



Department
for Education

Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care

Flowchart showing roles and responsibilities when a child goes missing from care

The following chart shows the main steps that need to be taken when a child goes missing from local authority care, and where responsibility lies for those steps. It should be read alongside the full statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, and is not intended to be a comprehensive list of actions.

Children's home or foster carer

Responsible authority

Host authority

Local police

Planning and placement

Local authorities should agree with local police and other partners a runaway and missing from care and home (RMFCH) protocol. Carers, local authority and police staff should be aware of the protocol as appropriate. All partners should work together to assess risks and develop appropriate strategies to prevent children from going missing and respond when children do go missing. Staff should receive appropriate training.

Children's homes should have explicit procedures in place both to prevent children running away or going missing, and to locate, return and support a child who has run away or is missing from their placement. This procedure must have regard to local protocols of the host authority.

Care planning should include assessment of appropriate placement arrangements to protect the child from the risk of going missing, and strategies for dealing with any known risks of running away.

When a child is placed out of area, the responsible authority must notify the host authority of the placement. Notification processes for missing episodes should be agreed between the responsible and host authorities.

When a looked after child goes missing

The carer should take agreed actions to locate the child. If they can not be located, they should inform the police, the responsible authority and anyone else identified in the child's care plan (such as their parents).

Useful information to report to the police include:

- the child's name, date of birth, description and a recent photograph
- any details of where and when the child was last seen, who they were with, etc
- details of family, friends and associates
- details of the responsible authority.

The responsible authority should provide relevant information about the missing child to the police to enable all the risk factors to be considered.

The responsible authority should notify the host authority that a child in their area has gone missing.

Police should perform a risk-assessment which will form the basis for their operational response. The case will remain the subject of constant review, particularly in the light of new information and changes in circumstances.

Children's home or foster carer

Responsible authority

Host authority

Local police

When a looked after child is found

If the child returns to their placement, the responsible authority and police should be informed.

Carers should continue to offer warm and consistent care when a child returns, and running away should not be viewed as behaviour that needs to be punished.

If the child is located but meaningful contact can not be established, the responsible authority and police should consider appropriate action.

An independent return interview should be offered and provided within 72 hours of the child's return. When a looked after child is placed in a host authority, the responsible authority should ensure the independent review interview takes place, working closely with the host authority.

A safe and well check should be carried out by the police as soon as possible after a child reported as missing has been found.

The responsible local authority should review whether the child's placement remains appropriate. The decision should be informed by discussions with the child and carers where appropriate.

Care plans should include a strategy to minimise future risk of repeated missing episodes.

IROs should be informed about missing episodes and address these in statutory reviews.

Data and analysis

Children's homes should be prepared to provide information on missing incidents to those conducting independent visits to monitor the effectiveness of the home.

Data on missing episodes, including intelligence from return interviews, should be analysed regularly by all relevant partners to map problems and patterns. Regular reports should be provided to council members and the LSCB.

Data for children missing or away from placement without authorisation should be reported to the Department for Education by the responsible authority through their annual data returns on looked after children.



Department for Education

© Crown copyright 2014

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence or email psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at www.education.gov.uk/contactus.

This document is available for download at www.gov.uk/government/publications.