



Kingston and Richmond Safeguarding Children Partnership Joint Protocol for Safeguarding Missing Children

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1. Introduction

Children who are reported missing from home or care are at increased risk of harm. The reasons why children are reported missing are complex and frequently involve a number of push and pull factors which should not be viewed in isolation from a child's home circumstances or experience in care. Every missing episode warrants professional attention, and practitioners need to offer a consistent and coherent response to ensure the child is protected from harm.

This protocol is designed to support an effective and collaborative safeguarding response from all agencies involved when a child goes missing from home or care. It provides guidance for assessing both the risk of the child going missing and the risk to the child when he or she is missing. The protocol describes the appropriate actions that agencies should take to locate the child, support his or her return to home or care, and to identify issues which caused, and may continue to cause, the child to be reported missing. The protocol applies to all children that are reported missing or *unauthorised absence*, including:

- All children aged under 18 who reported missing from their family home.
- All children looked after by the local authority placed within and beyond the local area.
- All young people for whom the local authority has continuing responsibility as care leavers.
- Over 18s that have been reported missing before their 18th birthday and remain open to the local authority, i.e. Care Leavers.

This protocol relates to protecting all children who are reported missing, whether they are reported missing from home or care; however, the protocol contains additional guidance covering the specific actions which need to be taken when children are reported missing from a care setting.

2. Status of this protocol

This protocol has been approved by the Kingston and Richmond Safeguarding Children Partnership (KRSCP). It has been written to comply with the statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home and care (2014) and reflects the national police guidance on the management, investigation and recording of missing persons (2016). It should be read and implemented by all practitioners and managers working with children who are at risk of going missing from home and care.

The protocol is based on Working Together 2022, the statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing and London Child Protection procedures. This protocol should be followed by all professionals and volunteers working with children and young people and learning opportunities on this topic will be included in the multi-agency training offer.

It is intended that this protocol will assist in the development of preventative services for children who are at risk of going missing, as well as the development of effective responses to missing children. This protocol will be reviewed on a 3-yearly basis and the review of the effectiveness of this protocol will be commissioned by the KRSCP. The protocol should be read in conjunction with the following statutory guidance and procedures:

- Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care (2014).
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) and related guidance.
- Children Act 1989 and related guidance.
- Children Act 2004 and related guidance.
- London Child Protection Procedures and Practice Guidance (2015).
- ACPO guidance on management, recording and investigation of missing persons (2010).
- ACPO interim guidance on the management of missing persons (2013).
- Metropolitan Police Missing Persons Standard Operating Procedure (2016).
- Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked (2011).
- The national minimum standards for residential and fostering agencies (2011).

Professionals should be aware that going missing may be an indicator that a child is at risk of, or experiencing exploitation, all professionals should therefore be aware of the indicators of exploitation and access the Kingston and Richmond Safeguarding Children Partnership (KRSCP) policies and procedures for information and guidance:

<https://kingstonandrichmondsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk/guidance-policies-and-procedures/>

Children who are missing from education are not necessarily missing from home or care; however, children missing from school, or their education placement can be an indicator of other risk factors. Any incidences of children missing education should be appropriately investigated in line with the Children Missing Education Strategy

<https://kingstonandrichmondsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk/guidance-policies-and-procedures/children-missing-education/>

3. Definitions

The following definitions have been used throughout this protocol:

Absent	From 23rd June 2020 the Absent Category ceased to be used as an alternative to Missing by the MPS. All reports of missing should follow the process outlined in the Missing Persons Investigation Protocol. Linked Guidance question 1.5
Unauthorised Absence	A child in care whose whereabouts are known but who is not at his or her placement or the place he or she is expected to be, and the carer has concerns about the child's safety and wellbeing.
Care leaver	An eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.
Child	Any person who has not yet reached his or her eighteenth birthday; the term child or children therefore represents both children and young people.

Contextual Safeguarding & Risk Outside the Home	<p>Contextual Safeguarding - Safeguarding within those spaces and places outside of the family home.</p> <p>Risk Outside the Home - The type of harm which occurs to children by someone (often outside of the family context) i.e. peer, adult, or unknown person. The word “child” is often put in front of the different types of harm to reflect that the worry is regarding a child (someone under the age of 18): e.g. child sexual exploitation (CSE), child criminal exploitation (CCE).</p> <p><i>Risk outside the Home may be interchangeable with extra familial harm and/or contextual safeguarding; however, it is important to note the differences with contextual safeguarding.</i></p>
Host local authority	The local authority in whose area a looked-after child is accommodated when he or she is placed outside of the responsible local authority’s area.
Child in Care	A child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a Care Order or voluntarily accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
Missing	A child whose whereabouts cannot be established and has been reported to the Police – see paragraph 5.1 in this protocol for further information. This means children are considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.
Responsible local authority	The local authority that is responsible for a looked-after child’s care and care planning. In Kingston and Richmond this responsibility has been devolved to Achieving for Children, a social enterprise company owned by the two local authorities and commissioned to deliver their children’s services.
Trafficking	Any child transported for exploitative reasons is considered to be a trafficking victim. Children may be trafficked internally within the UK or externally to and from other countries.
Trigger Plan	A Police Safety Plan which effectively assesses the likelihood of a young person being at risk of future missing episodes. The information gathered is used to create a plan and action plan. The trigger plan is used to locate them as quickly as possible, supports information sharing, and is to be shared with other Police forces, if/when the young person moves to another area. The trigger plan also facilitates the response from Police being within the MET Police Missing Person (MISPER) Unit (MPU) at the point of the missing notification, rather than held by Response Unit for the first 24-48 hours. Please note: The MPU is not a 24/7 unit therefore the missing person may be held with a response team especially if reported missing overnight.

Social Care Grab Pack	For children in care and young people, the Grab Pack must be completed by the allocated social worker, uploaded to the child's LCS file, provided to the carer or placement provider at the Placement Planning Meeting, and submitted to the Police when a child goes missing. Within AfC, a Social Care Grab Pack is an Information Sharing form that contains all relevant information about the child/young person and that once completed is to be provided to police to assist them in locating and returning the child as well as updating their Trigger Plan. The template for the Grab Pack is located in AfC Connect Page.
The Child Protection Information Sharing System (CP-IS)	The Child Protection Information Sharing System (CP-IS) is a service originally designed for young people missing and known to social work child protection services. It links IT systems across unscheduled health care settings and social care in England to help health and social care practitioners share information securely to better protect children and young people who are known to social care because they are looked after or have a child protection plan.

4. Guiding principles

This protocol should be read as guidance as it cannot anticipate or reflect every situation. All practitioners working with children in a professional capacity should use their professional judgement to determine the actions necessary to protect and safeguard the wellbeing of a child.

The following principles should be adopted by all agencies:

- The safety and wellbeing of the child is paramount. The shared aim of all agencies is to reduce the incidences of all children who go missing. Children who go missing are at more risk of harm and each missing episode is potentially serious. The reasons for their absence are often complex and cannot be viewed in isolation from the child's home circumstances or their experience in care. Every missing episode should receive appropriate attention from the professionals involved with the child who should work together to ensure a consistent and coherent response is given to the child on his or her return.
- When a child goes missing from home or care the shared aim of all agencies is to prevent that child suffering harm by locating and returning the child to safety as soon as possible. The Police will act on any report of a missing child where there is an assessed risk to the child's safety or wellbeing.
- Interventions are important in attempting to address repeat missing episodes. Child protection procedures will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child may be at risk of significant harm. Interventions for looked-after children must be driven by and reflected in the placement information record and in the child's care plan. Interventions must also be informed by effective return interviews.
- Statutory guidance outlines that every missing child who returns to home or care will receive an independent return interview to determine the reasons for their missing episodes and

the associated risks. The views expressed by the child in the return interview will be taken seriously by all agencies.

- Agencies will share data, information, and intelligence through multi-agency meetings in order to better understand and reduce the risks to children who go missing through strengthened preventative work and interventions.
- The national minimum standards for children's homes and fostering services require all providers to have in place procedures for when a child is missing from their care setting. These procedures must be compatible with this protocol. The reporting of a child in care as a missing person should not be used as a sanction against the child.
- Agencies will take responsibility for ensuring their workforce is trained and skilled in working with children who go missing. This will help build professional confidence, improve working practices and enable practitioners to meet their responsibilities to the highest standard.

5. Definitions of reported missing and unauthorised absence

This protocol uses the definitions for 'missing children' as set out in the Association of Chief Police Officers' (ACPO) Guidance on the Management, Investigation and Recording of Missing Persons (2010 and 2013). This definition has been adopted by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and informs their policy and standard operating procedures for the investigation of missing persons, which was updated in February 2016.

5.1 Definition of a child reported missing

A child is considered to be missing if his or her whereabouts cannot be established, whatever the circumstances of his or her disappearance, and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the child may be the subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another. The Police will respond when a child is reported missing.

5.2 Definition of an unauthorised absence for a child

A child whose whereabouts are known; however, the child is not at a place where they are expected or required to be. The unauthorised absence category will include cases where children are not presently where they are supposed to be and where there is no apparent risk of harm. Where a child has been identified as at risk of exploitation, there should be consideration as to whether or not an unauthorised absence should actually be considered a missing episode. Children who are reported as *unauthorised absence* will be logged with the local EDT (Emergency Duty Team/Out of Hours) but will not be responded to by the Police.

6. Agency roles and responsibilities

Local agencies must work together to identify and assess the risks to children who are missing from home and care, and to analyse data and intelligence for patterns that indicate particular concerns and risks. They should also work collaboratively to ensure appropriate measures are in place to prevent children from going missing.

6.1 Roles and responsibilities of the local authority

The Children Act 2004 (Section 13) requires local authorities and other named statutory partners to make arrangements to ensure that their functions are discharged in order to safeguard and

protect the welfare of children. This includes planning to prevent children from going missing and to protect them when they do, most often by meeting with the family and child. Local authorities should name a senior children's services manager as responsible for monitoring policies and performance relating to children who go missing from home and care. Within AfC this is the Associate Director for Permanency and the Adolescent Exploitation and Missing Manager – Contextual Safeguarding Lead. The responsible manager should use all available resources to understand the risks and issues facing children missing from home and care and ensure local practice is effective in dealing with the issue. Local authority children's services in Kingston and Richmond upon Thames are delivered by Achieving for Children.

6.2 Roles and responsibilities of the Police

The Police are the lead agency for investigating and finding missing children. The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) is responsible for recording every report of a missing child and for conducting an assessment of the risk to that child and the wider public as a result of their disappearance. The MPS will actively investigate all missing children and will conduct regular reviews of unsolved missing children investigations including an ongoing re-assessment of the risks to these children.

When a child is placed outside of their local borough, i.e. London Borough of Richmond upon Thames or Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, the child will be reported missing within the local authority area where they reside. Therefore, it will be important for the allocated Social Worker to liaise with the local Police force area.

6.3 Roles and responsibilities of Kingston and Richmond Safeguarding Children Partnership (KRSCP)

KRSCP is responsible for considering the safeguarding risks and issues associated with children who are reported missing from home and care. This requires partner agencies from children's social care, the Police, health, education and other services to work effectively together to prevent missing episodes and to act when they do. The KRSCP must ensure that there is an up-to-date and appropriate protocol in place which clearly sets out how agencies will respond to missing episodes for children in the local area. The KRSCP should receive and scrutinise regular reports from the local authority and the Police analysing data on children reported missing from home and care; this should include an analysis of their return interviews and the effectiveness of their measures to prevent missing episodes. In Kingston and Richmond Safeguarding Children Partnership the Quality Assurance Sub-Group and the Vulnerable Children & Adolescent Sub-Group are responsible for testing the effectiveness of local arrangements for missing children.

6.3.1 Role of schools, further education colleges and other education establishments

Staff in schools, further education colleges and other education establishments must be alert and competent to identify and act upon concerns that a child is at risk of or experiencing abuse through exploitation. The education service provides guidance and procedures for responding to children who are missing from education with their family and those who do not turn up to school due to recurrent absences. These guidance and procedures are linked to the KRSCP Missing Children Joint protocol. The school also has a role to identify concerns about children and young people missing,

through early help assessment processes and also the Designated Safeguarding Leads would be expected to have undertaken training to identify the risk factors of children and young people who are reported missing, including those at risk of Child Exploitation. There is also a role for schools and education services to deliver education programmes in schools. For example, Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) programmes can help children make informed and healthy choices about issues such as sexual activity, grooming techniques, online safety, substance misuse, and keeping them safe.

6.3.2. Role of health services

Healthcare professionals have a key role in identifying and reporting children who may be missing from care, home and school. Missing children access a number of services provided by a range of health providers, for example:

- Urgent Care Units.
- Accident and Emergency Departments.
- Genito-Urinary Medicine Clinics (GUM).
- Community Sexual Health Services; and
- Pharmacy Services.

Children's Social Care are automatically informed via the CP-IS service of all children subject to child protection plans and children looked after, when they attend accident and emergency department and/or urgent care units.

Health professionals should have an understanding of the vulnerabilities and risks associated with children that go missing. Staff working in health settings should be aware of their professional responsibilities and the responses undertaken by the multi-agency partnership. Risks include sexual exploitation, trafficking, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

Members of the Safeguarding and Children Looked After Teams in community health provider services (e.g. 0-19 community health services) will attend Misper and Pre-Mace meetings where possible and provide information as part of a contextual safeguarding assessment. The appropriate health professional and social worker will support practitioners to identify children at risk of harm outside the home. Information sharing is an integral part of keeping children safe and professionals will communicate all relevant information to frontline practitioners (e.g. GP, CAMHS, 0-19) to enable appropriate follow-up of any physical or mental health concerns.

Where health professionals have immediate concerns about a child or young person suffering likely or actual harm as a result of a child due to a missing episode, including links to child exploitation, they must follow the standard London child protection procedures to make a referral to SPA. Where the concerns are not immediate or are unclear, staff must discuss the case with their named safeguarding lead and consult with the SPA team as required. If a multi-agency meeting is convened the respective health professionals must attend or contribute with a report.

All health providers should provide a comprehensive service for Children Looked After (CLA). A Designated Nurse and Doctor for Children Looked After are located in each Integrated Care Board.

They are statutory appointments and should be consulted for the commissioning and delivery of appropriate healthcare, assessments, and services. Designated health professionals for CLA should share relevant information and intelligence relating to high-risk individuals or emerging themes and patterns indicative of organised and targeted abuse, to the NHS Safeguarding Children Forum. They should also ensure that all health staff within their locality know how to identify, report, and respond to a child who is missing from care.

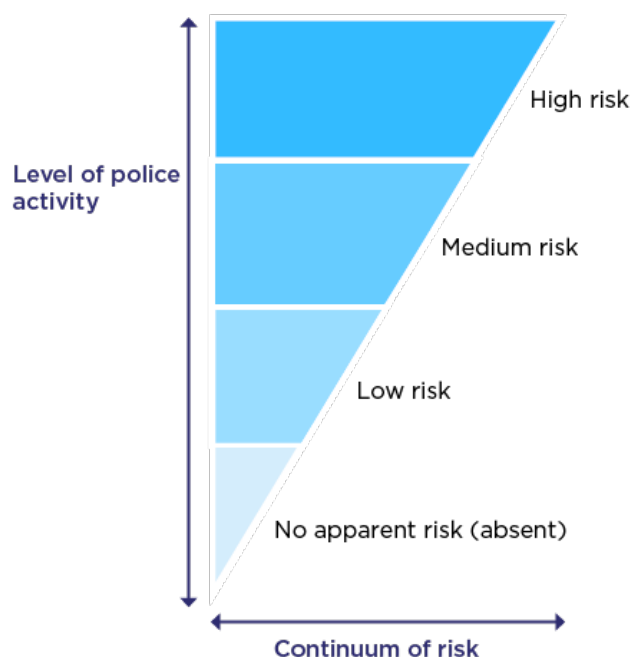
6.3.3 Role of voluntary and community groups / agencies

Statutory guidelines on children and young people reported missing from home or care recognise the role the voluntary sector, as well as youth workers working in both statutory and voluntary services, have in building trusted relationships with children and young people. In Kingston and Richmond, there is an arrangement for voluntary and community groups/agencies to be represented on the KRSCP and its subgroups which includes a commitment to ensure that professionals and volunteers in voluntary and community groups/agencies are alert and competent to identify and act upon concerns that a child is at risk of going missing with the additional risk of experiencing abuse through sexual exploitation.

7. Risk Assessment Framework

The MPS are responsible for assessing and classifying the degree of risk when a child goes missing from home or care. The MPS will prioritise all incidents of children missing from home or care as low, medium or high risk in accordance with the risk assessment framework below. The Police Duty Officer (Inspector) will agree the initial risk grading of a missing child within 2 hours of the time of origin. This will follow appraisal by the initial investigating officer. Merlin (Police notification) reports will be created in all cases within 4 hours of the time of origin. Missing children open to CCE risk is passed to Missing Persons Team from onset of reporting.

Missing definition



7.1 High risk

A missing child incident would be categorised as high risk where the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds to suspect that the child is in danger through their own vulnerability or may have been the victim of a serious crime. The high-risk category would also be used where there are substantial grounds to believe that the public is in danger as a result of the child's missing episode. The high-risk category requires the immediate deployment of Police resources. The Merlin will be created immediately. MPS guidance makes clear that a member of the senior management team or similar command level must be involved in the examination of the initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels in order to locate and protect the child as soon as possible. A (senior) investigating officer will be appointed who will lead the investigation and agree the media strategy, family support arrangements and liaison with Achieving for Children and other agencies involved with the family. High risk cases will continue to demand a Borough response and will be overseen by the Crime Manager / SLT and be resourced according to merit. Met Police guidance states:

- All high-risk cases will demand a Borough Command Unit (BCU) response whether immediate risk identified via (Metropolitan Command Complex (MetCC) first contact or later grading by London Resilience Team (LRT)/Operations Manager (Ops Manager).
- Ops Manager to pass to Safeguarding Detective Inspector (DI) during operating hours.
- Outside these hours the case will progress under leadership of a senior detective, assisted by ERPT (Emergency Response Police Team).
- Merlin supervised by ERPT Sgt within 2 hours of creation.

7.2 Medium risk

A child would be prioritised as medium risk where the risk posed is likely to be place the child in danger or they are a threat to themselves and others. This category requires an active and measured response by the Police and other agencies in order to trace the missing child and support the family or carers. The Police will lead a proactive investigation and search to locate and protect the child as soon as possible. Duty Officers will own medium risk missing person investigations for the initial 48 hours. Handovers during this time will ensure the risk grading remains accurate.

Please note: one of the primary differences between the risk grading of High and Low is the Police team which responds/investigates in the first 48 hours; this would also impact on the Police team to be invited to any statutory meetings. First 48 hours of medium risk is the Response Team. High Risk and after first 48 hours, Missing Police Team.

7.3 Low Risk

Police guidance indicates Children aged 17 and under CAN be considered in this category where established circumstances dictate. 'Regular' episodes of missing are often a sign of significant risk and therefore low risk should not be an automatic consideration without further rationale. Duty Officers will own low risk missing person investigations (adults) for the initial 48 hours. Handovers during this time will ensure the risk grading remains accurate.

Please note that following recent Police guidance, it is uncommon for children to be risk graded as Low.

8. Responding to children missing from home or care

8.1 Reporting children missing from home and care

If an agency is informed that a child is missing from home or care, they must advise the parent/carer or residential care provider to report the missing episode to the Police. They should also advise the parent/carer or residential care provider of their agency's duty to ensure that the incident is reported to the Police and, if necessary, follow this up by contacting the Police directly to verify that the child has been reported missing.

The parent/carer or residential care provider will be expected to undertake basic measures to try to locate the missing child and ascertain his or her safety. Before a child is reported missing to the Police, parents/carers are also encouraged to undertake several actions to try and locate a child who is missing before reporting them to the Police as long as it is safe to do so.

These actions include:

- Fully searching the accommodation and surrounding area/vehicles.
- Search the home for any important leads (e.g. mobile phones, diaries, letters, notes explaining absence, email and website activity etc.), which may inform the investigation and/or assist in protecting or recovering the child.
- Speaking with other children in the family or who live in the home to obtain relevant information about the missing child.
- Making all appropriate enquiries regarding the whereabouts of the child. This will involve trying to contact the child themselves, friends, family, associates, appropriate locations, local hospitals, the local police custody office and the school.
- When referring to the Police any relevant information that might help to find or support the child should be shared, including:
 - Description of the child including their clothing
 - Details of where the child was last seen and with whom.
 - Recent photograph.
 - Relevant addresses, known associates and addresses frequented.
 - The name of the school and the school setting.
 - Previous history of absenteeism and circumstances of where found.
 - Circumstances under which the child went missing.
 - Any factors that increase the risk to the child.
- Professionals working with a child who is believed to be missing from home have a duty to support the parent to report the child as missing. If, for some reason, the parent does not undertake this action then the professional should contact the police themselves and have the above information to hand.

If this immediate action does not result in the child being found, the matter should be reported to the Police.

If the whereabouts of the child are known or suspected, it is the responsibility of the parent/carer or residential care provider to arrange for the child's return home. Anyone who has care of a child without parental knowledge or agreement should do all that is reasonable to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of the child. In these circumstances they should inform the parents, carers, Police and/or Achieving for Children about the whereabouts and safety of the child.

Foster carers and residential care providers must be given a copy of this protocol which must be followed when a child goes missing from their placement. They should be provided with training, supervision and support in the use of this protocol and develop skills to enable them to divert children from going missing.

Children subject to Section 17, Section 47 or a child in care has a care plan based on a full assessment of their current and future needs, including potential risks to themselves and to others. The care plan will therefore take into account any risk that the child may go missing and any factors that may increase risk should they go missing. All risk information should also be included in the child's placement plan. Relevant information about the risks that a child may go missing should be shared with the placement and the Police. If there are grounds to suspect that a child is likely to go missing from his or her placement, a multi-agency preventative meeting should be held to reduce the risks.

The risk assessment should consider:

- The likelihood of the child going missing (push and pull factors).
- The risks the child is likely to face whilst missing.
- Control measures to reduce these risks.
- The actions that need to be taken if a child goes missing.

Should a child go missing then a recent photograph of the child will need to be made available to the Police. Most commonly the photograph will be used by Police officers to help them identify the child while actively looking for the child at relevant locations. In serious cases the Police and Achieving for Children may decide to use this photograph more widely as part of a media strategy to locate the child. A recent photograph bearing a good likeness of a child in care must be kept on record by Achieving for Children for every child. When a child becomes looked-after, the consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any missing person investigation. Achieving for Children will also ensure that sufficient knowledge and information about the child is recorded to enable a detailed Police report to be made should a child go missing from care.

8.2 Unauthorised absence from placement

The foster carer or residential unit manager should determine if the child is missing from placement. Not all absences from a care placement will warrant a missing report. A child who is

half-an-hour late returning from school would not usually be considered a missing person; neither would a child be missing if they are known to be staying safely with a friend (i.e. the “friend’s” details are known by the placement and appropriate checks by the placement have been undertaken to confirm the child is in that address/with that person; if the details cannot be verified **then** consideration to be given to whether or not this should actually be a missing report) for a short period and are likely to return home. Definitions of absence are set out in paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2 of this protocol.

Factors to consider in determining whether a child is missing from placement, the foster carer or residential unit manager must consider the circumstances of the missing episode and the risk to the child. This decision should not be taken in isolation. Residential unit managers should consult with the team manager responsible for children in care or Emergency Duty Team (EDT). Foster carers should consult with the child’s allocated social worker or EDT. Making this decision will require a consideration of the following factors:

- The circumstances of the child’s absence.
- The legal status of the child and his or her care plan.
- The age and maturity of the child.
- Any physical or cognitive disabilities or medical requirements.
- Previous behaviour and historical concerns.
- The child’s tendency to substance misuse.
- Any circumstances within the placement relevant to the absence.
- The risk of offending.
- The influence of peer groups, friends and family members.
- The risk of sexual exploitation or predatory influences on the child.
- Any known risk of abduction.
- The general vulnerability of the child.

A child identified as at risk of exploitation should not be considered absent but as missing. They will be flagged automatically by Police as missing.

Review of unauthorised absence the situation should be kept under constant review and changes in circumstances should be taken into account. If the child is receiving support or services from CAMHS professionals or other agencies it would be advisable to discuss the case with them to inform the decision; however, if they are not readily available a decision must be made on the basis of the best available information. A review should be conducted and recorded at a minimum of **six-hourly** intervals except during the night when a review should be conducted and recorded at 2300 hours and again at 0800 hours on the following morning. For a small number of children and young people it may be appropriate to immediately report them as a missing person. This should be part of the child’s care plan and will normally be due to his or her vulnerability. This should also be recorded within a Social Care Grab Pack and provided to the placement (i.e. foster care or residential).

Where the assessment of the foster carer or residential unit manager is that the child is at risk from being in *unauthorised absence* from his or her placement, the child should be reported as missing to the Police.

Escalation Where there is a difference of opinion between Achieving for Children and the Police over the appropriate category of absence i.e. unauthorised or missing, the Police will make the final decision about the Police response; however, the Police Officer should refer all such cases of dispute to the Duty Inspector. Where Achieving for Children are not satisfied with the decision of the relevant Inspector, the matter should be reported to senior managers in both agencies for resolution in line with escalation procedures. Within AfC this is the Associate Director for Permanency and the Adolescent Exploitation and Missing Manager - Contextual Safeguarding Lead.

Recording, if in care If the assessment of the foster carer or residential unit manager is that there is no apparent risk to the child's immediate safety, he or she should record the absence as *unauthorised absence* in the child's record and inform the child's allocated social worker or EDT (Emergency Duty Team). The record should be dated and timed including a log of any contact made or attempted with the child, the child's response (or lack of response) and an indication of the assessed risk. Responsibility for managing this type of absence remains with the carer and the allocated social worker.

If the carer and/or allocated social worker know the child's whereabouts they will need to make a decision about whether to allow the child to temporarily remain at that location or make arrangements to facilitate the child's return.

If the child repeatedly remains away from his or her placement without authorisation, the child's individual missing risk assessment and care plan must be reviewed and updated to reflect the issues and risks. For any child who has been missing more than once, there should be a planning meeting with the child, parents and carers (as appropriate) to determine a plan to halt missing episodes. Achieving for Children should keep accurate records of all episodes of children being away from placement without authorisation. For individual children this should include the length of time they are away from their placement, whether they return of their own accord or are found, and the locations they are found at, together with any other relevant information. The child's Independent Reviewing Officer must be informed of all instances of a child being missing or away from placement without authorisation. The care plan should be reviewed to include details of arrangements required to keep the child safe and minimise the future risk of the child going missing from his or her placement.

If a foster carer or residential unit manager assesses that a missing child is at risk, then the child should be reported as missing immediately and the perceived risk(s) reported to the Police. The carer must also immediately inform the child's allocated social worker and/or the relevant team manager. Out of normal working hours contact should be made with the EDT and the allocated social worker or team manager should be contacted on the next working day.

The allocated social worker should inform the child's parent(s) or the adult(s) holding parental responsibility no later than 24 hours after the child was reported missing, unless indicated

otherwise in the child's care plan. The child's Independent Reviewing Officer must also be kept informed of all incidents of a missing child or a child away from placement without authorisation.

8.3 Multi-agency response

The Police will complete an initial risk assessment for each individual child on every separate occasion he or she is reported missing. A risk level grading of either low, medium or high will be used.

A Merlin PAC will be created and sent to the Single Point of Access (SPA) in Achieving for Children. It is the responsibility of the SPA to ensure that all relevant professionals in Achieving for Children are alerted to the missing episode. This should include the allocated social worker, the team leader, the head of service and the return interview service. It will be the responsibility of the allocated social work team to notify the Independent Reviewing Officer. The Merlin PAC will remain open until the child has been located. Whilst the SPA team review the missing episode and determine threshold, the Return Interview Service will support the response to the allocated social work team and offer a Return Interview once the child has been located.

The MPS will carry out enquiries aimed at locating the child. Foster carers, residential unit managers, practitioners and all relevant agencies will be expected to help the Police to locate the child and to work cooperatively during the investigation. Throughout the process the Police, foster carers, residential unit managers and social workers must keep a full record of all the actions taken and the messages received and given. The MPS, in consultation with Achieving for Children, will be responsible for agreeing and implementing any media strategy to help locate the child. Where appropriate the child's parent(s) will be included in this decision making.

8.4 Planning for the child's return

When a child has been missing for a period of **24 hours** and/or consideration is given to multiple incidents within a 3 month (90-day period) (for example, a young person missing 3 times in 90 days), Achieving for Children will consider initiating a Section 47 Missing strategy meeting with the Police and other relevant agencies. Please be advised that professional judgement should be given based on risk even if the multiple incidents are not met and therefore, this may be subject to review of timescale if a meeting is needed earlier than 24 hours, due to concerns and risk.

The meeting will bring together a multi-agency chronology of significant events to inform a risk assessment, and either work along the statutory guidance for a Section 47 child protection investigation or support for a child in need provided under Section 17 (Children Act 1989). The meeting will also agree the safety plan and consideration of the Police utilising their Trigger Plan for the child and agree the actions that are necessary to facilitate the child's return home/placement. This may involve contingency planning such as identifying suitable alternative short-term accommodation for the child. Further meetings should be held at least every **seven days** or until the child is located. The initial meeting should determine whether the second or any subsequent meetings should be held before the child has been missing for seven days. This decision should be informed by the Police risk assessment and the risk assessment generated from

the multi-agency chronologies. The minutes from meetings should be circulated to all agencies attending the meeting and recorded on the AfC internal information system, ICS/ Liquid Logic.

8.5 Return home

It is the responsibility of the parent or carer to notify the Police immediately to confirm that a missing child has been located and/or returned home.

Police Safe and Well check The Police will complete a Safe and Well check in person within **one hour** of the child's return to their home/placement if they are classified as high risk and will carry out a 'S' Grade response. All other Safe and Well checks will need to be completed within **three hours**.

Met Police Policy states - Conduct a Prevention Interview (Safe and Well check) for all persons located/ returned from missing.

Returned home/located high-risk cases will generate a face-to-face prevention interview by an officer best placed to complete at time of being located or within 1hr of notification of return.

In line with a proportionate policing response, the circumstances of each low and medium risk case will dictate the methodology of the prevention interview. Within 24 hours of Misper location or notification of return, MPS staff will apply the following:

- Police liaise via telephone with the parent/carer/medical professional in charge of the child and confirm wellbeing. (No deployment, follow aide memoire, Merlin updated).
- Police liaise directly via telephone/video call with the child and confirm wellbeing (No deployment, follow aide-memoire, Merlin updated).
- Police deploy and conduct formal face-to-face prevention interview (follow aide-memoire, Merlin updated).
- If children are found in circumstances where they are at risk of immediate significant harm, consider police protection.

It is common for children to be unwilling to engage in this process. If a child refuses to engage, it is important for the Police to record the child's manner, their physical appearance and any other factors that may be relevant as part of any on-going investigation. The purpose of the Safe and Well check is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm, identify where they have been and with whom, and to give them the opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them. This is not the return interview. The Police must always conduct a Safe and Well check with a child who was categorised as missing when they return or are located, no matter how many times the child has been missing before.

The Police will notify the SPA that the child has returned home and any identified risks using a Merlin PAC. The Merlin PAC will also be used to confirm the missing status of the child: whether the child was missing or *unauthorised absence* in line with the definitions set out in this protocol.

The information provided is provided to and recorded by the Return Interview Service, within the Missing Episode on Liquid Logic.

If the child has been the victim of a crime during their missing episode, then the Police will instigate further enquiries. If the situation indicates that the child has been exploited or has been subject to significant harm (or the risk of harm), a referral must be made to the SPA in accordance with local safeguarding procedures.

Responsibilities The parent or carer is responsible for collecting the child and returning him or her home. If the child has an allocated social worker, he or she may be able to assist with the child's return. If there are thought to be specific issues of safety or public order difficulties involved in collecting and returning the child, then coordinated action should be agreed with the Police. The parent or carer should only request Police assistance to collect a child if:

- The parent or carer is being prevented from obtaining access to the child.
- There is evidence to suggest that the child is at immediate risk of harm.
- This is necessary to prevent a public order incident due to a threat of violence or disorder.

If the Police locate a child, they should not leave them at a location where he or she is likely to be exposed to the risk of harm or from where they are likely to go missing again, prior to the child's parent(s) or carer(s) being able to make arrangements to collect the child. In some circumstances, the Police may need to consider returning a child direct to his or her home or taking the child to a local Police station after confirming a collection time with the parent(s) or carer(s).

Children should not be returned to the place they are reported missing from until their safety and wellbeing is fully evaluated. If there are concerns that to do so would mean a child is likely to suffer significant harm, a referral must be made to Achieving for Children for the consideration of section 47 child protection enquiries. The Police may consider the use of Police Protection powers to ensure the safety of the child until child protection enquiries are undertaken, including applying for an Emergency Protection Order or applying for a Recovery Order.

An independent return interview, undertaken by the Return Interview Service should be completed for each missing episode within 72 hours of the child returning home. Once completed, the Return Interview worker will compile the VOLT analysis (identifying how the child is a victim; whom the child is at risk from and/or any known associations as it relates to the missing episode; any identified locations where the child attended or was located in/any themes identified from this missing episode). This VOLT analysis is sent to the relevant Police force, where the child is resident/care placement. The Return Interview is held within the missing episode within LCS and is accessible by the allocated Social Worker/Social Work team. This information should inform any risk assessment, meetings, and/or Missing Panel/pre-MACE panel. This is further discussed in section 9.

8.6 Review of the plan

When a looked-after child who has been missing has been located, the allocated social worker and team manager should decide in consultation with the Independent Reviewing Officer, carers and

child whether they should convene an early statutory review of the child's care plan. The statutory review will provide an opportunity to check that the care plan has been appropriately amended to address the reasons for the child's absences and include an intervention strategy to prevent future missing episodes.

8.7 Missing episodes during external activities or outings

If a looked-after child goes missing during an external activity or outing, the responsible adult in charge of the activity, outing or holiday will:

- Arrange a search of the area where the child went missing.
- Notify the local Police for that area.

The Police for the area where the child went missing and the Police for the area where the child normally resides will decide which Police Force and division 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 Police will notify the responsible local authority of their decision. The relevant team manager will be responsible for ensuring the protocols in relation to a missing looked-after child are followed. Ongoing communication must be maintained between the allocated social worker or team manager and the Police Force responsible for managing the missing person enquiry to support the investigation. The child's electronic social care record must reflect all the actions and discussions undertaken. The social worker should inform the child's parents or any other person with parental responsibility within **24 hours** of the child going missing.

8.8 Children subject to Placement with Parents regulations

A child living at home and subject to Placement with Parent regulations is still a child in care. It is the responsibility of the parent(s) to inform the allocated social worker or team manager (or the EDT) and the Police when it is evident that the child has gone missing from home. This responsibility should be discussed with the parent(s) before the placement is made and must form part of the placement agreement. The senior manager who approved the placement should be informed of the incident within 24 hours. The social worker must ensure that the child has been reported as missing to the Police and must record the incident on the child's electronic file.

8.9 Out-of-borough placements

When children and young people are placed out of the borough the expectation remains for the KRSCP Missing Protocol to be adhered to. This needs to be discussed as part of the Initial Placement Planning Meeting. Where there may be challenges with the placement area local authority in adherence with this protocol then the lead social work practitioner needs to escalate matters to the Missing Panel Chair. All care placement providers, in and out of borough, need to be provided a copy of KRSCP Missing Protocol

An out-of-borough placement is a placement made by the local authority in a residential placement that is located in another local authority area (the host local authority); or is a foster care placement made with foster carers who live in another local authority area. Before a child is

placed in an out-of-borough placement, the social worker for the responsible local authority (Achieving for Children) should check with the residential unit or foster care provider that local protocols are in place that are consistent with this protocol, and if not, that the provider agrees to comply with this protocol. The provider should be fully informed and agree to the actions required to be taken if a child is reported as missing or away from the placement without authorisation. It is important to note that, in some situations, both policies will apply.

Where a child in care is placed out-of-borough, and is missing from his or her care placement and is identified as at risk of exploitation, then a referral must be made to the Pre-MACE Operational Panel or equivalent meeting in the host local authority area. The Pre-MACE in the responsible local authority must also have oversight of the actions taken to protect the child by the Pre-Mace in the host local authority.

9. Independent return interviews

It is the responsibility of the Return Interview Service within Achieving for Children and based within the Single Point of Access Team to decide whether an independent return interview is completed for each missing episode. Independent return interviews should be offered to all children who have been reported as missing.

The return interview is a safety, needs and risk assessment completed when a missing child has returned home or to their care placement in order to identify and understand any risks and issues experienced by the child. The interview should be initiated and completed within **72 hours** of the child returning home or to their care setting. It should be held in a neutral space where the child feels safe. The return interview is different from the Safe and Well check completed by the Police. The Achieving for Children proforma for the interview should be used which is located with the Missing Episode on the AfC internal information system, ICS/ Liquid Logic.

Appropriate child protection procedures should always be followed where a child has been harmed, or believed to be harmed, whilst they have been missing, and where there is a known or suspected risk of exploitation.

It is the responsibility of the Return Interview managers to ensure that the return interview is completed to a suitable standard by an appropriate professional. Government guidance states that this must be completed by an independent person who is trained to conduct these interviews and is able to follow up any resulting issues or actions. The child's view on who should conduct the return interview should also be considered.

The purpose of the return interview is to better understand the reasons for the child going missing, including exploring the circumstances that led to it and the risks involved in the missing episode. It should be used to inform prevention strategies and future missing person investigations should the child go missing again. The interviewer should discuss with the child:

- The frequency of the child's missing episodes.
- Whether the child has been hurt or harmed.
- The child's risk of exploitation.

- Whether or not the child has been forced, coerced, or threatened to be involved in a criminal act or use of substances.
- Whether the child has had contact with adults who pose a risk to children.
- On-going factors that may influence the child going missing again.
- Any risk factors the child may experience in his or her home.

During the return interview, the interviewer needs to help the child to feel safe and understand that he or she has options to prevent repeat missing episodes. It should provide the child with information on how to stay safe if they choose to leave home again (including telephone helplines). The return interview is recorded on the ICS and the VOLT analysis is sent to the Police.

For every return interview, parents and carers will be given an opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence. Where children refuse to engage in a return interview, parents and carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence in any case. This could help to prevent further instances of the child running away and identify the support needed for them.

10. Missing Children Panel

The MISPER panel will be held every 2 weeks. It will review data of children who have been missing over the previous 2-week period. The data used will be collated by the Data Analysis team and will include children missing from care and children missing from home. The MISPER panel will have multi-agency representation including Health, Education, Police, Return Interview Service, and Children's Services. The panel will be chaired by Head of Permanency and co-chaired by the Associate Director for Corporate Parenting or a manager from the Return Interview Service

The meeting will consider for each case:

- Whether the missing protocol has been followed to ensure a robust response to the case being presented.
- The VOLT analysis and consider any overall themes from all of the child's missing episodes.
- The nature and degree of risk to each child or young person and review actions that have been taken in order to reduce the risk.
- The MISPER panel will identify any children at a high risk of harm and escalate to the Pre-MACE Operational Panel for their risk management oversight.

10.1 Operational Process

The MISPER panel will sit once every 2 weeks for 3 hours. The Intelligence Analyst will send to the MISPER Business Support inbox the data on the Friday before the Wednesday meeting. MISPER Business Support will notify attendees, via email, by the Monday lunch time prior to the Panel that the data is ready to view. External agencies will be sent the data via secure email.

The representative from the Children's Service responsible for reporting on the case will come to the Panel with an update on responses and actions taken in relation to the missing child or young person. Managers should review all return interviews and any decisions made regarding the

missing episode recorded within 24 hours. If there is no involvement from Children's Services, the Return Interview Team manager will lead on reporting in relation to the child or young person.

The panel Chair will agree the minutes by the Thursday following the meeting. The MISPER Business Support will upload the actions agreed at Panel on the Child's records.

10.2 Escalation to Pre-MACE

Children who meet criteria for Pre-MACE Operational Panel will be noted as such in the minutes and actions. The Return Interview manager will ensure that these cases are taken to Pre-MACE Operational Panel and the Pre-MACE Operational Panel Business Support will also add the cases to the Pre-MACE Operational Panel agenda. The attending representative from Children's Services and the responsible manager will ensure that action points from the meeting are undertaken and updates provided to Business Support MISPER inbox within 1 week of the MISPER panel.

For cases open to Children's Services, Social Care, the key discussions and actions will be entered onto the child or young person's case note under heading of MISPER meeting by the MISPER Business Support.

11. Information sharing

Whenever there are concerns about a child's safety or wellbeing, it is necessary for agencies to share information with each other in a timely manner. The Data Protection Act 1998 enables sensitive information to be shared if it is necessary to protect a child or detect a crime. In addition, section 11 of the Children Act 2004 sets out the duty of the Police and children's social care services to share information. The procedure is formalised and governed by a multi-agency Information Sharing Agreement:

https://kingstonandrichmondsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk/media/ggcmkgvu/london_multi_agency_safeguarding_agreement_for_safeguarding_and_promoting_welfare_of_children.pdf

12. Specialist support organisations

Barnardo's - <https://www.barnardos.org.uk>

Barnardo's deliver a number of support programmes and interventions for children at risk of exploitation as a result of going missing from home or care. Achieving for Children has a contract in place with Barnardo's to provide this support.

Missing People - <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/>

Missing People provides a free 24-hour confidential helpline to children who have run away and their families (0500 700 700). The runaway helpline also provides 24-hour helpline support to any young person who has run away or been forced to leave home (0808 800 70 70).

[Childline](#) or the [Runaway](#) Helpline - they are there to listen and offer support at any point. Their websites also have stories from others who may have similar experiences.

Childline (0800 1111) -

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/home-families/family-relationships/running-away/>

Runaway (Missing People) - helpline call or text (116 000)

<https://www.runawayhelpline.org.uk/about-us/>