

Children Missing From Home and Care Procedures

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Document Author	Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership (KSCMP)
Document Owner	Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership Sessions House Maidstone ME14 1XQ Email: kscmp@kent.gov.uk
Summary of Purpose	These procedures outline the role and responsibilities of Kent agencies in responding to children and young people who run away and go missing from home or care.
Accessibility	This document can be made available in large print, or in electronic format. There are no copies currently available in other languages.
Equalities Impact Assessment	<p>During the preparation of this policy and when considering the roles and responsibilities of all agencies, organisations and staff involved, care has been taken to promote fairness, equality, and diversity, in the services delivered regardless of disability, ethnic origin, race, gender, age, religious beliefs or sexual orientation.</p> <p>Single agencies are responsible ensuring their delivery of services gives appropriate consideration to equality and accessibility needs, including in their application of this procedure.</p>
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1. Introduction

1.1 Forward

These procedures are important for the safeguarding of children and their families, or those using services in the Kent area. This guidance should be read in conjunction with your agency's guidance and implemented, where necessary, by all practitioners and managers working with children who are missing from home and care (see appendix 1 for legislative framework and useful links).

The Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership (KSCMP) expects all agencies working with children who go missing from home and care to implement these procedures, ensuring all relevant staff are aware of this document and how to use it. This guidance is expected to ensure that when a child goes missing there is an effective and collaborative multi-agency safeguarding response.

This will be achieved by good information sharing and will include a consideration of risks for individuals with a focus on reducing repeat missing episodes. Working in partnership with children and their families is a key part of this process.

Reasons for why a child runs away or goes missing are variable. They are often referred to as 'push' or 'pull' factors. A child can be 'pushed' from something, including (but not limited to) abuse, neglect, family conflict, and bullying. Alternatively, a child can be 'pulled' towards something, for example those who wish to groom children or young people for the purpose of sexual or criminal exploitation. Whatever the reason, a child who is running away or goes missing just once faces the same immediate risks as those who regularly go missing. However, children who go missing when they are young (and/or with greater frequency) are more likely to face longer-term problems.

The Return Interview and Missing Conversation and Post Missing Intervention Meeting should be used to inform interventions and identify support. The views of the young person should be listened to and taken seriously. In addition, the local authority has an independent advocacy service that young people can access to ensure their views are heard.

These procedures relate to children under 18 years of age who go missing. The definition of running away is taken from the [Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care \(January 2014\)](#).

1.2 Purpose of these procedures

The purpose of these procedures is to assist practitioners across all agencies to develop a robust response to children who go missing from home or care. This will include preventing the child suffering harm and recovering them to a place of safety as soon as possible. It is expected that all agencies working with children who are missing from home and care will implement these procedures and ensure their staff are aware of them.

1.3 Scope of the procedures

These procedures cover children under the age of 18 comprising:

- children who are missing from care (including residential care homes)
- children who are missing from home

1.4 Kent principles

Children who are missing may be at greater risk of harm as a consequence of their basic need for food, safety, shelter, and/or from the people whom they may come into contact with. Risks can include physical harm, sexual exploitation, self-harm, substance abuse, radicalisation, criminal exploitation, and involvement in a range of other criminal activities. Additional vulnerability due to their age, level of understanding, or the significance and seriousness of the circumstances that led to the missing episode may also be present.

The KSCMP, together with partner agencies, have undertaken several positive steps to review policy and practice on missing children.

Our key principles are to ensure:

- the safety and welfare of the child is paramount
- locating and returning the child to a safe environment
- every missing child who returns will be offered a return interview by someone other than the direct carer
- every missing child who returns will be offered an independent third-party return interview
- alignment of practice and recording data
- effective use of performance data, return interviews and The Young Lives Foundation to better understand the needs of children who go missing
- improved risk assessment procedures to provide a better coordinated response to episodes of missing children
- strengthening of partnership working to ensure consistent and robust information sharing and pooling of resources to provide support to children at risk
- improving our strategic approach to addressing the needs of missing children
- strengthened strategic planning and preventative work to inform practice and reduce the number of children who go missing

Children in care are particularly vulnerable in relation to missing episodes. At a national level, although the number of children in care going missing is a small percentage of the overall number, it is disproportionately high compared to the children's population.

1.5 Definitions

Missing (national police definition): anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.

Missing child: a child/young person under 18, reported as missing to the police by family or carer.

Missing from care: a child in care who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (for example school) and their whereabouts is not known.

2. Roles and responsibilities

2.1 Strategic leads

Kent Police and Kent County Council each have a strategic lead for missing children who are responsible for identifying vulnerable absent / missing children and to coordinate a response in order to reduce long-term risk. Both roles will identify and share best practice in relation to all missing children investigations.

2.2 Missing Child Liaison Officer (MCLO) – Kent Police

The main purpose of the role is to maintain an oversight of all missing children in their district, undertake multi-agency work to safeguard vulnerable and frequent persons, and act as a critical advisor.

2.3 Missing Child Exploitation Team (MCET) – Kent Police

The MCET are responsible for maintaining an overview of all enquiries in relation to missing children, ensuring the effective tasking of internal and external resources, and maintaining accurate and up to date records of all interventions taken to identify and safeguard victims of child exploitation and those at risk of being exploited. MCET are also responsible for bringing offenders to justice and building intelligence to better understand the personal safety of individuals across Kent.

2.4 Front Door Service Business Support Assistant

The role of the Front Door Service Business Support Assistant is to process the information in respect to any missing episode for a child and pass on to the relevant team to ensure a robust response is given.

It is the responsibility of the placing authority to ensure that return interviews are undertaken within statutory guidance.

3. Prevention and planning for children in care

3.1 Pre-risk assessment

For children in care, prior to each placement, KCC Integrated Children's Services staff will assess the risk of the child going missing and record in the child's placement plan. If the child has had previous missing episodes, the care plan and placement plan should include strategies to locate and minimise the likelihood of the child going missing in the future. This may include devising a missing agreement or response plan with the child and/or parent/carer.

Both foster carers and residential staff should be aware of the potential triggers and signals that a child is considering going missing. They will need to be proactive at this stage, engaging with the child to discover the cause/s and put the relevant arrangements in place to encourage the child to remain at the placement.

A risk assessment will be completed if the child is known to be at risk of running away. The risks should be discussed, where appropriate, at the placement planning meeting and reflected in the day-to-day arrangements for the child. The risk assessment will include the push and pull factors and contextual risks. The child must be given information about the risk of running away and the actions that will be taken, including devising a missing agreement, even if the child does not wish to collaborate.

Where children run away from their care placement, their needs will be reassessed and their care plan updated, to incorporate a risk management strategy to minimise missing from care incidents.

If the risk assessment indicates a high risk of the child going missing, social workers and foster carers should prepare and maintain an updated missing response plan which is to be shared with the police should the child go missing. If the child has had previous incidents of going missing, the missing response plan will be shared with the relevant missing child liaison officer. [View guidance on the points that should be considered in the missing response plan.](#)

4. Responding to a report of a child missing from home or care

4.1 Response from parents /carers

Children may go missing from home or care for a number of reasons. Parents and carers are expected to undertake a number of 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 may form part of a missing response plan, if one is in place, and are as follows:

- fully search the accommodation and surrounding area / vehicles
- search the home for any important leads (for example mobile phones, diaries, letters, notes explaining absence, emails, and website activity etc.) which may inform the investigation and / or assist in protecting or recovering the child
- speak with other children / young people in the family or others who live in the home to obtain relevant information about the missing child
- make all appropriate enquiries with regards to the whereabouts of the child. This will involve trying to contact the missing child, friends, family, associates, appropriate locations, local hospitals, and the local police custody office
- attending a place where the child is known to be and collecting them if it is safe to do so.

For children missing from home and care, it is expected that the parents or carers will inform the police without delay. When referring the child to the police, any relevant information that might help find or support the child should be shared, including:

- description of the child and their clothing
- details of where the child was last seen and with whom
- recent photograph of the child
- relevant addresses, known associates, and addresses frequented
- previous history of absenteeism and circumstance of where they were found
- circumstances under which the child is absent / missing
- any factors that increase the risk to the child.

If a child has previously been missing, it maybe helpful for parents or carers to have details of the child recorded and ready to share with the police in the instance of a further missing episode.

For children in care it is expected that the KCC Integrated Children's Services are contacted as soon as possible, and a risk assessment will be carried out.

4.2 Response from the police

Kent Police use the category of missing, defined as anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their wellbeing or otherwise

confirmed. As per Kent Police's policy a child will be assessed as either high risk or medium risk. A person under 18 years cannot be categorised as low risk or no apparent risk.

In all cases a missing investigation will commence by recording the incident in the bespoke missing persons investigation system (COMPACT).

Kent Police policy is aligned to the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice Missing Persons guidance which was last reviewed in February 2023.

4.3 Response from the Front Door Service

If a child is reported as missing to the police, this information is recorded onto the police recording system (COMPACT). This system generates a notification to the Front Door Service. Once the notification is received, the Front Door Service Business Support Assistant checks Liberi, EHM, and Core+ (KCC Integrated Children's Services' information systems) to check if the child has an allocated key worker. If so, the information is forwarded to the relevant key worker and their team. Where there is no active involvement from KCC Integrated Children's Services the missing episode will be created on Liberi. This will be triaged by a KCC Front Door Service Team Manager or Senior Practitioner and if there are no circumstances requiring a strategy discussion, passed to the appropriate member of the Front Door Service team to progress to the relevant Early Help Unit to undertake the missing conversation.

If there is a child missing that is deemed high risk and information is required urgently then the missing child liaison officer within Kent Police will contact the Front Door Service. If the child is known to the KCC Integrated Children's Services, the Front Door Service Business Support Assistant will provide details of the allocated key worker to the Missing Child Liaison Officer.

Where children that are in care to another local authority but placed in Kent are missing, the missing episode will be created on Liberi. This will be triaged by a Front Door Service Team Manager or Senior Practitioner and if there are no circumstances requiring a strategy discussion, and no additional concerns that need to be escalated to the placing authority it will then be passed to the relevant authority. If the child is a child in care placed by another local authority, then that local authority has a statutory duty to notify the KCC Integrated Children's Services of the placement. If it is identified that this notification has not been submitted, this will be followed up with the placing authority.

4.4 Response from the local authority

Section 13 of the Children Act 2004 requires local authorities and other named statutory partners to make arrangements to ensure that their functions are discharged with a view to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This includes planning to prevent children from going missing and to do everything possible to ensure their safe return when they do go missing. The KCC Integrated Children's Services will respond to missing episodes in

accordance with current legislation and policy with specific reference to the updated statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care issued by the Department of Education in January 2014.

Children who run away or go missing from home are likely to be in need and require support provided by the local authority or voluntary agencies. Therefore, all children who runaway or go missing will be offered a return interview.

4.5 Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)

An unaccompanied asylum-seeking child is someone who:

- is under 18 years of age when applying for asylum
- applying for asylum in their own right
- is separated from their parent/s and is not being cared for by an adult who in law or by custom has responsibility to do so.

There are many additional factors to consider when unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are reported missing and further practice guidance should be sought to ensure there is a coordinated approach to share information. Close cooperation with the UK immigration department and the police is important. The assessment of need to inform the care plan may be critical in these circumstances and as assessment should seek to establish:

- relevant details about the child's background before they came to the UK
- an understanding of the reasons why the child came to the UK
- an analysis of the child's vulnerability to remain under the influence of traffickers
- an analysis of the child's vulnerability to further exploitation
- a risk assessment as to the likelihood of the unaccompanied asylum-seeking child going missing
- consider placing the child in a safe place
- the appropriateness of information being divulged as to the whereabouts of the child.

When unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are reported missing, they will remain their status of child in care unless one or more of the below criteria are met:

- they return to a birth parent / someone with parental responsibility
- they are located in another country
- the care is taken over by another local authority
- they are age assessed as being over 18 years of age.

Children reported as missing will be reviewed by the MCET in line with the [College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice \(APP\) Missing Persons guidance](#). By definition, a child reported missing from local authority care will be categorised by the police as requiring special consideration. In this case, the police national computer (PNC) will automatically update the Police National Missing Persons Bureau.

Please refer to your own agency guidance for more information.

4.6 Children placed outside the local authority

When a child is placed out of their local authority area, the responsible authority must make sure that the child has access to the services they need in advance of the placement. Notification of the placement must be made to the host authority and other specified services.

If children placed out of their local authority go missing, this protocol should be followed, in addition to complying with other processes that are specified in the policy of the host local authority. It is possible that the child will return to the area of the responsible authority, so it is essential that liaison between the police and professionals in both authorities is well managed and coordinated. A notification process for missing / absent episodes should be agreed between responsible and host local authorities as a part of the care plan and the placement plan.

5. When a child is found

5.1 Response from the police

Post Missing Intervention Meetings will be completed by the Kent Police as soon as practicable (during working hours) after the child returns. Where possible, the Post Missing Intervention Meeting will be completed by MCET. This is required to establish the wellbeing of the child and identify if they have been exposed to harm or crime whilst missing, visits will be conducted in person.

All high-risk follow up visits will be actioned immediately. In cases where there is no MCET officer on duty and a child has returned, this will be risk assessed by the police force control room and the duty manager will decide if it is appropriate for the Post Missing Intervention Meeting to be deferred until MCET are on duty, or whether it requires immediate action.

Once the Post Missing Intervention Meeting has been completed a found report will be added to COMPACT. This will trigger an automatic notification to KCC Integrated Children's Services, allowing the commencement of the return interview process.

A child is classified as a repeat missing person if they go missing three or more times in a consecutive three-month period or where they are missing for 7 consecutive days. Repeat missing children should be subject to a multi-agency meeting at the earliest opportunity. Where necessary, the missing children liaison officer will facilitate the meeting and invite representatives from interested parties such as social services, private care homes, fostering agencies etc. Safeguarding concerns will be discussed, the level of risk will be assessed, and an action plan to reduce risks will be agreed.

5.2 Response from the Front Door Service

When a child has been found or has returned home, the police will complete a Post Missing Intervention Meeting, after which they are required to submit a record of this in the found report which is forwarded to the Front Door.

A found notification is sent to the Front Door from the COMPACT system. This is subsequently recorded onto Liberi and the relevant team is notified of the child's return. Children aged 13 years and over will be notified to the KCC Adolescent Early Help Team, and children aged 12 years and under will be notified to the KCC Intensive Early Help Team. Unit leads will decide who will undertake the return interview and identify any risks and needs.

Once received, KCC Integrated Children's Services systems will be checked by the Front Door business support assistant and sent to the keyworker if currently open. If the child is not open, the responsibility for completing the return interview is allocated to the appropriate KCC early help unit, who will determine and agree which practitioner is best placed to complete this.

The following forms, where available, will be shared to the relevant keyworker or team:

- a) the missing and found reports
- b) the completed risk and needs summary form
- c) return interview undertaken form
- d) return interview did not take place form
- e) the child exploitation identification tool.

5.3 Response from the Integrated Children's Services

When a child is located, a discussion will take place between the police and KCC Integrated Children's Services and appropriate arrangements will be made to return the child. In some instances, it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home or placement, and in such cases, the police will contact KCC Integrated Children's Services or the Front Door (out of hours) for an evaluation of their safety.

For children in care, when another professional/associate has located the child, KCC Integrated Children's Services will be responsible for making arrangements for their return to the children's home/foster placement. Where possible, residential staff/foster carers will transport the child themselves, however, where this is not practical, arrangements will be agreed between the residential staff/foster carer and the social worker. There may be occasions where it is appropriate for the police to assist. This will be subject to discussion and agreement on a case-by-case basis.

Return from a missing episode may be a reachable moment, in which a child can be engaged in a missing conversation, which could be supported by using the [Missing Conversations Toolkit](#).

5.4 Specific consideration for children in care and children subject to a child protection plan

Professionals should carefully consider the circumstances of the return of the child in care to ensure that they are not being placed in a position of potential risk. If a child returns to a care setting on their own accord, then this may be seen to be a safe setting. If the child is found, any signs of reluctance by the child to return to their care setting should form part of a risk assessment before a child is returned or accommodated elsewhere.

On the child's return, their health condition should be discussed with the child and their parents/carers immediately, with an offer made to arrange medical attention, if necessary. There may be some children who should always be seen by or have a consultation with a doctor or relevant medical practitioner such as those with medical conditions which require medication or monitoring (for example, diabetes or epilepsy). If the nature of the required medical attention is, or has the potential to be, part of a child protection investigation, then those procedures should be implemented.

The child will be reminded that they will be visited by a suitable professional who has been identified; the purpose of this interview is to establish safety and welfare. For those placed outside of the local authority and at some distance, arrangement should have been made at the outset of the placement for a person, independent of the placement, to undertake the return interview. In these circumstances, this may not be the child's social worker, but an appropriate professional acting on behalf of KCC Integrated Children's Services.

Risk factors should be recorded in the Liberi missing workspace on every occasion when a child is missing. A risk assessment must be completed and all discussions relating to the missing episodes should be clearly recorded on Liberi.

The initial completion and update of the risk assessment should be used to inform and review the level of escalation as well as the child's current care plan. This may include input from other practitioners/agencies currently involved in supporting the child, such as the social worker, child and adolescent mental health services, physical health services, inclusion and attendance service or the young person's school.

The plan should outline any individual vulnerability and risk factors that could increase the chances of the child going missing, as well as information to help manage any missing episodes and finding the child. All care plans and risk assessments will be regularly reviewed, updated, and recorded.

5.5 Children open to other local authorities

The other local authority will be requested to send a completed copy of the return interview form; once this has been received it is uploaded to Liberi as a document and a copy forwarded to Kent Police's Missing Person Coordinator to gather intelligence. For children placed in Kent, the responsible local authority should ensure the return review interview

takes place, working closely with Kent where appropriate. Following receipt of a missing notification, a covering letter, together with the notification, is sent to the relevant other local authority by the Front Door Service Business Support Assistant and uploaded to Liberi. This confirms the episode of missing and requests a copy of the return interview form or any relevant summary, once undertaken by the home authority.

The found notification is passed on to the other local authority as it is received. A reminder request for the return interview form, or other relevant summary (if not received), is sent 2 weeks after the due date, and repeated 2 weeks later. Requests for return interviews are chased up 3 times and after 2 months, the episode will be finalised and closed.

The KCC Safeguarding, Professional Standards and Quality Assurance Team will follow up with any local authorities where return interviews are persistently not received. All return interviews are uploaded onto Liberi as documents by the Front Door Service Business Support Assistant and copies sent to the police. Any relevant child sexual exploitation information from the return interview is sent to the MCET by the other local authority placement officer.

5.6 Children who are not children in care or subject to a child protection plan

As per the above procedures, when a child has been found or has returned home, the current keyworker will be allocated to undertake the return interview. If the child is not known or open, the responsibility for completing the return interview is allocated to the appropriate KCC Early Help Unit, who will determine and agree which practitioner is best placed to complete this.

Children aged 13 years and over will be notified to the KCC Adolescent Early Help Team, and children aged 12 years and under will be notified to the KCC Intensive Early Help Team. Unit leads will decide who will undertake the return interview. This should be an Early Help Worker, either in an Adolescent or Intensive Early Help Team or a Youth Justice Unit. In a very small number of cases, such as where a missing report is made but it is determined that the child was not missing, the return interview may be allocated to the youth team, and a management oversight case note recorded to explain the rationale for this decision.

Consideration should be given to whether the child has needs that can be met via open access and community services, such as targeted provision or additional support in youth hubs.

Consideration should also be given to whether a request for support form is required to provide support to the family, to prevent future missing episodes, and to address any concerns identified during the return interview. This will require the consent of the child or their parents/carers. Any safeguarding concerns identified should be raised with the Front Door Service, either via a request for support form or a step-up process, including where the child has had 3 or more missing episodes.

For children who are already open, their plan will be reviewed and, if necessary, updated to include the work identified as required within the return interview process, this may include:

- an additional piece of targeted work for the child around safety, drugs, alcohol, or relationships
- a change to the focus of the family work to address the issues raised by the missing event
- amendments to the outcomes within the plan
- completion of the [Kent and Medway Exploitation Toolkit](#).

5.7 Return interviews and missing conversations

When a child is reported as missing from their placement, there is a statutory duty to undertake a return interview within 72 hours of the found report being received (separate to the Post Missing Intervention Meeting undertaken by Kent Police). The Liberi system should be updated upon completion of the return interview forms.

In all cases (not only missing from placement) a return interview is offered to the child by their allocated keyworker within 72 hours of the child being located. It should preferably take place in a neutral place where they feel safe. Delays in return interviews may mean a loss of important information or evidence. Return from a missing episode may be a reachable moment, in which a child can be engaged in a missing conversation, which could be supported by using the [Missing Conversations Toolkit](#). The purpose is to offer the child the opportunity to talk about the reasons why they went missing and what they may have done, or who they may have met in that period which may put them or others at risk. Should they decline this, or want an independent interview, an interview must be offered to the child through the Young Lives Foundation (YLF).

Once completed, all return interviews forms must be uploaded to the young person's Liberi record.

The allocated worker and their manager will review and consider the information contained within the return interview to inform the analysis of risk, vulnerability, and impact. For those who are not open to KCC Integrated Children's Services, this will help to identify if support is required and if so, the most appropriate level of support. For those already open to KCC Integrated Children's Services, the analysis will inform future planning. If there are concerns that the child is vulnerable to or may be being exploited, the key worker should complete the [Kent and Medway Exploitation Toolkit](#).

6. Appendices

Appendix 1: legislative framework and useful links

These procedures have been developed by the Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership and should be used in conjunction with the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Children Procedures. In addition, these procedures consider the following legislation:

- [The Children Act 1989](#)
- [The Children Act 2004](#)
- [Working together to Safeguard Children 2018](#)
- [Information Sharing Advice](#)
- [LAC \(2002\) 17, 'Children Missing from Home and Care – Good Practice Guidance'](#)
- [Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away and Go Missing from Home or Care](#)
- [Supporting local authorities to meet the requirements of National Indicator 71-Missing from home and Care Issued: July 2009](#)
- [Housing Act 1996, Part 7](#)
- [Child Abduction Act 1984](#)
- [Case Law R \(G\) v London Borough of Southwark.](#)
- [Education and Inspection Act 2006](#)
- [The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Statutory Guidance \(out of authority placement of looked after children\)](#)
- [The Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#)
- [Borders, Citizenship, and Immigration Act 2009](#)
- [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#)
- [Kent & Medway Safeguarding Children Procedures](#)
- [Council of Europe Convention on Action against Human Trafficking](#)
- [UK Human Trafficking Centre](#)
- [Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care \(January 2014\)](#)
- [Ofsted Missing Children Thematic Inspection](#)
- [Ofsted: Running Away \(2012\)](#)

Useful Links:

- [Children Missing Education: http://www.kelsi.org.uk/pru,-inclusion-and-attendance-service-pias/attendance/children-missing-education](http://www.kelsi.org.uk/pru,-inclusion-and-attendance-service-pias/attendance/children-missing-education)

- [Kelsi: www.kelsi.org.uk](http://www.kelsi.org.uk)
- [NSPCC: www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)
- [NSPCC Whistle Blowing Advice Helpline: www.nspcc.org.uk/what-you-can-do/report-abuse/dedicated-helplines/whistleblowing-advice-line/](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-you-can-do/report-abuse/dedicated-helplines/whistleblowing-advice-line/)
- [Child Exploitation and Online Protection \(CEOP\): www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk)
- [Barnardo's: www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

Appendix 2: child and young person missing from home and care process flow chart

