moving into the home. The assessment is based on information provided before they have moved into the home by Social Workers, parents, adults and/ or previous placement adults. The risk assessment will be reviewed with the child/ young person when they move to the home. Therefore, if a child/young person has lived with us for some time, their risk assessment will also include intelligence information and a chronology of all missing from-home episodes since their time at the home.

Where there are child protection concerns relating to a child/ young person and/or where they have gone missing from the placement or any previous home, the Missing from Care Risk Assessment must include information agreed between the Placing Authority and the home about the day-to-day arrangements put in place to keep the child/ young person safe. The risk assessment will be implemented consistently by all adults working with the child/ young person and reviewed at least monthly and after any absence/missing episode in collaboration with the child's Social Worker.

NOTE: The absence of a strategy in a child/ young person's Missing from Care Risk Assessment does not prevent adults from acting as they see fit to protect an individual from significant harm. For example, a child/ young person may routinely be considered as 'absent' if they are late returning to the home, however, if they had displayed out-of-character/ unusual behaviour before disappearance, if they had self-injured, an immediate and dynamic risk assessment will be required.

The home will prepare as much information as possible for information-sharing purposes when liaising with the police, social care or other partners regarding any missing episode. This will include:

- the child/ young person's name
- date of birth
- mobile number, email, social media (if applicable)
- legal status
- description and a recent photograph
- medical needs or needs for urgent or ongoing medical treatment
- any agreed strategy with the Placing Authority to reduce or prevent the child/ young person from going missing.
- any learning or physical disability of the child/ young person and associated support needs
- free time arrangements (if applicable)
- details of family, friends, and associates
- details of permitted and non-permitted contacts
- known or suspected risks presented by or to the child/ young person.

- any previous history of the child/ young person going missing, including their activities and whereabouts during the missing episode(s)
- Placing Authority details, including those of the child/ young person's Social Worker.

The adult who reports the child/ young person missing will refer to this form for sharing information and will ensure to complete the form at the earliest opportunity.

Prevention

Lighthouse Collaborative Care will take the following steps to prevent a child/ young person from going missing from care:

- Providing stability and continuity of care for the child
- Building trusted relationships with the child
- Taking a supportive approach, active listening and responding to a child's needs
- Providing a safe environment where the child can go for help, advice, and support.
- Assisting the child to problem solve and providing mediation as needed.
- Creating and maintaining close links with family members and significant others
- Communicating any indicators that the child may be at heightened risk of going missing with other professionals working within Lighthouse Collaborative Care, as well as with external professionals (Education and Therapy Providers, YOS, Social Services, Police, and family members where appropriate).
- Informing the child about their right to be supported by an independent advocate, and assisting them to make contact as needed
- Providing a range of interventions to develop the child/ young person's understanding of personal risks and safety (including keeping safe from sex trafficking, sexual exploitation, drug and alcohol misuse, criminality, or gang affiliation)
- Working with the child/ young person to identify any specific 'push or pull factors' relevant to them and identifying ways to seek support with these.
- Providing details of helplines and support services

Missing from Care Procedures

Immediate Actions

If a child/ young person indicates that they propose to leave the home without consent, adults in the home should in the first instance speak to them about this and try to dissuade them. Adults must always show care and concern, even if they are sure that a child/ young person is going to leave. Adults should take all reasonable steps to prevent children/ young people from leaving, especially if it will result in the child/ young person or others being placed at risk.

There may be circumstances where a child/ young person can be prevented from leaving the home – for example, a child/ young person who is putting themselves at risk of injury by leaving the home to carry out gang-related activities, use drugs, or meet someone who is sexually exploiting them or intends to do so.

Any such measure of restraint must be the least restrictive, proportionate and in place for no longer than is necessary to manage the immediate risk. See Lighthouse Collaborative Care's Behavioural Response Policy (Including reducing restrictive practices) for more information.

In some cases, it may be more proportionate to go along with a child/ young person on foot if they leave the home without permission. This will allow the adult to verbally support the child/ young person and continually encourage their return to the home.

If this is not possible, or the child/ young person goes out of sight, then it is the expectation that adults accept normal parenting responsibilities and undertake reasonable actions to try to establish the child/ young person's whereabouts.

If a child/ young person cannot be located, and where it is safe to do so, basic steps taken to locate and establish well-being might include:

- Search the bedroom/ house/ outbuildings (using a top-to-bottom approach)
- Search of the local area
- Consult other children/young people within The Old Parsonage as to the child/ young person's whereabouts.
- Visit locations that the child/ young person is known to frequent.
- Attempt to contact the child/ young person on the telephone, email, or social media.
- Make appropriate enquiries with the child/ young person's known contacts.

If the child/ young person has become absent during an activity away from the home, adults should conduct a search of the vicinity, if it is safe to do so. Searches beyond the local vicinity may only be undertaken with the approval of the Registered Manager.

If adults are satisfied that the child/ young person is absent or away from the home without authorisation, but they are aware or suspect the whereabouts of a child, they should consult the Registered Manager with a view to recovering the child.

NOTE: In circumstances of immediate risk of harm, the police should be contacted immediately.

Notifying Family and Relevant Agencies

When reasonable enquiries have been made and there is still no trace of the child/ young person, and there are concerns for their well-being, the relevant agencies and family must be contacted.

The Registered Manager is responsible for ensuring there are systems in place to notify the following people within the timescales set out in the child/ young person's Missing from Care Risk Assessment:

- The local police
- The child/ young person's Placing Authority (Social Worker or Out of Hours Duty Worker) - if they have not already been notified prior to the police being informed.
- Parents and any other person with parental responsibility unless it is not reasonably practicable or to do so would be inconsistent with the child/ young person's welfare.

The adult sharing the information with relevant agencies should be prepared to comment on:

- Matters included within the child's Missing from Care Risk Assessment
- The circumstances around being unable to locate the child, including the efforts made to locate them and a description of any intel learnt from the child's associates.
- Last known clothing, including whether the child was carrying a bag/ any other belongings or if any items are missing from the young person's bedroom.
- The possible reasons for the child/ young person going missing and their likely intentions.
- Whether the child/ young person is running from or to anything.
- Environmental factors such as weather, time of year, community events or tensions.

Recovering the Child/ Young Person

Any actions taken to recover the child/ young person and return them to the home must focus on promoting the child/ young person's welfare and must take account of their legal status, age, understanding and the level of risk posed to the child/ young person or others.

If children/ young people are found but refuse to return to the home, adults must consult the Registered Manager (who should consult the child/ young person's Social Worker) or, in an emergency/where the child/ young person or others are seriously at risk, call the Police. The use of physical interventions, such as restraint should not be used unless there is an immediate risk of significant harm, or serious property damage, as a last resort and if adults are confident that such interventions will work/de-escalate the situation and make the child/ young person safe. See Lighthouse Collaborative Cares Behavioural Response (Including reduction of restrictive practices) Policy for more information. If this outcome is not likely, they should withdraw and immediately consult the Registered Manager and or the Police.

When a Child/ Young Person Returns

The child/ young person must be welcomed back and must have the opportunity to talk about the reasons for leaving. The Placing Authority, police, and others notified of the absence must be informed of their return.

Adults should continue to offer warm and consistent care when a child/ young person returns and running away should not be viewed as behaviour that needs to be punished. The need for safe and reliable care may be particularly significant for a child/ young person who faces pressure to run away from their home because of circumstances beyond the control of adults. In these circumstances, it will be even more important that the child/ young person's Missing from Care Risk Assessment is kept up-to-date and inclusive of a strategy to reduce the pressure on the child/ young person to run away.

NOTE: The attitude of professionals towards a child/ young person who has been missing can have a big impact on how they will engage with subsequent investigations and protection planning. However, "streetwise" they may appear, they are children and may be extremely vulnerable to multiple risks. A supportive approach, actively listening and responding to a child/ young person's needs, will have a greater chance of preventing the child/ young person from going missing again and safeguarding them against other risks.

Contact should be made with the child/ young person within 72 hours of them being located or returning from absence to arrange an Independent Return Interview in a neutral place where they feel safe. The person conducting the interview should be independent of caring for the child/ young person. An exception may be when a child/ young person has a strong relationship with a relevant professional or Social Worker and has expressed a preference to talk to them, rather than an independent person, about the reasons they went missing.

Independent return interviews provide an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children/ young people from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing, or from risk factors in their home.

The child/ young person's Placing Authority is responsible for ensuring the Independent Return Interview takes place, however, The Old Parsonage will keep a record of such interviews and escalate them where necessary if they have not been completed within the required timescales.

Escalating Concerns

Repeatedly going missing should not be viewed as a normal pattern of behaviour. For example, repeat episodes of a child/ young person going missing can indicate exploitation.

Where a child/ young person runs away persistently or engages in other risky behaviours, the Registered Manager, in consultation with the child's Placing Authority, should convene a Strategy Meeting to develop/ review any existing strategies in place for managing risks to the child/ young person. The strategy should be agreed with the child/ young person's Placing Authority, the Local Authority where the home is located and the local police. Actions following earlier incidents, and access to and timeliness of Independent Return Interviews should also be reviewed. Any strategies must be detailed in the child/ young person's Missing from Care Risk Assessment and communicated to the adult team.

In exceptional cases, and where strategies have proven unsuccessful in keeping a child/ young person safe, it may need to be considered whether a change of home might be in the best interests of the child/ young person. In such cases, the Registered Manager must discuss this option with the child/ young person, their Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer to ensure that this option is considered in the context of the child/ young person's holistic needs and of their Care Plan, and endeavour to arrange a Placement Stability Meeting. Where a meeting does not take place, the Registered Manager must escalate this concern under Regulation 5 of The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015.

In all cases where the child/ young person is or has been, persistently absent from the home, the child/ young person's Looked After Review should be brought forward.

Recording, Monitoring and Notifications

Recording

Records must be kept detailing all individual incidents when children/ young people go missing from the home. This information should be shared with the Placing Authority and, where appropriate, with the child/ young person's parents.

The date and circumstances, including any information relating to the child/ young person's whereabouts during the period of absence, and all action taken by adults, must be recorded in full.

Such incidents must be recorded under the relevant tab on each child's ClearCare record e.g. Missing from Care, or Unauthorised Absence, within 24 hours. The incident should also be referenced within the young person's Daily Log.

The missing record will remain 'live' until all actions have been completed, including the completion of the Independent Return Interview.

Monitoring

If The Old Parsonage is experiencing high levels of children/ young people going missing, the Registered Manager should undertake a formal review of the culture and strategies being used in the home and take steps to reduce the incidents.

Evaluation of missing incidents should be undertaken to identify any gaps in training, skills, or knowledge for adults or to record and retain evidence of what worked well. This evaluation should inform the Registered Manager's Quality of Care Review.

The Old Parsonage will also have an independent person visiting the home at least once a month to monitor the effectiveness of the home's arrangements for safeguarding children/ young people and for promoting their well-being. They will routinely examine missing person's reports to check The Old Parsonage provides stable, secure, and safe care.

Notifications

Regulation 40 of The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 requires the Registered Manager to notify Ofsted, along with other relevant persons, if there is an incident relating to the protection, safeguarding or welfare of a child living in the home which the Registered Manager considers to be serious.

This could include serious concerns over a child/ young person's missing behaviour, particularly where the child/ young person is considered to be at risk of harm due to age or vulnerability or where they have been missing for a considerable period and their whereabouts are unknown.

The Registered Manager must assess each case individually, taking into account any patterns of behaviour or unusual behaviour which may indicate an increased risk to the child.

Any notifications to Ofsted must be made within 24 hours of the incident.

Training and Supervision

Adults will be trained and supported to offer a consistent approach to the care of children/ young people. This will include being proactive about strategies to prevent children/ young people from running away and understanding the procedures that must be followed if a child/ young person goes missing.

The competence and support needs of adults in responding to missing from care issues will be considered as part of their appraisal and supervision. Each adult will receive supervision every 4 weeks. Group supervision is also facilitated monthly in the form of team meetings.

Regulation and standards

- The Protection of Children Standard, Regulation 12^v
- Reporting serious incidents in a children's social care service to Ofsted^{vi}

ⁱ [Greater Manchester Runaway and Missing from Home and Care...](#)

ⁱⁱ [Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Statutory Guidance Missing From Care](#)

^{iv} [the College of Policing definition of missing and absent.](#)

^v [QS Stat Guidance \(Consultation version - Formatted for Pub\)](#)

^{vi} [Report a serious childcare incident - GOV.UK](#)