Children missing from a foster/supported lodgings carer’s home without permission
Guidance
Children missing from a foster /supported lodgings carer’s home without permission

About this document

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Children missing from a foster /supported lodgings carer’s home without permission</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Guidance for Foster Carers and Supported Lodgings Carers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Updated by</td>
<td>Rosemarie Cronin, CWDC Co-ordinator (Fostering) and Annette Masters, Missing Co-ordinator</td>
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<td>Approved by</td>
<td>CiC Workstream</td>
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<td>March 2019</td>
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Introduction and Legal Framework

Sometimes children or young people go missing from the foster home or supported lodgings carer’s home and there may be a number of reasons why this may happen. Children who are looked after may be more vulnerable and put themselves more at risk than other young people. It is important that foster/supported lodgings carers are prepared for this event and know what to do should they find themselves in this position. It is also important for foster/supported lodgings carers to prepare for the risk of running away and work with young people to try and prevent this from happening.

For the purpose of this guidance the term ‘carer’ includes foster carers and supported lodgings carers.

Regulation 13 (3) of the Fostering Regulations 2011 state:

The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written procedure to be followed if a child is missing from the foster parent’s home.

Standard 5 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering (2011) relates to children missing from care and states:

5.1) The care and support provided to children, minimises the risk that they will go missing and reduces the risk of harm should the child go missing.

5.2) Foster carers know and implement what the fostering service and the responsible authority’s policy is in relation to children going missing.

5.3) Foster carers are aware of, and do not exceed, the measures they can take to prevent a child leaving without permission under current legislation and Government guidance.

5.4) Children who are absent from the foster home without consent, but whose whereabouts are known or thought to be known by carers or staff, are protected in line with the fostering service’s written procedure.

5.5) The fostering service and foster carers take appropriate action to find children who are missing, including working alongside the police where appropriate.

5.6) If a child is absent from the fostering home and their whereabouts are not known (i.e. the child is missing), the fostering service’s procedures are compatible with the local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols and procedures applicable to the area where each foster home is located.

5.7) Where children placed out of authority go missing, the manager of the fostering service follows the local RMFHC protocol. They also comply with, and make foster carers aware of, any other processes required by the responsible authority, specified in the individual child’s care plan and in the RMFHC protocol covering the authority responsible for the child’s care.

5.8) Children are helped to understand the dangers and risks of leaving the foster home without permission and are made aware of where they can access help if they consider running away.

5.9) Where a child goes missing and there is concern for their welfare, or at the request of a child who has been missing, the fostering service arranges a meeting in private between the
child and the responsible authority to consider the reasons for their going missing. The fostering service considers with the responsible authority and foster carer what action should be taken to prevent the child going missing in future. Any concerns arising about the foster carer or the placement are addressed, as far as is possible, in conjunction with the responsible authority.

5.10) Written records kept by the fostering service where a child goes missing detail action taken by foster carers, the circumstances of the child’s return, any reasons given by the child for running away from the foster home and any action taken in the light of those reasons. This information is shared with the responsible authority and, where appropriate, the child’s parents.

This document should also be read in conjunction with the following documents:

Fostering services guidance (2011) paragraphs 3.88 – 3.94

Children who Run Away or go Missing from Home or Care: Practice Guidance (Essex Guidance)

Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care (Department for Education, January 2014)

SET Procedures (available on the ESCB (Essex Safeguarding Children’s Board) website)

Definitions

- **Missing from care**: ‘a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (eg, school) and their whereabouts is not known.’

- **Away from placement without authorisation**: ‘a looked after child [child in care] whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.’

- **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 a 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.’

It is also important that you consider some of the differences between missing and absent. For example:

- **A young person might be considered missing if**:
  - The young person’s whereabouts are NOT KNOWN.
  - The young person has made contact with you and you have concerns that they are not where they say they are.
  - The young person reports that they are at a place or with people that have not been agreed by the family and/or social worker as appropriate or acceptable for them to be.
  - The young person has not adhered to any flexible discussion you may have had with them about timings to return home and you do not know where their whereabouts.
  - The young person has additional vulnerabilities such as:
- Is at known or suspected risk of Child Sexual Exploitation.
- Is at known or suspected risk involvement in gangs or gang activity.
- Is at known or suspected risk of involvement in criminal activity or drugs.
- Is at known or suspected risk of self-harm or suicide.

- **A young person might be considered absent or ‘away from placement without authorisation’ if:**
  - A young person’s whereabouts are known but are not where they are required or expected to be.
  - The young person is at a place or with people who are known about and accepted as safe/suitable/agreeable.
  - A young person has not returned at the agreed timing but contacts you to tell you they are running late (train, bus etc.) and this is accepted as the likely reason they have not yet returned.

Absent’ and ‘away from placement without authorisation’ children/young people should have their circumstances constantly under review and may become regarded as missing, later.

In addition, the Police use the following definitions:

- **High Risk:** ‘a risk that is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the subject 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 that the public is in danger.’

- **Medium Risk:** ‘the risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.’

**Prior to a child or young person going missing**

When children and young people are placed with carers it is important that full information is given to the carer about the child’s history regarding if they have previously gone missing.

Where there is concern that a child or young person living with carers may go missing, this should be discussed prior to placement and information recorded as part of the Placement Planning meeting. There is a section under Emotional/Behaviour record where this can be recorded.

It may be helpful to undertake a risk assessment at this time and ensure that everybody is aware of expectations and actions.

When undertaking this risk assessment, the following points should be considered:

- The child’s view on their current placement/stability of their relationships at home
- What support the family or carers need to parent the child
- The degree of risk to the child if they go missing and what actions can be taken to mitigate the risk. Particular vulnerability factors that you may wish to consider alongside those on the risk assessment form are:
  - The child’s age
Children missing from a foster/supported lodgings carer’s home without permission

- Capability/disability/mental capacity
- The frequency with which they go missing (if this has occurred before)
- Any pattern to running away e.g. time, place, people
- The child’s perceived resilience, i.e. their ability to self-protect
- Whether the child is a child in need or subject of a child protection plan

- The views of parents/carers of their child’s needs and the action that needs to be taken if their child is missing
- Consideration of any external influences which may result in a child’s removal without consent

Consideration should also be given to the expectations of the carers should the child or young person go missing. This will include information about who should inform the parents, is the carer in a position where they are likely to be able to actively go out and collect the child if it is appropriate to do so etc.

It should be explained to the child or young person what actions will be taken if he/she absents him/herself without permission.

It will also be crucial for carers to have information of friends and family networks where children or young people may go to, (see chapter 20 of the SET procedures for children who go missing or run away from home or care). This information could be discussed as part of the Placement Planning Meeting and should be recorded as part of the care plan for the child or young person.

Carers should also talk to children and young people age appropriately regarding the importance of always letting the carers know where they are. They should be given strategies of what to do should they find themselves in different situations e.g. if they are going to be late home, if they find themselves in any kind of danger, if they have got lost.

It will also be important to teach children and young people of the dangers of different situations e.g. walking home late at night, meeting people that they have met on the internet but they do not really know who they are. This should be part of the education process of helping children and young people to keep themselves safe and should not be done in a negative way assuming that the child or young person is likely to do such things.

All carers should keep an up to date photograph of children and young people that they look after so that this can be made available to the police should the child or young person go missing.

**If a child or young person does appear to be missing**

*(See also flowchart on Appendix 1)*

The most important thing is for the child or young person to be safe. The carers should work with all relevant agencies and provide them with the relevant information that is required regarding where the child may have gone, clothing, any incidents which may have occurred prior to them leaving etc. This could all be crucial information.

The information below is also relevant for those carers who provide PACE beds to young people under the PACE bed scheme.
1. If the child or young person appears to be missing a thorough check around the home, outbuildings and local area should be undertaken by the carers to ensure that the child or young person hasn’t ‘hidden’ somewhere in the vicinity.

2. Carers should make contact with friends/family who the child or young person may be with as any good parent would.

3. If after these checks it appears that the child has gone missing then the carer should inform the police.

4. The carers should inform their supervising social worker/team manager and the social worker of the child or young person as soon as possible. If it is out of hours then the emergency duty service should be informed.

5. It is the responsibility of the carers to complete the risk assessment tool (appendix 4). This should be used to record and share any current/historical risk factors that will assist the police to make an assessment and respond accordingly. In completing this, the carer may wish to consult with other relevant professionals who know the child/young person (e.g. social worker, SSW). The police will use this information to assess the level of risk they consider the child or young person to be in.

6. When a child is established as ‘missing’ the carer must inform the police, the child’s social worker, the child’s supervising social worker or, in the event of an incident out of hours, the Emergency Duty Service (EDS). If EDS is informed the foster carer/ supported lodgings carer should also ensure that both the social worker and the supervising social worker are informed on the next working day.

7. The supervising social worker for the carer should ensure that the incident form is completed for any child or young person who is missing or where there is unauthorised absence.

8. **Record Keeping:** Carers should keep detailed records of what happened in the period leading up to a child or young person being missing as well as recording carefully the process undertaken since the child or young person has gone missing e.g. all phone calls to try and find the young person as well as any phone calls to professionals. The foster carer/ supported lodgings carer should also record, in the case of unauthorised absences when this has been reviewed and at what stage it is deemed that the child or young person’s status changes from unauthorised absence to being missing.

**If a child or young person does appear to be ‘absent’ or ‘away from placement without authorisation’**

*(See also flowchart in appendix 1)*

1. If a young person is considered to be absent or away from placement without authorisation; the carer should make contact with the allocated social worker or the Emergency Duty Service (EDS) in the first instance.

2. If a young person is absent, and there are concerns about vulnerability to child sexual exploitation, the carer should call the police and report ‘concerns for welfare’
3. If in joint discussion it is assessed that the young person is absent or away from placement without authorisation, a reviewing strategy should be agreed as it may be necessary to upgrade the concerns to ‘missing’ and the police be contacted at a later stage. The allocated social worker or EDS Worker will record the absent/away from placement episode details and subsequently close this, stating the time and date, they were no longer absent. There is no set time for how long a young person might be considered absent /away from placement but you should consider that the longer they are absent, the vulnerability increases.

If the child or young person returns to the foster home/supported lodgings carer
(see also flowchart in appendix 2 and 3)

1. If the child returns there should be a discussion with the carer as to how the young person is returned to the foster home (unless there are any safeguarding issues). If the young person is at the police station and the carer is able to collect him or her, this would be the preferred option.

2. The carer should inform all the relevant parties that the child or young person has returned from being ‘missing’ or ‘absent’ or ‘away from placement without authorisation’ e.g. Police, Emergency Duty Service, supervising social worker (or manager) and the child or young person’s social worker (or manager).

3. Where a ‘missing report’ has been made to the police, they should conduct a ‘Vulnerability interview’ with all missing children and young people within 24 hours of their return. The interview consists of a simple series of questions about where the child was whilst missing, where they went, what they did, who they were with, etc. If the child makes an allegation of crime that occurred whilst they were missing or that contributed to him/her running away, the police will record this allegation and take appropriate action, which would usually involve commencing a police investigation and convening a further strategy meeting.

4. The social worker should make contact with the child or young person within 48 hours of their return and should arrange to conduct a Missing Prevention Plan. If the social worker is unable to visit they should telephone the child/young person and visit them within a week.

5. The social worker of the child or young person should inform the Independent Reviewing Officer that the child or young person has returned and a decision should be made as to whether an early review is required and/or any additional support or behavioural strategies put in place.

6. The social worker should offer the child/young person a ‘Missing Chat’ (Independent Return Interview) and independent advocacy.

7. The carer should provide a positive non-judgemental return. While it may be appropriate for the carer to say that they have been concerned about the child or young person it is important not to judge why the child or young person was missing.

8. The carer should ensure that if the child or young person needs medical assistance that this is arranged.
When a child or young person goes missing it is likely to cause anxiety to all those involved. It is important that the foster/supported lodgings carers know that they can access support out of hours and the supervising social worker/duty worker should arrange to visit or speak to the carers within 48 hours of this taking place.

The child or young person should also be spoken to by their social worker and a decision will be made as to whether it is appropriate to convene a strategy meeting or an early review for the child or young person.
Appendix 1

Process for carers for when child/young person away from placement/missing

Child is not in placement

Meets definitions of child or young person being missing

From own knowledge and information on Placement Plan consider places the child may be found

Carry out enquiries, phone calls, house search, outbuildings and any other actions agreed by SSW and SW

Complete Risk Assessment

Contact Police

Child considered as a child missing from care

Inform EDS or SW if in office hours

Meets definition of being away from placement without authorisation

In conjunction with the SW/SSW, Emergency Duty Service or a reviewing strategy should be agreed

Child not returned within an accepted timescale and there is an evolving concern for welfare

Child or young person considered as Missing

Still in contact

Notify SW or EDS that the child continues to be away from placement

Carers to ensure that social worker is informed of the situation the next working day.
Appendix 2

Process for when a child who is missing has returned

Child/young person return to placement on own accord or by family or friend

Carer to inform the police, social worker, SSW and EDS (if out of hours)

Police conduct a Vulnerability Check

Carer should record detail of return, any observations or information the child may provide

Social Worker should visit the child or young person within 48 hours. If this is not possible they should speak to the child on the phone and visit within a week

Social worker to offer child/young person the opportunity of a ‘Missing Chat’ (independent return interview) and complete the return record whether or not the child wishes to take up the offer

If there are concerns that the child is at risk of significant harm and likely to go missing again. A strategy meeting should be held and Safety Plan completed.

Child or young person found by police
Appendix 3

Process for when a child who is ‘absent’ or ‘away from placement without authorisation’ has returned

Child/young person return to placement on own accord or by family or friend

Carer to inform the social worker, SSW and EDS (if out of hours)

Carer should record detail of return, any observations or information the child may provide

Social worker to make contact with the child/young person to discuss the ‘absent/away from placement without authorisation’ episode

If the child/young person continues to be absent/away from placement without authorisation, the social worker should review the care plan with all relevant parties
# Appendix 4 – Risk Assessment

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<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<td>1  Is the person vulnerable due to age or infirmity or any other similar factor?</td>
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<td>2  Behaviour that is out of character is often a strong indicator of risk; are the</td>
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<td>circumstances of going missing different from normal behaviour patterns?</td>
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<td>3  Is the person suspected to be the subject of a significant crime in progress e.g.</td>
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<td>abduction?</td>
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<td>4  Is there any indication that the person is likely to commit suicide?</td>
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<td>5  Is there a reason for the person to go missing?</td>
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<td>6  Are there any indications that preparations have been made for an absence?</td>
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<td>7  What was the person intending to do when last seen e.g. going to the shops or</td>
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<td>catching a bus and did they fail to complete their intentions?</td>
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<td>8  Are there family or relationship problems or recent history of family conflict and/or</td>
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<tr>
<td>abuse?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9  Are they the victim or perpetrator of domestic violence?</td>
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<td>10 Does the missing person have any physical illness or mental health problems?</td>
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<td>11 Are they the subject of a Child Protection Plan?</td>
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<td>12 Previously disappeared and suffered or was exposed to harm?</td>
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<td>13 Belief that the person may not have the ability to interact safely with others or in</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Do they need essential medication that is not likely to be available to them?</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Ongoing bullying or harassment e.g. racial, sexual, homophobic or local community concerns or cultural issues etc.?</td>
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<td>Were they involved in a violent and/or racist incident immediately prior to disappearance?</td>
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<td>School / college / university / employment or financial problems?</td>
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<td>Drug or alcohol dependency?</td>
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<td>Other unlisted factors which the officer or supervisor considers should influence risk assessment?</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Is the child or young person known to have been involved with child sexual exploitation (CSE)</td>
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