



# **Sandwell Safeguarding Children Board**

## **Protocol for Children & Young People missing from Home and Care**

October 2011

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## **Foreword**

This Protocol is important for the safeguarding of children and families in Sandwell, or those using services in the area. It should be read and implemented, where necessary, by all practitioners and managers working with children or young people who are missing from Home and Care.

It was drafted on behalf of the Sandwell Safeguarding Children Board, which agreed the Protocol in July 2011.

The most effective assessment and support comes through good information sharing, joint assessments of need, joint planning, joint action in partnership with families and professional trust within the interagency network.

Sandwell Safeguarding Children Board expects all agencies working with children or young people who are missing from Home and Care, to implement this Protocol and ensure that all relevant staff are aware of it and how to use it. It should be used in all new contacts with children and young people.

**If you believe that a child or young person is at immediate risk , this should be reported without delay to the police service as a 999 emergency and a referral be made to the Sandwell Children’s Social Care via the Access Team on 0845 351 0131.** A telephone referral should be followed up with a written notification referral form (CAF part 1) within 48 hours. The referral form is placed on the website under ‘Child Protection Procedures’ ([www.sandwellscb.org.uk](http://www.sandwellscb.org.uk)).

This policy compliments the ‘PCT Non-Engagement or Missing Child Policy (2009)’ which is utilised by community health agencies.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the Child sexual exploitation policy due to be launched in October 2011.

## **1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Going missing is a dangerous activity. A child or young person who goes missing just once faces the same immediate risks as faced by a child or young person who regularly goes missing. However, children who go missing when they are young (and/or more frequently) are more likely to face longer-term problems.

The following procedure has been created to provide a joined up multi-agency response to children and young people who are missing or have gone missing from home and care.

Research has shown that every year approximately 77,000 under 16 year olds go missing overnight in England. Peak ages for going missing are between 13 and 16 years old and a quarter are under 11 years old (Children's Society, Still Running 1999/ Social Exclusion Unit [SEU], 2002).

### **Why children go missing**

The Children's Society through its research has identified the following risk factors that can precede a missing incident:

- Arguments and conflicts
- Poor family relationships
- Physical and emotional abuse – Domestic Violence / Abuse
- Step parent issues
- Boundaries and control

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is key to assisting agencies to identify and respond effectively to these risk factors and going missing should be seriously considered as a possible outcome, and appropriate support put in place to prevent any potential missing incidents.

Although in many cases young people who go missing from home are already known to agencies and in receipt of support before they run away, all agencies need to be able to recognise and respond to risk factors that could lead to missing incidents.

The immediate risks associated with going missing include:

- No means of support or legitimate income – leading to high risk activities
- Involvement in criminal activities
- Victim of Abuse
- Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and exploitation
- Alcohol/substance misuse
- Deterioration of physical and mental health
- Missing out on schooling and education.
- Increased vulnerability

Longer-term risks include:

- long-term drug dependency / alcohol dependency
- crime
- homelessness.
- Disengagement from education
- Child sexual exploitation

- Poor physical and/or mental health

The introduction of parenting work has significantly improved the comprehensive intervention on offer and parents report this has reduced the number of runaway incidents.

## **Principles**

Any missing episode is potentially serious, one runaway is one too many. Therefore prevention work relating to children going missing is of paramount importance. The prevention of children and young people going missing requires an integrated multi agency approach to vulnerable children and young people. Existing prevention strategies will need to include the prevention of children going missing from home and care and will include:

- Awareness and training for all professionals
- Awareness and safety sessions for young people via curriculum opportunities
- Multi agency assessment procedures, including MANF and CAF, should include the risk indicators for running away.
- Consistent implementation of this protocol across all agencies.
- Monitoring and reporting of missing from home incidents.
- Support to parents via the Parenting Strategy for Sandwell.

Every individual has a duty to inform the authorities if a child is missing from home or care.

Partnership working, information sharing, problem solving and performance management best achieve effective interventions.

For children who are missing with their families where there are concerns, please see Appendix 1.

## **2. SCOPE**

The protocol is designed for:

- All children and young people under 18 who go missing from the parental home.
- Children and young people “Looked After” by Sandwell MBC placed in Local Authority Residential Homes within the authority’s boundaries.
- Children and young people “Looked After” by Sandwell MBC placed with foster carers within the authority’s boundaries.
- Children and young people “Looked After” by Sandwell MBC placed in private establishments or with agency foster carers within the Local Authority boundaries and where compliance with the protocol is specified in the contract or placement agreement.

### **3. DEFINITIONS**

The following definitions apply to this protocol and relate to children and young people under 18 years old who go or have gone missing. The definition of running away is taken from the Social Exclusion Unit Young Runaways report (2002) and includes reference to young people who self-define running away as being forced to leave because, for example, they do not believe they have any alternative.

- **Missing Person – Association of Chief Police Officers Definition:** “A missing person is anyone whose whereabouts are unknown, whatever the circumstances of disappearance. He or she will be considered missing until located and his or her well being, or otherwise, established.”
- **Runaway;** A child or young person, who is absent from their home or placement without permission for any length of time where their age and experience, background and ability make this a concern or who has been forced to leave by their parents or carers.
- **Looked After:** A child is looked after by a local authority if s/he is “in care” by reason of a court order, or if s/he is provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by agreement with her/his parents or with the child if s/he is aged 16 or more.
- **Accommodated:** A child is accommodated if the Local Authority looks him after with the voluntary agreement of his /her parents or with the child if s/he is over 16 years old.
- **Child:** A child or young person under the age of eighteen years.
- **Police SPOC:** Single Point of Contact
- **Unauthorized absence;** Absent for a short period of time and after a careful and thorough risk assessment the absence does not raise concern for their immediate safety or that of the public. In accordance with the ACPO Manual of Guidance 2005 this period of absence should not **exceed 6 hours.**
- **Absconded:** When a child or young person has gone missing who is subject to legal orders such as secure orders. Police **must** be made aware of the order under which the child has been placed in the residence and the expiry date of the order for the child to be classified as an absconder. If the expiry date of the order is not known, the child or young person will be classified as a “missing person” **NOT** an absconder.

#### **4. MISSING FROM HOME ADDRESS**

##### **Responsibility of the alerter: parents/carers agencies and voluntary sector**

Parents (and carers) are expected to undertake the following basic measures to try and locate their child if considered safe to do so;

- Search bedroom / house / Outbuildings / vehicles
- Contact known friends and relatives where child/ young person may be
- Visit locations that the child is known to frequent, if it is safe to do so.

All children who go missing from home should be reported to the Police

NB

Children and young people, who go missing under the age of 16 are not legally considered as being able to live independently away from home. For Children and Young People over the age of 16, consideration should be given to their physical and emotional needs when making a judgment as to whether they can live independently away from home.

#### **5. OFFENCES IN RELATION TO MISSING CHILDREN**

Anyone who 'takes or detains' a runaway under 16 without lawful authority may be prosecuted under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984, where the child is under 16.

A child can be the victim of abduction under the 1984 Act for many different reasons. The law states that it is an offence if there is "an intentional or reckless taking or detention of a child under the age of 16, the effect or objective consequence of which is to remove or to keep the child....it is immaterial that the child consents or not"

Alternatively, if the child is in care of the local authority and is over 16 but under 18 then an offence under section 46 of the children act 1989 should be considered, s. 49, which is acting in contravention of protection order or power exercised

Perpetrators of these offences will often harbour runaways exposing them to risk of harm. In more serious cases where the abduction of a child is apparent or suspected and the circumstances give rise to the immediate personal safety of that child, research has shown that the first five hours can be critical if the person is to be found alive. Any details of suspected perpetrators must be given to police even if no prosecution is brought to enable police to serve the perpetrators with a warning notice in relation to child abduction and harbouring as a prevention tactic and to assist in any later prosecutions. Although the welfare of the child is the first consideration, attention must be paid to the seriousness of the offence and the likelihood of repetition.

## 6. QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE – MISSING FROM HOME ADDRESS

Parents identify time by which the child should be in the address.  
Parents will be expected to make enquiries to locate the missing person with relatives / friends.  
This should include searches of the residence and local area.

Parents should then telephone police with details of the missing person:  
Details Required: Childs name / D.O.B. / Where, when and who missing with? / What child was last wearing / Description of young person / Recent photo / Medical History / Time & Location last seen  
All efforts to locate the child / young person must be recorded and auditable.

West Midlands Police

Police Officers to conduct a Risk Assessment which will form the basis for resulting proportionate actions. Enquiries are then ongoing.....

Sharing of information between the Police, Parents and other agencies as appropriate

### MISSING PERSON is located or returns to Home Address

When a missing child is located by family or friends etc, it is their responsibility to return the child to the home address. Where a risk is present, a police officer may accompany the family or the police may be requested to collect and return the child/young person to the place of residence. Parents must inform the police when a child returns of their own accord.

The Police will conduct a 'Safe and Well' check to establish missing persons well being, and safety and to establish whether they were the victim of crime or abuse whilst missing.

**If it is warranted, the Police may refer the child or young person to Childrens Service Social Care ACCESS Team.**  
Consideration should also be given, dependant upon intelligence gained from the 'safe and well check', for other children or young people in the same residence to be referred to Children's Social Care.

## **7. MISSING FROM CARE**

The local authority has a duty of care for any child/young person looked after by them under the requirements of the Children Act 1989. This applies to all children/young people, wherever they are placed, irrespective of their age, legal status or previous difficult behaviour. It includes young people over the age of 16 who are accommodated, even if they are considered to be of sufficient maturity to make independent decisions.

Residential care staff are caring for the most vulnerable young people who may go absent and may place themselves at risk. The local authority, as a corporate parent retains a responsibility to maintain the safety of the children in their care at all times.

This protocol requires all care providers, both local authority and private sector, to inform the local police of any new children's homes being established within Divisional Boundaries prior to the placement therein of any children and young people. This will enable local policing procedures/policies to be prepared should children subsequently be reported missing from such an address.

When a child in the care of Sandwell Local Authority is missing, the Social worker or Residential worker is responsible, in consultation with the Operations Manger, for completing the 'Missing Children Report' (**Appendix 3**) which is forwarded to the Service Director Children & Families and copied to the Quality Development Unit .

### **Responsibilities of the alerter**

When a child or young person goes missing from care it is expected that their carer(s) will act in their capacity as a 'good parent'. This means that:

- When a child or young person is reported missing, the local authority and the police have a joint responsibility for protecting the well being of the individual. The act of reporting a child missing to the police does not absolve the carers from their duty of care to the individual, and carers must take proactive steps to trace the child's whereabouts.
- Children /young people must not be reported missing as a behaviour management tool.

Every reasonable effort will be made to locate the child/young person prior to them being reported to the police and throughout the length of the enquiry. This should include local searches, and making early contact with family and friends to establish his/her location where possible but if this puts themselves or others at risk.

### **The Care Plan**

Prior to each accommodation arrangement for a looked after child, the social worker must consider within the care planning process all potential risks to the child including an assessment of the potential for them to go missing. The child and her/his parent/carer (if appropriate) should be involved in the assessment and planning process. Missing episodes, prior to the child becoming "looked after", need to be taken into account during the assessment and care planning. This should also consider:

- The degree and level of risk for the child should they go missing.
- The level of supervision/support offered to the child and the actions to be taken by the foster or residential carer, based on the risk assessment, which can be taken to prevent a child running away.

- The parent, guardians or social worker's advice (where appropriate) on what action they feel should be taken if the child goes missing.
- Any known addresses that the child may frequent.
- Any adults known or involved where the child may be at risk.
- Any peer networks/behaviours where the child may be at risk.

This information should be reviewed and revised, as appropriate, at Progress Meetings, Placement Reviews and Looked After Reviews.

All information should be included in the placement plan and in the child's care plan. As part of this assessment it may be appropriate for Sandwell Children's Social Care to consult with the police to share information that may be of relevance.

### **Risk Assessment**

Individual risk assessments are an essential part of this protocol. They will enable staff/carers to be clear what the risks are for the particular child or young person and/or the risks they pose for the public

Every time a child/young person goes missing, a risk assessment will be carried out, to establish the degree of risk they may be at when absent. A child/young person should not be reported missing to the Police until a risk assessment has been completed by the staff on duty. **(See Appendix 1)**

### **Issues that need to be considered when assessing level of risk:**

Absences which cause concern are those where staff have no indication that a child is likely to return within a short space of time or where there is immediate concern for the child's safety or there is potential danger to the public.

In assessing the risk, all staff need to take account of the above definition and take the following into consideration:

- Child's age – the younger a child is, the more vulnerable he/she is.
- Have they gone missing before? If a child has never gone missing before then this may increase your concern.
- If the reason for absence is known then this will either increase or diminish the cause for concern. If no reason is known this should increase the level of assessed risk.
- Whether the child/young person has any disability or medical condition that requires treatment.
- History of self harm.
- Likelihood of self harm.
- Competence of the child/young person.
- Particular circumstances at time of incident.
- State of mind at time of incident.
- Subject of secure accommodation.
- Remanded to local authority care by the Court.
- His/her likely associations when absent.
- Length of time missing (case by case basis).
- The time of day or night.

A record should be made by the staff member of their assessment of risk.

Any child/young person, whether categorised as 'missing' or 'absconded', assessed as high risk will merit an immediate Police response.

If the child or young person is assessed as a medium to low risk then a measured Police response will be instigated at an early stage, there being a strong possibility that the child/young person will return of their own volition. This response will increase if the child/young person does not return and will depend on individual circumstances, including the receipt of further information.

The above criteria should be considered in every case where a child/young person is absent without permission, but must be applied with sensible judgement. He/she may be simply returning late or testing the boundaries of control. On the other hand it may be obvious to staff that the child/young person is at significant risk, in which case the Police should be informed immediately.

The intention is to trigger Police action at a mutually agreed stage, which is based on a high level of concern, not simply the number of hours absent.

The Emergency Duty Team (EDT) should always be informed by the Social Worker (or Residential Home / Foster Carer at weekends and Out Of Hours) of all those who are missing for a period of 24 hours or unable to locate whereabouts.

If the child or young person has gone missing from foster care, then the foster carer must contact the child's social worker/duty social worker or emergency duty team (if it is out of hours), who will assist completion of the risk assessment and advise on reporting the child/young person to the Police.

### **Child in Care Missing/Absent on External Activity**

If a child goes missing during an external activity arranged by the residential home (or by another provider), the person in charge of the activity will:

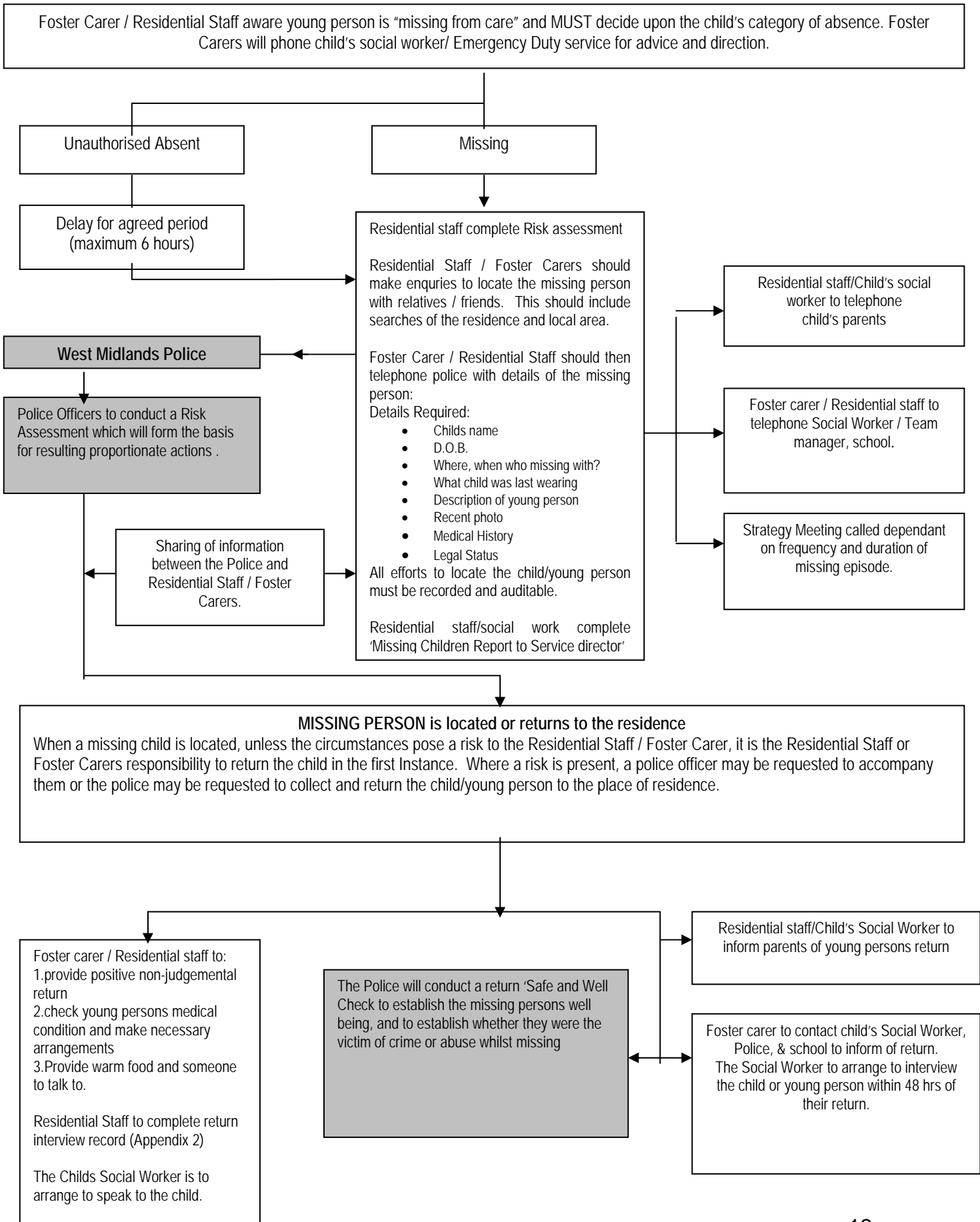
- Notify the local Police in that area
- Notify a senior manager of the residential home
- Institute a local search if staffing levels permit.

The senior manager at the residential home will be responsible for ensuring that the general procedures in relation to a missing child are followed including notifying the child's social worker.

The senior manager of the home and the person in charge of the external activity will decide whether the party should return to the home, and when.

The residential home will need to maintain communication with the local Police where the absence occurred.

## 8. QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE – MISSING FROM CARE



## **PHOTOGRAPHS**

Should a child/ young person go missing it is vital to the safe recovery of the child that a recent photograph of the child is made available. The photograph must be a good likeness of the child/young person, and the date the photograph was taken should be endorsed on the back of it to identify its relevance to the enquiry. The photograph will be used by the police to help them identify the child or young person whilst conducting enquiries. In very serious cases, where the child is believed to be at severe risk, the police and local authority may decide to use the photograph more widely, including publishing the photograph to national or local media, and circulation on the Police / ICMEC [www.missingkids.co.uk](http://www.missingkids.co.uk) website.

On admission to care, the consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any subsequent missing person investigation. If possible the consent of the child/ young person should be gained.

The children's home manager/foster carer should consider the most appropriate ways to meet the above requirements and should ensure that the child/ young person is made aware of what will happen if they go missing, including their right to be interviewed by an independent person on or prior to their return, and be given a choice as to who that may be. They should be given information leaflets and contact details of advocacy services / other services that they can access or that can be accessed on their behalf.

## **9. REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO RISK**

When it is discovered that a child has absented him/herself without permission from a placement, staff will refer to the young person's individual risk assessment in considering whether the young person is "unauthorised absent" or "missing" as defined by these procedures. In cases of doubt the home manager or manager on call will be consulted. .

The fact that the young person may have gone missing on a number of previous occasions does not reduce the risk. In fact, children who repeatedly go missing are often being enticed away from their placement by activities that they see as exciting or by predatory influences. Furthermore, short absences may be as risky as lengthy ones.

However, at some point, depending upon the child and the circumstances, the young person's absence will give rise to justifiable concern and require a formal missing person report to the police. Whilst there can be no substitute for a considered judgement, based on a sound assessment of the young person and the circumstances, it is the purpose of this framework to assist carers to structure their thinking with regard to the two categories of absence.

### **Reporting**

The decision to report a child as missing should not be taken in isolation, staff should consult with the senior staff member on duty and foster carers should liaise with the young person's social worker or Emergency Duty Team staff. Any decision should incorporate information from the child/ young persons' risk assessment. The situation should be kept under constant review and changes in circumstances taken into account. If the young person is receiving support from CAMHS professionals, Educational Psychologists and so on, it may be advisable to discuss the case with

them. However, if they are not readily available a decision must be made on the basis of the best available information. In cases of doubt it may also be appropriate to discuss the case with a local police supervisor.

Each case must be decided on merit and a formal missing person report to the police may be actioned earlier in some circumstances than in others. For a small number of young people, it may be appropriate to immediately report them as a missing person. Normally this will have been previously agreed as part of the Care Plan because of the young person's vulnerability.

If the absence is considered to fall within these procedures the relevant staff member, i.e. child's social worker, duty social worker, Emergency Duty Team social worker, residential care worker, will as soon as practical inform:

- the child/young person's parents/and those with parental responsibility; and
- the Police.

### **Responding**

Where, initially, the decision was made that this absence **does not** fall within this procedure (i.e. an Unauthorized absence) this decision will be reviewed **every hour** throughout the period of unauthorized absence (to a maximum of 6 hours) if the child does not return or his/her whereabouts are not known.

If such a period of absence continues for 6 hours it will automatically be considered to fall within these procedures. NB: This is the maximum period; and in most situations much shorter periods will be appropriate.

If during a period of unauthorised absence, the informant becomes aware of the location of the missing person, he/she should make every effort to have the missing person return to the place of residence without police involvement, unless there are safety issues, in which case a report should be made to the Police.

If the child or young person is subject to a care order, and refuses to return voluntarily with the agent of the care provider, then Police assistance may be requested.

If the child or young person is "accommodated", then a risk assessment is to be undertaken in consultation with the Local Authority, and if police attendance is warranted, the use of 'Police Protection' is to be considered if there is an immediate risk present. The use of 'Police Protection' should be jointly considered by police and children's services. If the missing person is in no immediate risk, the police should liaise with the carers/children's services regarding any further action.

Whilst notifying the police of the absence of a child or young person is an essential part of the overall process, having done so does not absolve carers of their corporate parenting responsibilities for the child, and such carers should take all necessary actions to attempt to locate the missing person.

## **10. CONDUCTING THE MISSING PERSON INVESTIGATION (Home and Care)**

### **West Midlands Police (Sandwell)**

When reporting an absence, police call handlers in the first instance will want the following information that staff should make available:

- Name of the person missing, include aliases, nicknames

- Age and date of birth
- Are they an asylum seeker, if so what is their immigration status.
- Description of the person: (Include gender and ethnicity)
- Description of clothing
- Home address (if the person is in the care of an external agency does a protocol apply)
- Location missing from if different from above
- Circumstances of going missing
- Are there cultural issues e.g. possible honour crime
- Is the behaviour out of character
- Has this happened before and details of previous incidents
- Details of any vehicle or transport used
- Name, address and telephone number of person reporting
- Mobile phone number/s of missing person
- Have they access to money/ cash point / credit cards
- Details of any medication / illness e.g. depression, dementia, Alzheimer's.
- Has the location from which they went missing from and home address been searched?
- Identify dangers in the immediate vicinity especially for vulnerable young missing persons e.g. ponds, rivers.
- Are photographs available- it is advised that photographs are taken regularly especially if the hairstyle/ colour has been changed.

Upon receiving a report of a child or young person being absent from care or missing from home, West Midlands Police will carry out enquiries (which are proportionate to the perceived risk) aimed at locating the child/young person as soon as possible.

Whilst missing persons aged under 18 years are automatically classified as "Vulnerable Missing Persons". However, this is NOT an indication of risk.

A risk assessment will be carried out for each individual on every separate occasion they are reported missing to the Police. This risk assessment, conducted by the Initial Investigating Officer, and subsequently confirmed or revised by his or her supervising officer will form the basis for the subsequent investigation into the person's disappearance.

The risk assessment for Children's Services Social Care and the Police have been aligned and a copy can be found in appendix 1.

When a police officer arrives to obtain further details this role is investigative and is not simply the recording of details for the missing person report. Any judgements that are made at this stage will have a significant effect on the progress of the investigation. Police will:

Establish the facts, gather sufficient information about the missing person for an effective investigation and informed decision making. Where appropriate they will consider using the services of Interpreters or language line to assist information gathering.

Establish the family composition, history, any previous police or other agency involvement with the family. Have they gone missing before, whether or not reported to the police?

Establish the last sighting of the child and the circumstances of the disappearance are crucial. Do not delay any action required to facilitate the immediate recovery of the missing child. Seek assistance to complete urgent enquiries/actions where this may be critical for the safe return of the missing child.

In addition to the points asked initially by the police call handler, officers will further ask:

Details of any travel pass that child may have; details of savings accounts; family addresses, known acquaintances; any previous history of absconding; name and phone number of social worker; details of any court order; the name and address of child's GP and dentist; any circumstances which might increase the risk to the child

Obtain statements from the reporting person and relevant witnesses.

- Police will complete form WG428.
- Obtain a recent photograph. The informant should sign the rear of the photograph to endorse its validity, include the name of the missing person, date of birth if known and the approximate date the photograph was taken.
- Obtain permission for publicity and make sure that the WG428 is endorsed accordingly.
- Conduct a thorough search of the place missing from and its surroundings.

Conduct a search even if carers have already done so. Include all rooms, cupboards and furniture where a person could hide or could have been hidden, attics, cellars, outhouses, garages, garden, grounds and all vehicles. Any area which is not searched due to lack of ready access will be recorded for action/review by a supervisory officer.

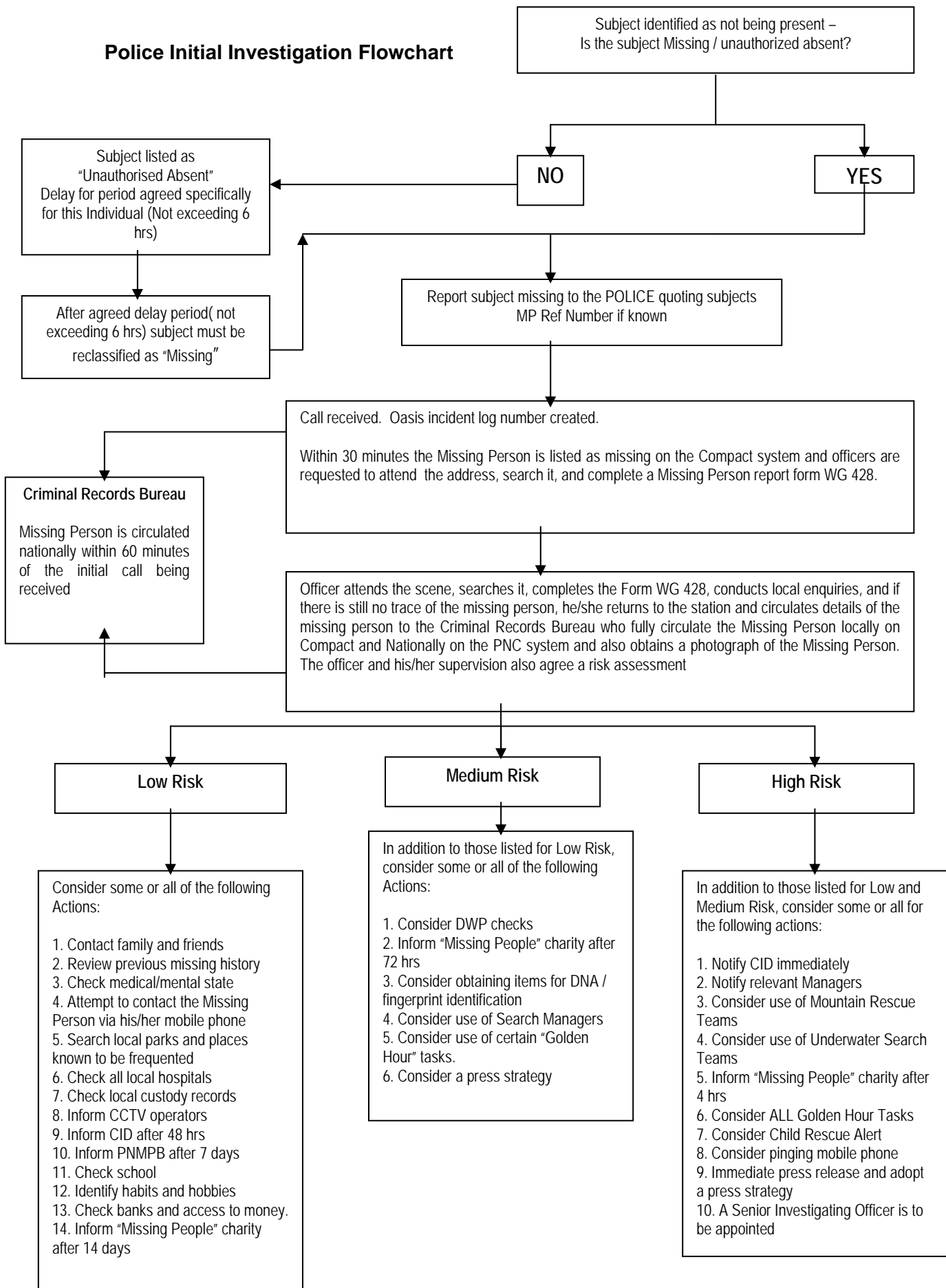
- Officers will need to see and obtain a copy of any Care Orders. This could be helpful in determining police action and powers should the person be traced.
- The last page of the WG428 'Information for the Family/ Person Reporting' will be handed to the person who is the point of contact for the police.

Consider the possibility that the child / young person may have been admitted to hospital unconscious or given false details, they may also give false details if taken into custody.

### Police Risk Definitions

<b>RISK</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>
<b>High</b>	The risk posed 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.
<b>Medium</b>	The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger, or they are a threat to themselves or others.
<b>Low</b>	There is no apparent risk of danger to either the subject or the public.

# Police Initial Investigation Flowchart



## **11. INTERVENTION STRATEGIES**

All agencies will operate an escalating system of interventions to reduce the likelihood of a child repeatedly going missing.

Intervention meetings should take place in the event of repeat episodes of children going missing from home and care. These meetings should have clearly identified purpose and attendance. The meeting should be held within a week of any the following trigger episodes. The meetings should be chaired and recorded and the increased levels of concern reflected in the seniority of those attending as follows:

- After **three missing episodes within a 30 day period, three episodes in twelve months or one episode of three or more days**: Social worker (if currently working with the child), local police officer, residential worker/ foster carer /parent, school representative, Youth Services. The lead Police Officer will take to MCC/YPSE for further multi-agency decision and planning.

### **Other risk factors demanding escalated interventions include:**

- Any case where the risks involved in even a single future missing episode is very high.
- Cases where it has been identified that immediate action is necessary to ensure the well being of the person.

## **12. PUBLICITY / MEDIA STRATEGY (Home and Care)**

Where appropriate, it is the responsibility of the Police to advise the media regarding any missing child or young person.

Whether the child or young person is missing from public sector or private care providers, the decision to publicise by press and/or television will always be made in consultation with the child's social worker and the Director of Social Care however, West Midlands Police reserve the right to publicise the child if there are serious concerns for the welfare of that child.

Such publicity will be arranged at local level, by direction of the Divisional Commander (or nominee). Prior to any publicity the child's social worker will be informed in order to allow the parents to be informed.

Additionally the police will automatically inform the "Missing People" charity of all high risk missing persons within 4 hrs of them being reported, Medium risk missing persons within 72 hrs of them being reported, and Low risk missing persons within 14 days of them being reported. (National – clarity, does this happen?)

The police may also utilise the website facility of the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children ([www.missingkids.co.uk](http://www.missingkids.co.uk)) to publicise the child or young person.

### **13. MISSING PERSON IS LOCATED OR RETURNS (Home and Care)**

It will be necessary to consider when the child is located:

- Will the child return to the previous placement / home address?
- How will s/he be conveyed there?
- Do the Police wish to interview the child before s/he is returned to the placement?

If there are concerns of safety or public order difficulties, the police will assist in the recovery and return of a child. Otherwise, the child's staff/carers should make arrangements for his/her return.

Detention in a police station overnight shall not be regarded as a satisfactory arrangement.

Parents and carers must be immediately informed that the child/ young person has been found. When the child is located by agencies other than the Police, or returns to their home address, the attending adult (parent / guardian / carer) is to notify the Police of the child's return (and location) **without delay**.

The locating agency will remind the child and the parent / carer that they will be spoken to by the police, the purpose of this interview being to confirm their well being, and to discover whether they have been the victim of any crimes whilst missing.

The locating agency should ensure that on the child's return, his/her medical condition is discussed with the child and his/her parents / carers immediately, and an offer made to arrange medical attention if necessary. A medical examination would be particularly beneficial for very young children and those with communication difficulties.

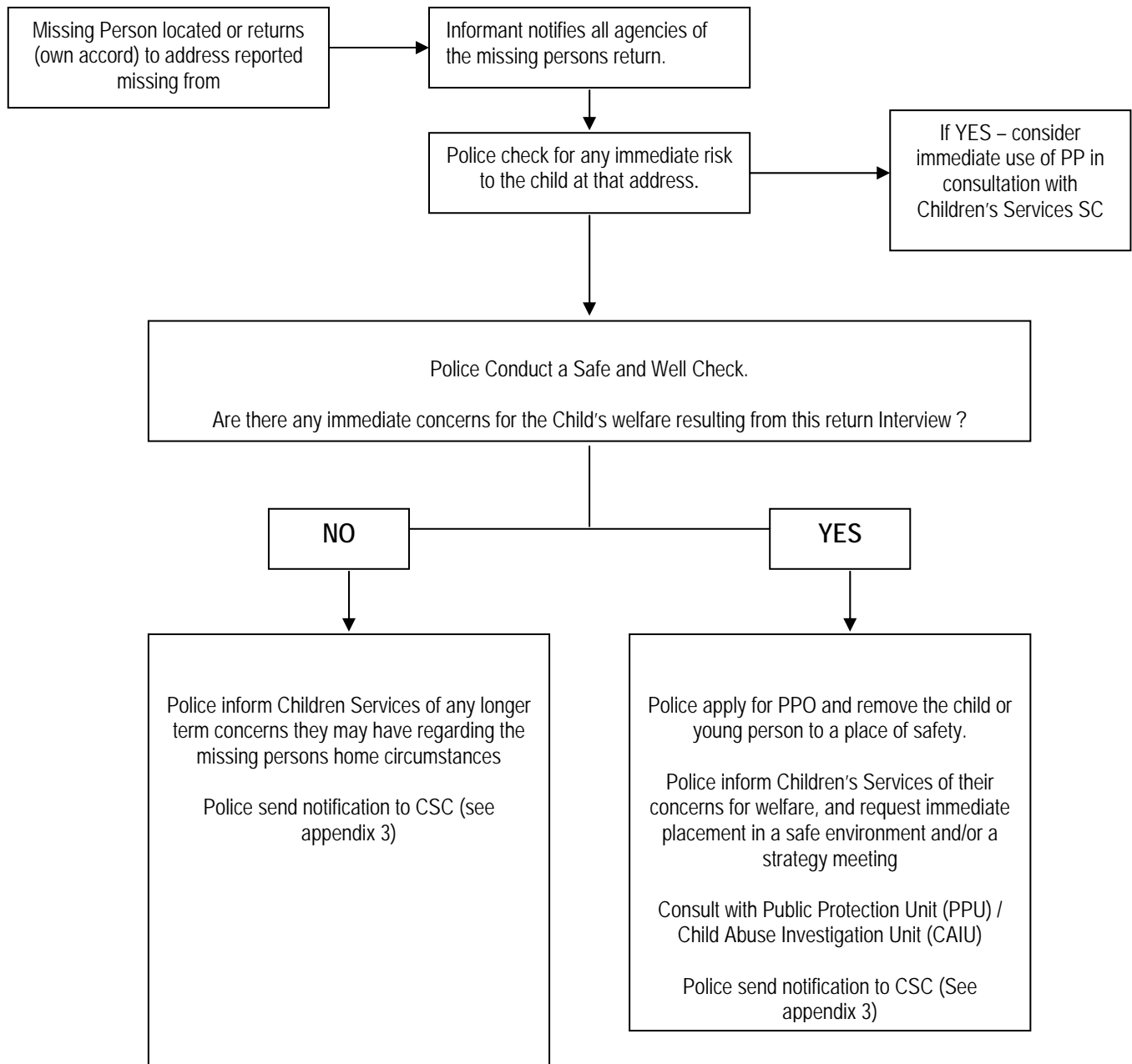
If any information is gathered during the course of enquiries which indicates a child / young person is at risk on their return home, the Police and Children's Social Care must be informed immediately, so that they may take appropriate action.

A risk assessment should be carried out by Police (and Social Worker) to ensure that it is safe for the child to return to their placement/ parental home.

The police officer will advise CSC of the child's return.

In order to help prevent further runaway episodes and after careful consideration of the individual young person's issues, a restorative justice approach may be adopted and a family meeting convened. This has proved particularly effective for children missing from home.

## **14. RETURN PROCEDURES – (Home and Care)**



### **Children and young people in care**

In all cases the Social Worker must visit and meet with the young person alone within two working days of his/her return. Where this is not possible, e.g. the child is placed at a distance from Sandwell or the social worker is not available, a team manager may agree that the child is interviewed at a later date, or by an alternative person. The arrangement, and reasons for this must be fully recorded. The Social Worker will ask the young person if they wish to speak to an independent person of their choice e.g. someone from an advocacy service. If the Social worker is not available it is the

responsibility of the team manager to arrange the visit. In all cases consideration will be given to the need to convene a strategy meeting.

**For children and young people in residential care:** Following the child/young person's return the 'missing person return interview record' (**Appendix 2**) must be completed and all relevant agencies informed, the form should be completed by the residential workers on duty.

A record must be kept on the child/young person's file of each absence, noting the date on which the absence started and the date of return.

A record should also be kept in the residential homes' daily log book.

## **15. ADDITIONAL RETURN PROCEDURES COMMON TO MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE.**

Once the child or young person has been located, the police will carry out a (Police) Return Interview – Safe and Well check. It **will not** be conducted over the telephone, and it must only be conducted by an appropriately trained Police Officer. Return interviews are not to be conducted by Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).

If there are immediate concerns please see both flowcharts (s.14115) for guidance and actions to be taken.

Where a child/young person has gone missing from their family home for 3 or more occasions / or more than 3 consecutive days the Police may call a strategy meeting to discuss further actions required and refer to MCC/YPSE.

If there are already concerns in existence relating to the care establishment that the child or young person has been absent from, or their home circumstances, the police officer must highlight such concerns to the Public Protection Unit (PPU) / Child Abuse Investigation Unit (CAIU) who will submit the Multi-agency notification form/CAF part 1 to Children Social Care via the Access Team.

Where children missing from home or care are identified outside of their resident authority, the "receiving" and the resident authority will need to negotiate so that the child or young person may be linked back into appropriate local services.

## **16. INFORMATION SHARING**

Relevant partners will be advised of the need to share information and will be reassured that none of their personal data will be shared with partner organisations without their agreement and consent, subject to the exceptions contained in statutory legislation.

## **17. SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

Staff/carers should be alert to the possibility of sexual exploitation of children. If a child is missing/absent and considered to be at risk of sexual exploitation, s/he is deemed to be vulnerable and should be reported to the Police and others.

This is a sensitive issue and the risk of wrongly labelling a child is clearly an issue. However, this should not deter staff/carers from raising and discussing their concerns.

If a child is continually missing from home staff/carers should remain vigilant and record any incidents of concern, including:

- Any available description of the possible Coercer or Abuser.
- Any telephone numbers frequently being used or passed on by others.
- Registration numbers of vehicles continually visiting the home or that regularly return missing children to the home.

Staff/carers who observe suspicious adults or suspicious vehicles should not approach either if there are concerns for their safety. Record information that is observable, staff should not place themselves or others at risk.

All relevant information should be passed to the police for further checks to be made, and all information should be forwarded for discussion at the Young People at Risk of Sexual Exploitation Panel (YPSE) by completing the referral form (**appendix 4**) and forwarding to [Quality\\_DevelopmentTeam@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:Quality_DevelopmentTeam@sandwell.gov.uk)

## **18. MONITORING.**

Sandwell Safeguarding Children Board will ensure that Missing From Home and Care remains a priority for Sandwell by having an oversight of the following;

- Implementation of "missing from home and care" protocols and procedures
- Reporting information about patterns of absence among looked after children to the Director of Children's Services and to Councilors responsible for "corporate parenting"
- Any issues/concerns will be raised to the SSCB via twice yearly reports, or more frequently if needed.

## **19. GLOSSARY**

ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
Absconder	See Definitions (pg.36)
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CAIU	Child Abuse Investigation Unit (Police)
CAMHS	Children & Adolescent Mental Health Services
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
CSC	Children's Social Care
Dfes	Department of Education & Skills
DCSF	Department of Children, Schools and Families
DoH	Department Of Health
EDT	Emergency Duty Team

LSCB	Local Safeguarding Children Board
Looked After	See Definitions (Sec 3, Pg 6)
Missing	See Definitions (Pg 36)
PACE	Police And Criminal Evidence (Act 1984)
PNMPB	Police National Missing Person Bureau (New Scotland Yard) London
PP	Police Protection
PPU	Public Protection Unit (Police)
Runaway	See Definitions (Sec 3, Pg 6)
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
SMT	Senior Management Team (Police)
SSCB	Sandwell Safeguarding Children Board
WT	Working Together 2010
MCC / YPSE	Missing and Compromised Care / YPSE

**MISSING PERSON RISK ASSESSMENT – Children Social Care**

**BASIC DETAILS**

NAME:	D.O.B:	
CARE STATUS:	D.O.A:	
GENDER: MALE/FEMALE	DATE OF INCIDENT:	
ADDRESS MISSING FROM:	ETHNIC ORIGIN:	
	TIME MISSING:	

**RISK ASSESSMENT CRITERIA AND PROFILE RATING**

RISK		
LOW RISK	MEDIUM	HIGH
There is no apparent threat of danger to the subject or the public	The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger and/or they are a threat to themselves or others.	Risk is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability; or may have been the victim of serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing the public is in danger.

AGE		
LOW RISK	MEDIUM RISK	HIGH RISK
16 + above	14 & 15	13 & UNDER

1

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have they gone missing before?</li> <li>If a child has never gone missing before then this may increase your concern,- It would also be of concern if they had not gone missing before</li> </ul>		
NO	UNKNOWN	YES
<u>Comments</u>		
<b>Risk Assessment</b>		
LOW (1/2)	MEDIUM (3/4)	HIGH (5)

1b

PREVIOUS ABSENCE PATTERNS				
Persistently	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
1	2	3	4	5
<b>Risk Assessment</b>				
LOW (1/2)		MEDIUM (3/4)		HIGH (5)

2

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the reason for absence known? (If the reason for absence is known then this will either increase or diminish the cause for concern. If no reason is known this should increase the level of assessed risk.)</li> </ul>		
NO	UNKNOWN	YES
<u>Comments</u>		
<b>Risk Assessment</b>		
LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH

3

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the child/young person have any disability, or mental/emotional health problems or a medical condition that requires treatment?</li> </ul>		
NO	UNKNOWN	YES
<u>Comments</u>		
<b>Risk Assessment</b>		
LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH

4

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there a history of self harm or Likelihood of self harm.</li> </ul>				
NO	UNKNOWN	YES		
<u>Comments</u>				
<b>Risk Assessment</b>				
LOW (1+2)		MEDIUM (3+4)		HIGH (5)
Never	Verbal threats	Attempts	Incidents/Low Likelihood/Severity	Repeated incidents high severity likely
1	2	3	4	5

5

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where there any particular circumstances at time of incident?</li> </ul>		
NO	UNKNOWN	YES
<u>Comments</u>		
<b>Risk Assessment</b>		
LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH

6

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there any suggestion that preparations were made for the absence?</li> </ul>		
NO	UNKNOWN	YES
<u>Comments</u>		
LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH

7

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Was the child/young person distressed prior to leaving?</li> </ul>		
NO	UNKNOWN	YES
<u>Comments</u>		
LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH

8

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there any family or relationship problems or recent history of family Conflict/and or abuse?</li> </ul>		
NO	UNKNOWN	YES
<u>Comments</u>		
LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH

9

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the child/young person a perpetrator or victim of violence (including forced marriage or under threat of forced marriage)?</li> </ul>		
NO	UNKNOWN	YES
<u>Comments</u>		
LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH

10

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there any factors that increase the level of welfare risk? e.g. Ongoing Bullying, Racial / Sexual / Homophobic harassment, problems within local community, Cultural issues or any concerns or evidence regarding Sexual Exploitation</li> </ul>				
NO		UNKNOWN		YES
<u>Comments</u>				
LOW (1+2)		MEDIUM (3+4)		HIGH (5)
None	Low	Average	High/Safe	Vulnerable/Unsafe
1	2	3	4	5

11

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there any recent problems identified at school/college or employment or any problems identified at a recent review?</li> </ul>		
NO	UNKNOWN	YES
<u>Comments</u>		
LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH

12

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there any issues of drug or alcohol dependency?</li> </ul>				
NO		UNKNOWN		YES
<u>Comments</u>				
LOW (1+2)		MEDIUM (3+4)		HIGH (5)
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequent / Safe	Persistent / unsafe
1	2	3	4	5

13

Are there any other factors that may influence this risk assessment? eg, Cultural issues affecting females, Offending behaviour, Contact issues				
NO		UNKNOWN		YES
<u>Comments</u>				
LOW (1+2)		MEDIUM (3+4)		HIGH (5)
None	Low	Average	High/safe	Vulnerable/Unsafe
1	2	3	4	5

14

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do you consider the level of risk to be ?</li> </ul>		
LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
STATE THE REASON FOR CHOICE OF RISK LEVEL:		

PERSON COMPLETING ASSESSMENT :	PRINT NAME:	SIGNATURE:
DUTY OFFICER:	PRINT NAME:	SIGNATURE:



**CODE RED = AUTOMATICALLY REPORT AS A MISSING PERSON ON EVERY OCCASION**

## Spon Lane Residential Children's Home Missing Person Interview Record

<b>Full Name:</b>	<b>ICS Number:</b>
-------------------	--------------------

<b>Gender M/F</b>
-------------------

<b>Date reported missing</b>
/ /

<b>Date Returned</b>
/ /

<b>Date of Birth</b>
/ /

<b>Where have you been?</b>
-----------------------------

<b>Why did you feel the need to run away?</b>
---

<b>Have you ever run away before?</b>
---------------------------------------

**Did you feel safer when you went missing? Why? Or why not?**

**Were you harmed at any point during your disappearance? (Give details if you feel able to)**

**Is either family or school the reason you went missing? (Give details if you feel able to)**

**Is there any way we could have helped you? In what way?**

**What is the likelihood of you going missing again?**

**What needs to happen to prevent you going missing again?**

--

**Tick any of the boxes that you would like to:**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you feel safe at school?		
Do you feel safe at home?		
Do you feel safe in your neighbourhood?		
Are you being bullied?		
Is Domestic Violence taking place in your home?		
Have you already talked to someone about any of the above problems?		
If not, would you like to talk to someone?		
If yes, do you know who you would like to talk to?		
If not, I can suggest someone to you. Would you like me to do that?		
Do you agree with what is written in this report?		

<b>Signature of young person</b>	.....
<b>Signature of worker</b>	.....

***For Worker Only***

<b>Name of Worker completing form</b>	
<b>Agency</b>	
<b>Date Completed</b>	

<b>Any other professionals/agencies involved with young person already</b>	
<b>Any referrals made as a result of this interview</b>	
<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature of worker</b>

## Children Social Care Missing Children Report to Service Director

### Child's details

Team		Key worker	
Child's name		Legal Status	
Date of birth		Ethnicity	
Person(s) with PR			
Current address			
Type			
Date of Missing episode			
Is child LAC? Y/N			
Is Child subject of CP plan? Y/N	<b><i>If yes please advise QDU immediately to enable alert To be circulated.</i></b>		

**Level of risk      Risk factors identified:**

Low Medium High	
-----------------------	--

Details surrounding Missing Episode

Details of Previous Missing Episodes

Management plan to reduce further Missing episodes

--

Legal advice

--

Media advice

--

List of attachments (including risk assessment)

Report author:	Date completed:
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cc. Quality Development Unit at [Quality\\_DevelopmentTeam@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:Quality_DevelopmentTeam@sandwell.gov.uk)  
Divisional Manager for Service  
Divisional manger Safeguarding

**Young People at Risk of Sexual Exploitation Panel  
REFERRAL FORM**

**YP/Child's name:**

**Date of birth:**

**Age:**

**Ethnicity:**

**Home Address:**

**Current Address (if different from above)**

**Legal status:**

**School / college:**

**Parent/carer:**

**Social worker:**

**Team:**

**Tel no:**

**Supervisor:**

**Details of Concern:**

Confirm category of risk: vulnerable to sexual exploitation /sexually exploited (delete as necessary)

