

**Joint Protocol
for
Children Missing from Home or Care**

**Bradford Safeguarding Children Board
Calderdale Safeguarding Children Board
Kirklees Safeguarding Children Board
Leeds Safeguarding Children Partnership
Wakefield and District Safeguarding Children Board**

Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Related Procedures	3
3	Definitions	4
4	Responding to a Child who is Absent	4
5	Reporting a Missing Child to the Police	6
6	Police Response to a Child Reported Missing	7
7	Using the Continuum of Risk to Plan the Most Appropriate Response	8
8	Police Investigation	10
9	Planning for the Child's Return	11
10	Police Prevention (Safe and Well) Checks	12
11	Independent Return Interviews	13
12	Children Looked After by the Local Authority	14
13	Media	18
14	Multi Agency Missing Planning Meeting and Missing Safety Plan	18
15	Additional Local Area Missing Procedures	20

Appendices

Appendix A - [Examples of Different Types of Absence and Missing Occurrences](#)

Appendix B- [Example Questions that may Help to Establish if a Child is Missing](#)

Appendix C – [Legal Powers and Duties](#)

Appendix D- [Children Missing in Specific Circumstances](#)

1. Introduction

This protocol has been produced jointly by Safeguarding Children Partners in Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield.

A document of this nature cannot anticipate every situation, but seeks to set out the overarching principles which should guide any response to a child who is missing from home or care. Individual judgement – based on an assessment of risk - will be needed to determine what action is deemed necessary on a case by case basis to protect the safety of a child or young person.

The reasons why children go missing from home or care are complex and frequently involve a number of 'push' and 'pull' factors which should not be viewed in isolation from a child's daily life experiences. Every absence or missing occurrence should warrant professional attention, and

practitioners need to offer a consistent and coherent response in order to safeguard children from any risk of harm. **Any missing episode should always be treated as a clear indicator that something is not right in the child's life.**

The following safeguarding principles underline this protocol:

- The safety and welfare of the missing child is paramount;
- Locating and returning the missing child to a safe environment is the main objective;
- Whenever there are concerns that a child who has been, or is missing, has suffered or is likely to suffer, Significant Harm, the [West Yorkshire Consortium Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures](#) should be followed.

This protocol applies to all children who are absent or go missing, including;

- All children under 18 who go missing from their family home;
- All children in the care of a local authority Children's Home within West Yorkshire;
- All children in the care of a West Yorkshire local authority, placed outside of West Yorkshire with a host authority;
- All children in the care of a West Yorkshire local authority, placed with local authority foster carers;
- All children placed in private establishments or with Independent Fostering Agencies within West Yorkshire, where compliance with this protocol is specified in the contract or placement agreement;
- Children in the care of a responsible local authority who are placed in West Yorkshire (as the host authority); and
- All children admitted to hospitals and mental health units in West Yorkshire.

PLEASE NOTE - Supplementary local area missing children procedures provide specific guidance on actions required by practitioners and should be consulted (where available) alongside this protocol (See, [Additional Local Area Missing Procedures](#).)

2. Related Procedures

[Child Exploitation - Policy, Procedures and Guidance](#)
[Children from Abroad, including Victims of Modern Slavery, Trafficking and Exploitation](#)
[Forced Marriage](#)

And [West Yorkshire Police Missing Person's Policy](#)

3. Definitions

Child	Anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.
Missing child	A child reported as missing to the Police by their family or carers.
Absent Child	A child not at a place where they are expected or required to be.
Child Looked After	A child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a Care Order, or accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989
Away from placement without authorisation	A Child Looked After whose whereabouts are known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the <i>carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the Police.</i>
Responsible local authority	The local authority that is responsible for a Child Looked After's care and care planning.
Host local authority	The local authority in which a Child Looked After is placed when placed outside of the responsible local authority's area.
Absconded	When a missing child is subject to a court order, such as curfew or bail conditions.

N.B. For the purposes of this protocol a child who has run away or who is missing will be defined as a missing child when the episode has been reported to the Police.

The Police categories of missing do **NOT** incorporate Children Looked After who are 'away from placement without authorisation'.

4. Responding to a Child who is Absent

Absent: *A child not at a place where they are expected or required to be.*

When a child is absent, parents/carers and professionals should consider the child's individual circumstances and any additional vulnerabilities (such as their age, level of understanding, friendships / associations and / or substance misuse).

Periods of absence may involve children staying out longer than agreed, either purposely, accidentally or to test boundaries, and may include:

- Not arriving home at an agreed time;
- Staying out at a known location;

- Being with friends;
- Attending a known address;
- Being at the home of family members; and
- Staying out/being with a girlfriend /boyfriend.

In these types of situations it would usually be appropriate to initially consider the child as absent, and at this stage it would not be necessary to report the child as missing to the Police. See [Appendix A Examples of Different Types of Missing and Absence Occurrences](#) and [Appendix B Example Questions that might help to Establish if a Child is Missing](#) which can be used to help determine if a child is absent or missing (in which case they should be reported as such to the Police).

When a child is absent, the child's parent/carers (including staff in Children's Homes) should take all reasonable and practical steps to establish the whereabouts of the child confirm their well-being and return them home.

Police assistance to return an absent child home should only be sought if:

- Access to the child is being denied;
- There is evidence to suggest the child is at risk of harm; or
- It is necessary to prevent a breach of the peace.

If the child refuses to return, their parent or carer and /or the child's social worker will need to make a decision about whether to allow the child to temporarily remain at that location. When the child is subject of a Social Care Single Assessment and /or a S47 Child Protection Enquiry, is a Child in Need or subject to a Child Protection Plan or is Looked After, any decision to allow them to remain at an alternative location, and the reasons for this, must be clearly recorded on their electronic record.

If a practitioner involved with the child or family becomes aware that a child is absent they should:

- Establish when the child was last seen and, if they or others have any concerns about the child, they should discuss these with the child's parent/carers. Where there are concerns they must advise the parent to inform the Police and Children's Social Care;
- Inform the child's social worker (or the Children's Social Care Services duty worker) if the child who is absent is subject of a Social Care Single Assessment and /or a S47 Child Protection Enquiry, a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan or is Looked After; and
- Make a record of their actions.

If Children's Social Care Services or Early Help Services are already involved with the child, the social worker / team responsible for the child will:

- Inform the child's parents / carers and other local agencies who know the child;
- Inform all practitioners involved with the child's plan;
- Ensure that the absent episode is recorded on the child's electronic file.

All practitioners should keep a log showing the dates and times of any contact / attempted contact with the child, the child's response (or lack of), an indication of the assessed risk and a review period of the absence.

5. Reporting a Missing Child to the Police

Missing: *A child whose whereabouts cannot be established and who has been reported to the Police as missing. They will be considered as missing until located and their well-being or otherwise is confirmed.*

See also [Appendix A Examples of Different Types of Missing and Absence Occurrences](#) and [Appendix B Example Questions that might help to establish if a child is missing](#) which can be used to help determine if a child is missing and should, therefore, be reported to the Police.

When a child is reported as missing, the Police will request the following information to assess the level of risk (if any) the child is likely to face:

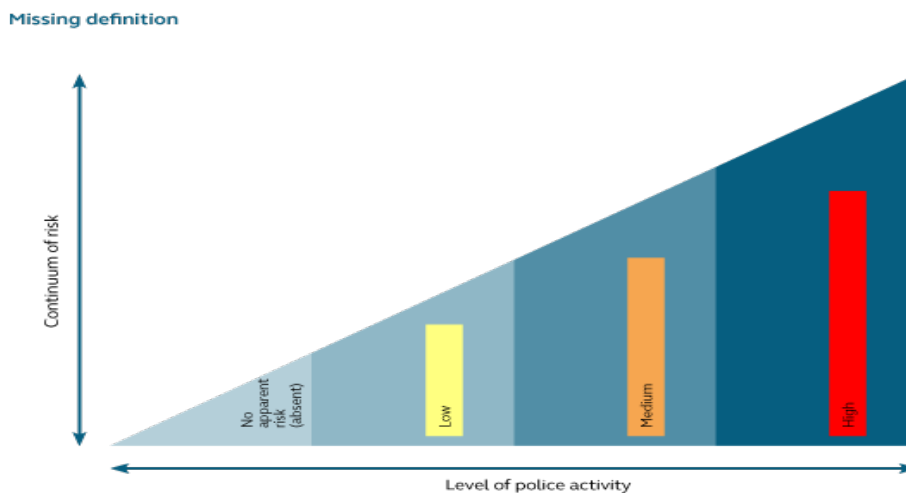
- Name and gender of the child (including all names and aliases), their date of birth and age;
- Description of the child and their clothing;
- The child's home address (and, if different, the child's family home address);
- The location the child is missing from, and details of when the child was last seen and the details of the person who last saw them;
- Whether this is out of character, and if they have been missing before, if so, how often, and what were the circumstances?*
- Circumstances of the missing episode, including any signs of pre-planning (have they taken any money, clothing? Did they tell anyone they intended to leave?);
- Whether the child has any illnesses or takes any medication; Whether they have mental health problems and /or if there are concerns for the child's emotional well-being;
- If the child has any issues with alcohol/drug misuse, and/or if the child has recently received any unexplained items or money;
- The child's mobile phone number;
- If any contact has been made with the child;
- Details of the child's social media profiles;

- Locations where the child may have gone, including places where they normally go, any places where they have been found previously, and details of any friends and associates they may be with;
- Name, address and telephone number of the reporting person and their relationship to the child; and
- Summary of all actions already undertaken to locate the child.

*The fact that a vulnerable child has a history of going missing (including any occurrences of absence) does **not** mitigate risk, and each report of missing will be considered in its own right.

6. Police Response to a Child Reported Missing

West Yorkshire Police will respond to reports of missing children using a nationally agreed continuum of risk ranging from 'no apparent risk (absent)' through to high-risk cases that require immediate, intensive action.



To establish the child's vulnerability, assess the level of risk, and determine an appropriate response the Police will seek to explore the following;

- The child's level of vulnerability (including any learning difficulties);
- Whether the child is a risk to others;
- The child's physical vulnerability.

And any concerns relating to:

- The child being a victim of a serious crime;

- The child being involved in any recent arguments or disagreements;
- The child having been the victim of a recent violent, domestic, homophobic or racist incident;
- Self harm;
- Bullying;
- Sexual Exploitation, Criminal Exploitation, Modern Day Slavery / Trafficking, so called Honour Based Violence, Forced Marriage, Female Genital Mutilation or Stalking.
- Whether the child is likely to visit someone who may be violent, sexually abusive, is known to pose a risk to children or likely to supply them with drugs or alcohol.

7. Using the Continuum of Risk to Plan the Most Appropriate Response

Following the initial enquiries, the child's level of assessed risk and vulnerability will be determined and the Police will respond according to where the missing child is placed on the continuum of risk. It is therefore important that the person reporting the child as missing shares all the relevant information, and any concerns they may have for the child.

Missing Children at 'No Apparent Risk' – this is where, based on the information available, the Police conclude that in relation to a child reported as 'Missing' there is no apparent risk of harm to either the child or the public.

Where a child's whereabouts are not known and they are not at a place where they are expected or required to be, but are not assessed as likely to suffer or cause harm, West Yorkshire Police will make a record of the missing report and agree a course of action with the parent/carer/practitioner who reported the child as missing.

A missing child who is assessed as being at No Apparent Risk must be kept under regular review by the appropriate carer. If the child does not return as expected, or is not located, and/or the risk to the child is believed to have increased, the parent or carer should notify the Police without delay.

The Police will set a review time to reassess the categorisation of No Apparent Risk of at least every 8 hours, up to a maximum of 18 hours from the point of the child being reported as missing. If the child has not returned or been located after 18 hours they will be circulated immediately as a missing person.

It is the responsibility of the parent/ carer to make arrangements for the child to return to their home.

If a child has an allocated local authority social worker, the period of missing at 'No Apparent Risk' should be clearly recorded on the child's electronic case file.

Please note - Children assessed as at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation or abuse (whether already flagged on the Police database or not and children assessed as at risk due to other vulnerabilities including mental ill health, Forced Marriage, so called Honour Based Violence, Trafficking / Modern Day Slavery, Female Genital Mutilation and Criminal Exploitation, should **not** be responded to by the Police as at 'No Apparent Risk', when reported as missing from home or care.

Low, Medium and High Risk Missing Children

Low Risk:	<p>A child is assessed to be missing, but any risk of harm to the child or the public is assessed as possible but minimal.</p> <p>Proportionate enquiries will be undertaken by the Police to ensure that the child has not come to harm</p>
Medium Risk	<p>The risk of harm to the child or the public is assessed as likely but not serious. This category requires an active and measured response by the Police and other agencies in order to trace the missing child and support the person reporting.</p> <p>All children reported as missing who have a flag on the Police system identifying them as at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation, will be responded, at a minimum as medium risk, unless there are exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>Children identified as at medium risk will receive a priority response from the Police.</p>
High Risk	<p>The risk of serious harm to the child or the public is assessed as very likely.</p> <p>This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of Police resources, with action only being delayed in exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>There should be a press/media strategy and close contact with partner agencies. Children's Social Care Services will be notified immediately.</p> <p>Support for the child's family will be put in place where appropriate.</p> <p>Children classified as high risk missing will receive a 'critical incident' response from the Police.</p>

Police Officer Attending

If the Police assess a child is missing and there is concern for the child and/or others, they will attend to take a missing person report and investigate in accordance with the assessed level of risk and vulnerability.

The police officer attending will:

- Take details of all the enquiries conducted so far;
- Request a photograph of the missing child;
- Make all necessary enquiries at the scene to locate the missing child, including undertaking a thorough search of the premises;

- Ensure during any search of premises that they also search for items which will assist subsequent enquiries or inform the Risk Assessment, e.g. suicide notes, diaries, and mobile phones;
- Gather information relating to any Police flags, reporting strategies, Missing Action Plans, and /or Risk Assessments to help determine whether the child is at risk of Child Sexual and/or Criminal Exploitation, Trafficking / Modern Day Slavery, Forced Marriage, So Called Honour Based Violence, or Female Genital Mutilation and to establish if an immediate investigation is required; and
- Provide the reporting person and other significant individuals with details on who to contact should they require an update from the Police.

8. Police Investigation

If a child is not located as a result of the initial enquiries, the police officer will create a missing person occurrence record on the Police computer system and a formal investigation will commence.

The police will continuously review any missing from home report in line with the [West Yorkshire Police Missing Person's policy](#)

Parents / carers, practitioners and all relevant agencies will be expected to help the Police to find the child and to work co-operatively with the Police during any investigation.

If a missing child has not returned within 72 hours of the Police receiving the initial report, the case details will be submitted by the District Safeguarding Unit to the UK Missing Persons Bureau within 12 hours.

Cross border investigations

When a child is reported as missing to West Yorkshire Police, the responsibility for the report and enquires to locate the missing child will ordinarily lie with the Police district in which the report was originally received.

However, where it becomes apparent that the missing child has left that area and is now likely to be in a different force or district area , then the 'ownership' of the report and enquiries may be transferred from one district area to another within West Yorkshire Police or to another Police force.

In respect of Children Looked After, the home / responsible local authority retains legal responsibility for the child and therefore the Police force responsible for any enquiries to locate the child, should liaise with both the child's home / responsible local authority Children's Social Care Services, as well as the host local authority.

Police Referrals

The Police will make a referral to Children's Social Care Services when a child who has been missing from home has been located by the Police and;

- The child is a 'repeat missing person' (i.e. they have been reported as missing 3 times in a rolling 90 day period);
- The child has experienced, or is likely to experience Significant Harm; or
- The parent or carer appears unable or unwilling to work to meet the needs of a child that has gone missing.

Children Missing Long Term

A long term missing child is defined by West Yorkshire Police as a child who has been missing in excess of 28 days. All children missing long term will remain subject to Police review.

9. Planning for the Child's Return

From the moment a child is reported as missing, parents /carers, social workers, and the Police should start planning for when they are found.

Planning for a child's return is extremely important, especially in relation to children who go repeatedly missing and / or those who are assessed as high risk. This planning may include identifying suitable alternative short term accommodation for the child. It is important that if alternative accommodation is required, that this is risk assessed and meets the child's needs. Children must not be placed in accommodation that leaves them vulnerable.

Consideration should be given as to who will support the child once they have been found / returned and to who is the most appropriate person to conduct an Independent Return Interview with the child.

When the child returns or is located, all individuals who were notified of the child's absence should be advised without delay so that they can support the child (and their family / carers).

The child's parents or carers are responsible for recovering and returning a child to their home. If the child has an allocated social worker, they may be in a position to support returning the child home safely.

The parent or carer should only request Police assistance to recover a child if;

- The parent / carer is prevented from obtaining access to the child;
- There is evidence to suggest that the child is at immediate risk of serious harm; or
- This is necessary to prevent a breach of the peace due to a threat of violence or disorder.

If the Police locate a child they should not leave them at a location where they are likely to be exposed to a risk of harm or at a location where they are likely to go missing from again.

If the Police are considering leaving a child at an address to be collected by the local authority, they must contact Children's Social Care Services to ensure that any known risk factors are shared and taken into account.

On occasions the Police may need to consider returning the child direct to their home or consider taking the child to a local Police Station after confirming a collection time with a parent / carer or the local authority.

Children should not be returned to the place they ran away from until their safety is fully evaluated. If there are concerns that to do so would place a child at risk of Significant Harm, a referral must be made to Children's Social Care Services. The Police may consider the use of Police powers of protection to ensure the safety of the child until Section 47 Enquiries are commenced by the local authority, and /or a coordinated plan of intervention is agreed.

If there is any suggestion that a child has been the victim or perpetrator of crime, consideration must be given to the securing of evidence including forensic examination.

Where an allegation of physical or sexual abuse is made or becomes evident, the [West Yorkshire Consortium Safeguarding and Children Procedures](#) must be followed.

10. Police Prevention (Safe and Well) Checks

A police officer must visit a child within 4 hours of their return to conduct a Prevention (also known as Safe and Well) Check, unless the child:

- Was returned or was found by the carer before initial Police attendance;
- Is a mental health patient;
- Is in the care of the local authority and a prior Prevention Check strategy has been agreed between the Police district Missing Person Co-ordinator and Children's Social Care Services;
or
- It is considered in the circumstances more appropriate to make a mutually convenient appointment.

The purpose of a Police Prevention Check is to seek to establish;

- That the child is safe and well;
- Why the child went missing (considering the push and pull factors as well as possible triggers);
- What the child did when they were missing, including, where they went and who they were with;
- If any offences were committed against or by the missing child;

- The child's demeanour (e.g. sad, defiant, unconcerned or relaxed) and appearance (e.g. clean, dirty, hungry, torn clothes or in possession of new clothing/possessions);
- What action is required to help prevent the child going missing again? This may include, exploring with the child positive alternative options to going 'missing', so that if a similar situation arises the child can consider what alternative action they might take, and where they could get support from.

Unless the Police district Missing Person Co-ordinator and the local authority have an agreed an alternative strategy, a Prevention Check **must always** be conducted with a Child Looked After, no matter how many times they have been missing before.

If a child does not engage in a Prevention Check, it is important for the Police to record the child's manner, their physical appearance and any other relevant information.

The Police must record details of the Prevention Check and share them with the relevant local authority.

11. Independent Return Interviews

When a child is found or returns, they should be offered an Independent Return Interview, in accordance with procedures in each local area.

An Independent Return Interview provides the opportunity to identify and understand any risk or vulnerability the child might be experiencing, discuss the child's needs and explore alternative strategies to help prevent further missing occurrences. It can also determine if any referrals for services are required.

The interview should be initiated and, where possible, completed within 72 hours of the child returning to their home or care setting and be held in a neutral place, where the child feels safe and undertaken by someone independent of the child's family, placement, or care; unless the child requests or indicates they would prefer the interview with someone they are familiar with.

Return interviews should explore the push and pull factors as well as any risk and vulnerability factors. This should include exploring with the child;

- Whether they have been hurt or harmed ;
- Any concerns around Sexual Exploitation, Trafficking, Modern Day Slavery, Forced Marriage, so called Honour Based Violence and /or Female Genital Mutilation;
- Any offending behaviour (including Criminal Exploitation) and /or substance misuse;
- Whether the child has had any contact with people who could be considered as a risk to children;
- The frequency of the child's missing episodes;
- Any on-going risk or vulnerability factors that may impact on the child going missing again; and
- Any risk or vulnerability factors the child may be experiencing at home or in their placement or in their education and social settings.

The interviewer needs to;

- Help the child feel safe and understand that they have options to prevent repeat instances of them running /staying away;
- Provide the child with information on how to they can stay safe if they choose to run /stay away again, including helpline numbers; and
- Undertake an assessment of whether a child might run /stay away again.

Although Independent Return Interviews provide children with an opportunity to speak in confidence about why they went missing, if the child shares information which suggests that they or another child or vulnerable adult are at risk of significant harm this will be shared with Children’s Social Care / the Police. At the start of the interview the child must be helped to understand what types of information might be shared with other agencies and why.

If a child chooses not to engage with the Independent Return Interview, the professional / agency responsible for conducting the interview should offer the child’s parents /carers the opportunity to provide any relevant information.

If the child has an allocated local authority social worker, details of the Independent Return Interview should be recorded and retained on the child’s electronic file.

When a child has been reported as missing on 2 or more occasions, the local authority should refer to previous Prevention Checks and Independent Return Interviews to inform a discussion with the child and /or their parents /carers.

12. Children Looked After by the Local Authority

Placement planning for every Child Looked After must include consideration of the likelihood of them going missing, and any associated risks and vulnerabilities. This information should then be used to inform an agreement with the placement provider about how to respond if the child is absent, missing or ‘away from placement without authorisation’.

The child’s social worker has responsibility for ensuring that an assessment of risk is completed when a child is accommodated.

The Missing Risk Assessment and any Missing Strategy documents should be reviewed as part of the Looked After reviewing processes.

A Missing Risk Assessment for a Child Looked After should address:

Prevention planning	Considerations: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the child been absent, missing or ‘away from placement without authorisation’ before and if so, what is the pattern of previous occurrences?
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	<p>What factors or potential incidents act as trigger events?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there are any other circumstances, behaviours or indicators that may influence a child to be absent, missing or away from placement without authorisation in the future? • Who will raise the child's awareness of the risks of running /staying away? • Who will provide guidance to carers on what they should do to help prevent the child running or staying away? <p>Carers / Placement Providers should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about any persons or addresses that the child should not be having any direct contact with or visiting, with the child and the carer(s). • Ensure that the child is aware of what action will be taken by the carers, the local authority and the Police if they go absent, missing or are away from placement without authorisation.
Risk and Vulnerability	<p>Whether the child is likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely to visit a person or people known to be a risk to children; • At risk of Child Sexual Exploitation, Criminal Exploitation, interpersonal abuse /violence, Trafficking / Modern Day Slavery, so called Honour Based Violence, FGM, Forced Marriage, bullying, self-harm? • Likely to misuse substances and/or become involved in offending behaviour? • Sleep / visit / stay in risky places?
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who needs to be contacted when the child's whereabouts is unknown and contact cannot be made? • Which addresses need to be visited and by who? • Which places the child is known to visit should be checked? How and by who? • What actions are expected of the child to stay in contact /keep the carer informed of their whereabouts • When should the Police be contacted?

Two recent digital photographs of the child (face and full body length) should be retained by the carer for missing from care purposes. Copies of these photographs should also be held on the child's Children Social Care Services electronic record. These should be regularly updated.

Away from Placement Without Authorisation: This is used to described a Child Looked After whose whereabouts are known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns, or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the Police

All episodes of away from placement without authorisation should be recorded by the carer and reported to the child's social worker or the Children's Social Care Services 'Out of Hours' duty team immediately.

If the carer or child's social worker knows of the child's whereabouts they should take all reasonable and practical steps to locate and return the child, keeping their own safety in mind.

The responsibility for managing these types of absences remains with the carer, the child's social worker and the local authority which placed the child.

Children Looked After who are absent or "away from placement without authorisation" must be the subject of a continuous local authority risk assessment. During their absence, circumstances may change and carers and agencies need to be in a position to respond accordingly.

An assessment should be made in each individual case as to the length of time that lapses before a Child Looked After who is absent or 'away from placement without authorisation' is reported to the Police as missing from care.

Where there is a difference of opinion between Children's Social Care Services and the Police over the appropriate category of absence, the Police will make the final decision about the Police response.

Local authorities should keep accurate records for all absent, and away from placement without authorisation occurrences relating to a Child Looked After.

The child's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) must be informed of all instances of a child Looked After being absent, missing or away from placement without authorisation.

If a Child Looked After is repeatedly away from their placement, the child's individual missing risk assessment and plan must be reviewed and updated to reflect the issues and risk and consideration should be given to arranging an early review of the child's care planning, including whether their current placement remains appropriate.

External activity or outings

If the whereabouts of a child Looked After becomes unknown during an activity which is outside the Local Authority area the child resides in, the carer in charge of the external activity will:

- Take all reasonable steps to try and locate /make contact with the child including a search of the immediate area;
- Notify the local Police force.

The Police force for the area in which the child is reported missing in, and the Police for the area where the child normally resides will decide which Police force will take responsibility for managing the investigation; this will normally be the Police force and division that covers the area where the majority of enquiries are likely to be conducted.

The child's social worker should inform the child's parent, any other person with parental responsibility and the child's Independent Reviewing Officer, so soon as it practical to do so.

Children who are subject to Placement with Parents Regulations

A child living at home under Placement with Parents Regulations is a Child Looked After.

It is the responsibility of the parent to inform the child's social worker or the Children's Social Care Services "Out of Hours" Service and the Police when it is evident that the child has gone missing. This responsibility should be discussed with the parents before the placement is agreed and it must be part of the Placement Agreement.

The child's social worker must check that the child has been reported as missing to the Police and must record the missing incident on the child's electronic file.

On a child's return, the child's social worker (or an agreed alternative professional) must arrange to visit the child within 72 hours. A return interview must be completed, in line with the local area arrangements.

Missing, absent or away from placement without authorisation - Out of Area Placements

An Out of Authority Placement is a placement of a child by one local authority:

- In a residential placement that is located in another local authority area, (the host authority); or
- With foster parents who live in another local authority area.

Before a West Yorkshire child is placed in an out of authority placement, the child's social worker should check with the residential / foster care agency provider that local area protocols are in place which are consistent with this protocol, and if not, that the placement provider agrees to comply with this protocol. The placement provider should be fully informed and an agreement reached regarding what actions are required to be taken if a child is reported as absent, missing or away from placement without authorisation from their placement. The responsible authority must make a record of this on the child's electronic file.

The placement provider /agency should contact the child's social worker or the responsible authority's Out of Hours Service as soon as it is confirmed that a child is absent, missing or away from placement without authorisation

On receiving this information the child's social worker or their team manager should inform the appropriate responsible Children's Social Care Service Manager and the child's Independent Reviewing Officer within 24 hours.

The child's social worker must inform the child's parent or any other person with parental responsibility within 24 hour of the child being reported as absent, missing or away from placement without authorisation.

An Independent Return Interview must be completed within 72 hours of the child being found / returning. The child's allocated social worker /the responsible local authority, is responsible for requesting that the identified appropriate person /agency completes the interview.

Children Looked After who may have been trafficked from abroad

Children Looked After who have been exploited and trafficked are at high risk of going missing, and unaccompanied migrant or asylum seeking children whose whereabouts cannot be established after becoming looked should be treated as potential victims of trafficking.

Proportionate safeguarding measures should be put in place to minimise the risk of the child going missing from care, or from being contacted by those who seek to exploit them. These will need to give consideration to the child's accommodation location only being shared on a need to know basis.

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

13. Media

The Police have responsibility for considering whether to use or inform the media regarding children being missing.

However when the child is looked after by the local authority, discussions regarding the use of the media must take place between senior representatives from the Police and local authority to agree a media strategy. Unless it is absolutely necessary, the child should not be identified as a Child Looked After.

Where agreement over publicity cannot be reached between the Police and the Local Authority, the ultimate decision regarding the use of publicity rests with the Police.

In all other cases where a missing child has a local authority social worker, the Police should liaise with /inform the child's social worker and the child's parents /carers prior to any publicity.

14. Multi Agency Missing Planning Meetings and Missing Safety Plans

A child who is repeatedly absent, away from their placement without authorisation and /or missing should not be viewed as a normal pattern of behaviour.

If any child is repeatedly absent, missing, or away from placement without authorisation, a multi-agency meeting should be held and a Missing Safety Plan developed.

If another type of multi-agency professional planning meeting is already in place, these can be utilised to incorporate discussions relating to the child's missing occurrences and to formulate a missing safety plan, rather than hold a separate meeting.

A Missing Safety Meeting should:

- Consider the 'push and pull factors for the child, which are assessed to be influencing absent, missing or away from placement without authorisation occurrences;
- Review the action taken to reduce the risk to the child, their vulnerability and future absent /missing occurrences;
- Review missing and absent occurrences, to determine if there is a pattern to the occurrences, who the child visits /associates with when absent/missing/away from placement without authorisation;
- Identify what action now needs to be taken, by who and timescales;
- Identify the most appropriate person to undertake Independent Return Interviews with the child when they are found or return;
- Review what the child has shared in their return interviews and take what the child and their parent /carer is saying into account;
- Consider whether it is appropriate and safe to return the child to their home address and consider if there is a need for alternative accommodation to be identified;
- Agree Missing Safety Plans; and
- Accurate decisions of records should be made.

A Missing Safety Plan should include:

- A missing Risk Assessment;
- A reporting strategy – which should include guidance to parents/carers as to when to report the child as absent and when to report them as missing;
- Outline the minimum enquiries to be conducted by the local authority, parents or carers, prior to reporting the child as missing;
- Recommendations on the minimum enquiries to be conducted by the Police;
- A Return Interview strategy, and
- An intervention strategy to address long-term risk and vulnerability factors.

Missing interventions seek to reduce the risks that a child may be exposed to and prevent the likelihood of further incidents of the child being absent / missing / away from placement without authorisation.

Common intervention strategies include:

- Disrupting the child's contact with adults or peers suspected of being involved in grooming, abuse, coercion, trafficking, violence, use and supply of illegal substances, illegal activities and exploitation;

- Gathering evidence to prosecute those suspected of being involved in grooming, abuse, coercion, trafficking, violence, use and supply of illegal substances, illegal activities and exploitation;
- Listening and taking account of the child's wishes and feelings;
- Promoting positive relationships with family, friends and carers;
- Identifying ways of physically protecting the child;
- Ensuring contact is maintained with a child whilst absent;
- Enhancing the return procedure to ensure it is a positive experience;
- Setting clear boundaries and developing contracts regarding expectations and responsibilities;
- Motivating positive behaviour;
- Empowering the parent / carer;
- Building the child's self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth through the provision of positive activities;
- Raising awareness of the risks associated with running / staying away or being missing.
- Meeting any physical, emotional, mental health needs the child might have;
- Working with the carers or parents to make the child's home a place where they want to be;
- Working with education and training providers to meet the child's needs; and
- Providing specialist support through multi agency partnerships.

See also [Appendix C Legal Powers and Duties](#) for a summary of actions which can be taken to return a missing child or to try and prevent a child going missing.

15. Additional Local Area Missing Procedures

For more information on the specific actions required from practitioners when a child is absent or missing in Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield please click [here](#).

Appendices

Appendix A – [Example of Different Types of Absence and Missing Occurrences](#).

Appendix B – [Example Questions that May to Help to Establish if a Child is Missing](#)

Appendix C - [Legal Powers and Duties](#)

Appendix D – [Children Missing in Specific Circumstances](#)