

Template Policy for Lancashire County Council Children's Homes

Young people who go Missing from Care (March 2017)

Introduction

This policy sets out the arrangements in respect of young people who go missing from care at (insert name of Children's Home) and should be read in conjunction with –

- Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (DfE 2014)
- Children and young people who run away or go missing from home or care (Pan-Lancashire Joint Protocol September 2014)
- The Children's Home Regulations and Quality Standards (2015; specifically regulation 12 and 9.23 – 9.32 of The Guide to the Children's Home Regulations)

Overview

Staff in Children's Homes have a key role to play in safeguarding young people from risks associated with going missing in the following areas –

- Support and Prevention
- Responding to Incidents
- Multi-Agency Working
- Actions on Return and Risk Management
- Monitoring and Escalation

Support and Prevention

Good quality residential child care is built on developing effective supportive relationships with young people. This enables young people to discuss any concerns they may have about their safety within or outside of the home and to participate in and understand plans to keep them safe. All young people will be given information at admission about sources of support and advice and will thereafter be supported by a named keyworker who will undertake regular planned work with the young person.

All young people living at the Children's Home must have a Placement Plan and Care Plan. Where it is identified that the young person may go missing these plans should address actions to reduce risk of harm and known risk factors linked to going missing.

Children's Homes will keep on file a recent photograph of a young person to be used if needed within a missing person investigation. The decision to use photographs or Child Rescue Alerts within a missing person enquiry sits with the Police, in conjunction with CSC as appropriate.

Responding to Incidents

Staff in Children's Homes should have a clear understanding of the categories used in respect of missing young people and how these relate to the young people placed at the home. (7.2 to 7.4 of Pan Lancs Protocol)

Young people who are known to be at risk of going missing must have an Individual Risk Assessment and this must inform judgements about how staff should respond. Staff should undertake initial checks prior to reporting a young person to the Police under MfH protocol unless their Risk Assessment (or dynamic professional judgement) indicates otherwise. This will typically include –

- Ringing / or send a text message to the young person on their mobile.
- Search bedrooms/accommodation/outbuildings/vehicles
- Contact known friends / relatives where the young person may be
- Visit locations that the young person is known to frequent if it is possible
- Also social media is a good tool to check where possible.
- Contact local hospitals where applicable

The following is an overview of the categories applied – (see Pan-Lancashire Protocol)

- **Unauthorised Absence** – This is a Local Authority term, not a Police category and therefore denotes a judgement on the part of residential staff that the young person is not judged to be at risk of harm. This judgement will typically reflect young people who are late home / testing boundaries and therefore will not be reported to the Police. Staff should still make all reasonable efforts to communicate with the young person and secure their return to the home. Children's Homes must monitor and respond to patterns of emerging unauthorised absence episodes as length of absence does not correlate to risk.
- **Missing Person** – Staff should report a young person to the Police as 'missing' where the young person is away from the home in circumstances that give rise to concern for the welfare of the young person, or public safety. This should be completed by telephone with an overview of the presenting risks leading to a missing report being provided and a Police log number retained by the staff member. Unless a young person's Risk Assessment indicates the need for an immediate missing report staff will have taken prior steps to communicate with / locate the young person based on known relationships or intelligence gained. These actions must continue after a missing report to the Police, in conjunction with the Police and taking account of any known risk factors.
- **Absent** – This is a Police decision and so a young person cannot be reported to the Police as 'absent'. This judgement is based on a decision that a young person does not at that time sit within the 'missing' category and therefore no active deployment will be made to locate the young person. This will be reviewed as necessary as an absent episode goes on. Where staff feel that the presenting circumstances and risk factors constitute a judgement of 'missing' this should be communicated to the Police and recorded on the LCS case

note. On the same basis the former practice of local Police accepting reports of young people who are missing 'cause for concern' should not be used as this is inconsistent with the statutory guidance and local protocol.

- **Away from placement without authorisation** – this applies where a young person is away from the home at a known and fixed location but that location gives rise to concerns for their welfare. This may be a young person who is staying with friends or extended family at a house where sexual exploitation may be a risk. As with the above categories efforts to return the young person must be made unless it is judged unsafe to do so. This category does not denote a 'missing person' however a formal request to the Police may be required to seek assistance to return the young person. It is acknowledged that young people can move between 'away from placement without authorisation' and 'missing' and ongoing dialogue with the Police and Children's Social Care will be required in such scenarios. Young people judged to be within this category should be reported to the Police under the MfH Protocol and therefore subject of risk assessment as to the actions required.
- **Absconder** - An Absconder is a young person who is absent from the placement without permission and who is subject to an order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process (e.g. remands, curfews, tagging, conditions of residence, other bail conditions, PACE detention or ASBO's), or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings. A young person in this category must be reported to the Police without delay.

Recording –

From the point you notify the Police under MfH Protocol you should –

1. Open an LCS case note using the 'Residential – Missing from Home' case note type.
2. Record the time and date / headline circumstances within which YP went missing, the Police Log Number and SU number. Record the specific category under which you have reported to the Police ('Missing' or 'Away from Placement without Authorisation'). Do not finalise the case note.
3. If you are seeking direct assistance from EDT to locate / return the young person telephone contact will be required. Do not copy EDT into the above case note as this will trigger multiple update alerts to EDT.
4. Use the one case note above ('Residential – Missing from Home') to record all actions / contact to locate the YP until they are back at the home.
5. Once the young person is returned (and you have agreement with Police to conclude the episode, where applicable) update the single case note and send by email to Customer Services via cypreferrals@lancashire.gov.uk (copy SW) advising of return (Date / Time / Circumstances).
6. Where the young person is categorised by the Police as a missing person they will create a SLEUTH report and send this to Customer Services for the episode to be created.

7. Any young person who has been missing from home for 24 hours must also be reported directly to the Residential Manager / Senior Res Manager and FARY Head of Service. Daily actions to contact and locate the young person must be agreed between CSC, Police and Residential staff.

The Return Home Interview will be created on LCS by the Customer Services Team and assigned to the Social Worker's Work Tray. Children's home staff should undertake and record a formal debrief with a young person who is regularly away from the home in circumstances that fall within unauthorised absence and should seek external input to this process if they feel that 'push factors' may be contributing to this pattern. The allocated social worker must be notified of the episode by phone (duty Social Worker / Manager in their absence) on the first working day after the return (and a case note recorded to that effect) in order to undertake the Return Home Interview

Multi-Agency Working

Effective practice in this area is underpinned by good working relationships with key partners. Children's Homes will ensure that good links are established with the local Police, Police Missing Coordinator and CSE Team. Young people who go missing can be at risk of sexual exploitation and therefore require assessment and intervention via a MACSE plan. Good communication with education providers and the Virtual School Service is important to ensure clear lines of accountability and information sharing, and to address any deficits in education provision or planning linked to missing episodes.

The key professionals contact details for {insert name of home} are –

Insert key details here..

Actions on Return and Risk Management

A young person returning to the home may have been exposed to harm, or been the victim of a criminal activity and therefore should be treated sensitively and supportively, as outlined below. This supports efforts to understand where they have been and what support may be needed to prevent future risk.

- Are you ok?
- Did you come to any harm?
- Do you need to talk and if so who would you like to talk to?
- Staff to remind the young person that they are here for them to talk to and when they feel ready to talk, the young person can approach them at any time
- Are you hungry / thirsty?

A Return Home Interview will be requested, via the above process, and must be offered to the young person within 72 hours of their return. Any information gained within this must be shared with the home to inform future planning / support.

The Individual Risk Assessment on LCS should be reviewed and updated to ensure it takes account of all emerging information about risks associated with going missing episodes and actions staff should take in response.

Monitoring and Escalation

Where a young person repeatedly goes missing from the home Intervention Meetings should be held to develop a multi-agency response. These should be convened as below –

Trigger points for Intervention Meetings – Tier 1

- Trigger level can be adapted by the carer's and Social Worker professional judgement based on the specific context, but should typically be not more than **3 episodes in one month or any period lasting more than 24 hours**
- Should be chaired by a CSC Practice Manager within 5 working days of the trigger event
- Should be attended by a Police representative, the child's residential worker and other professionals relevant to meeting the child or young person's needs
- The Child / Young Person and their parent should be involved where possible and appropriate and where this is not the case their views must be considered within the meeting
- The purpose of the meeting is to review all available information, including that gained from return interviews undertaken, to assess push and pull factors related to the missing episodes and agree an action plan with clearly defined roles and responsibilities to minimise the risk arising from missing episodes

Trigger points for Intervention meeting - Tier 2

- Where missing episodes persist or escalate from the threshold above a Tier 2 Intervention Meeting should be held
- Can be called by the Children's Home Manager or Family Placement Team Manager, CSC Team Manager or Police Missing Co-ordinator, and should be attended by same
- Should be chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer within 5 working days. Where this is not achievable the meeting should be chaired by either the relevant CSC Team Manager or Quality and Review Manager
- In addition to the purpose outlined at Tier 1 the Tier 2 meeting should review the compliance with, and effectiveness of, interventions set out at Tier 1
- It is recognised that there will be some children who go missing repeatedly within a short period of time where this level of intervention will immediately apply

Where safeguarding concerns persist beyond interventions agreed at a Tier 2 meeting the home must escalate those concerns to their manager, the IRO and the CSC Senior Manager for resolution as to next steps.

The Registered Manager should review within their monthly monitoring any missing episodes and the response made. This should identify any deficits, gaps in information or training or updates to action plans required. The Regulation

44 Visitor should regularly analyse practice in respect of young people who go missing and include their findings within their evaluation of the effectiveness of the home.

The Registered Manager should highlight any outstanding Return Home Interviews at the 72 hour stage to the relevant Social Worker and their manager. The Registered Manager will also review the completion and quality of Return Home Interviews undertaken via an established monthly monitoring spreadsheet. This is reported to CSC Heads of Service each month.