



**Kent  
Police**

# Medway

## Missing from Home and Care

### Joint Operating Procedures & Team Guidance

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## Introduction

These procedures are important for the safeguarding of children and families and those using services in this area. The development of these procedures reflects the generous and fulsome cooperation and support from Kent Children's Safeguarding Board. The document should be read in conjunction with Supplementary Information - Legislative Framework and Useful links. This document can not anticipate every situation and therefore individual judgement should be used to decide any action that is deemed necessary to protect the safety of the child, based on an assessment of risk.

These procedures cover children under the age of 18 years (up to 25 years for children with disabilities/special educational needs and care leavers) comprising:

- 1) Children who are missing from care (including residential care homes);
- 2) Children who are missing from home

It is expected that all agencies working with children who go missing (from home and care) implement these procedures, ensuring that 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, collaborative multi-agency safeguarding response.

This will be achieved by good information sharing and will include a consideration of risks for each individual with a focus on:

- Reducing repeat missing episodes
- Improve outcomes (Early Help Strategy)

To enable this process to be successful there are 3 aspects of the work that need to be achieved:

1. Working in partnership (multi agency)
2. Hear the voice of the child
3. Work with the family

## **A child-centred approach**

All actions and subsequent provision of resources must consider the views of the child or young person. Consideration must be given to the diversity of each individual young person and include an awareness of the importance of cultural sensitivity. Young people who run away or go missing should be given the opportunity to express their wishes and play a central role in plans to prevent further incidents of running away.

## **Supporting parents and carers**

Most of the time parents, carers and families play the important role in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Whilst professionals need to consider all circumstances when assessing and deciding how best to safeguard children and young people, working in partnership is key when working with families and delivering intervention.

Parents, carers, and members of the extended family should be included as integral participants in the “team” around the child; and in some instances, with minimal support they can be the entire “team” around the child. The role of professional partners in working with children and young people who go missing is to ensure that no child falls through the net. The aim for Medway Children’s Services is to offer early intervention through early help pathways where appropriate and where necessary.

Going missing could place children in dangerous situations and can often be the trigger for further vulnerabilities. It is when a child goes missing, we should check for school attendance and exclusion figures to understand a decline in educational outcomes. There are particular concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of exploitation both sexual and financial and radicalisation. A child who goes missing just once faces the same immediate risks as faced by a child who regularly goes missing. However, children who go missing when they are young (and/or with greater frequency) are more likely to face longer-term problems.

Children and young people who go missing from Home and Care are at increased risk of being abused or exploited. The reasons for their absences may be varied and complex and cannot be assessed in isolation from their home circumstances and experiences. Every missing episode should, therefore, attract attention from professionals to assess the risks

and respond appropriately and proportionately. Children and young people (up to the age of eighteen) who run away or go missing from Home or Care face a range of immediate and long-term risks including:

- No means of support or income
- Offending behaviour
- Being a victim of abuse
- Being a victim of criminal activities/ exploitation
- Alcohol and substance misuse
- Deterioration of physical and mental health

## Principles

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 Home Interview by someone other than the direct carer
- Every missing child who returns will be offered an independent interview
- Alignment of Team and recording of children's missing episodes
- Effective use of performance data, Return Home Interviews to better understand the needs of children who go missing
- Improved risk assessment procedures are in place to provide a better coordinated response to episodes of missing children
- Strengthened partnership working to ensure consistent and robust information sharing and pooling of resources to provide support to children at risk; and provide support to the needs of missing children.
- Strengthened strategic planning and prevention work to inform practise and reduce the number of children who go missing.

## Roles and Responsibilities

Research shows that the level of risk to the individual child escalates with each missing episode and repeat episodes can be a significant indicator of high risk to the child. It is therefore important for safeguarding the welfare of children and young people that all practitioners who work with children are familiar with this guidance.

### Strategic Leads

There are 2 strategic leads for missing children who are responsible for specifically identifying vulnerable missing children and to co-ordinate a response in order to reduce long term risk.

1. The Head of Service for First Response and Targeted Services, Children's Services
2. Kent and Medway Police (DCI for Vulnerabilities)

Both leads will identify and share best practice in relation to all missing children's investigations and will ensure this work is monitored and children do not fall through any gaps.

### Operational Leads

There are two Operation leads for Missing children. This is to co-ordinate the responses to reduce the risks for young people going missing.

1. Group Manager First Response and Adolescent Service
2. Detective Inspector from MCET

### Missing and Exploitation Coordinator

The main purpose of the role is to maintain a comprehensive overview of missing children and those vulnerable to and at risk of exploitation within Medway. The coordinator is tasked with identifying those children who are at risk of significant harm, assisting practitioners within Children's Services to co-ordinate the response from internal departments and partners to reduce the likelihood of harm.

The coordinator will follow up with children, and other Local Authorities when Return Home Interviews are not received in a timely manner. They are also responsible for collating themes and analysing the impact of any disruption activity.

## Children at risk – Prevention and Planning

If a child has had previous missing episodes, the child's plan (e.g Care Plan, Placement Plan, Child in Need Plan) and Young person's profile should include strategies to locate and minimise the likelihood of the child going missing in the future.

Parents, carers, foster carers and residential staff should be alert to the potential triggers and signals that a child is considering going missing. They will need strategies 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 home or placement.

For Children in Care where they are running away from their care placement, their needs will be re-assessed, and their Care Plan updated to incorporate a risk management strategy to minimise missing from care incidents. Prior to each placement, the allocated social worker will assess the risk of a child going missing and record in the Child's Placement Plan.

### Definition of Missing

**Missing:** Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.

Nationally, the police also use definition of Absent "A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be and there is no apparent risk".

**Missing Child:** a child/ young person under 18, reported as missing to the police by family or Carer(s).

Where a child's location is not known, this should be reported to the Police, however being away from their placement without authorisation such as coming home late, or staying at a known location with a friend, where their location is known, may not constitute a missing episode. The discretion of the residential staff and carers is necessary to decide when to make a report to the police, based on the concerns they have for the child and action taken to contact them. The responsibility for managing this type of absence lies with the foster carer or the staff at the residential home. If there are concerns for the child's safety, then a report should be made to the police clearly setting out what those concerns are.

If the assessment of the carer is that there is no apparent risk for the child's immediate

safety, it is still important that staff and or carers need to record these incidences as away from their placement without authorisation. The foster carer or the staff at the residential home should notify the child's social worker or out of hours service within a timeframe consistent with the placement plan or missing plan for that child. This needs to be recorded on to the child/young person's Mosaic record.

## **Responding to a Report of a Child Missing from Home or Care**

### **Responses from Parents/carers**

Children may go missing from home or care for a number of reasons. Parents and Carers are expected to undertake several actions to try and locate a child who is missing before reporting them to the Police, as long as it is safe to do so:

- Fully search the accommodation and surrounding area / vehicles.
- Search the home for any important leads e.g. mobile phones, diaries, letters, notes explaining absence, email and website activity etc.), which may inform the investigation and /or assist in protecting or recovering the child.
- Speak with other children /young people in the family or others who live in the home to obtain relevant information about the missing child; and
- 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.
- When referring the child/young person to the Police, any relevant information that might help to 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 circumstances of where found;
  - Circumstances under which the child is absent / missing; and
  - Any factors that increase the risk to the child.

### **Response from the Police**

Kent and Medway Police only use the category of "missing", defined as:



- “anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed” (College of Policing: Major Investigation & Public Protection: Missing Persons (2016)),
- And their response will be graded according to identified risk. When making a referral to the police, all relevant known details and background should be shared to inform the risk-assessment and subsequent decision-making process. Where risk cannot be accurately assessed without active investigation, appropriate lines of enquiry will be set to gather information and inform the risk assessment.

Nationally other forces also utilise the category of absent and therefore children placed outside of Kent or Medway may be categorised as such.

Individuals whose whereabouts are known will not be considered (within police terminology) as Missing, however, if there are concerns about the child/ young person’s welfare, police officers will work within the Local public protection procedures and partner agencies to ensure an appropriate safeguarding response is provided. This includes Children in Care who are deemed to be ‘absent without authorisation’ (as defined within the Department for Education (2014) Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care).

If a child’s whereabouts are not known and they are reported missing to the Police, initial questions are asked to identify whether the individual may be considered High Risk. In all cases a missing investigation will commence by recording the incident in the bespoke missing persons investigations system (COMPACT).

An Investigating Officer will then complete a full risk assessment and, depending upon the level of risk to the child, a Duty Inspector or Senior Investigating Officer will oversee the investigation, undertaking reviews in line with ‘Authorised Professional Team’. Investigation tasks will be completed, proportionate to the risk level and individual circumstances. The primary objective of any Police Investigation will be to safeguard the vulnerable child and deal with any potential identified offences. Should the individual return within a very short period of time and there are no specified identified vulnerabilities, then the report may be closed with a Found Report prior to Police attendance.

**High Risk:** The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.

**Medium Risk:** The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely, but not serious.

**The Association of Chief Police Officer Missing Persons Guidance 2013 states that missing incidents relating to any person under 18 years should NOT be classified as low risk.**

### **Response from Local Authority**

If a child/young person is reported as missing to the Police, this information is recorded onto the Police recording system (COMPACT). This system generates a real time notification to the Missing Information Officers email box based in Medway Children's Services Adolescent Team. Once the notification is received the Missing Information Officer investigates Mosaic to check the status of the child. The information relating to the missing incident will be recorded onto Mosaic by the Missing Information Officer and if currently allocated, the relevant team informed (Family Solutions/ Safeguarding Children's Services).

Where there are safeguarding concerns identified for a child/young person who is either not in receipt of statutory Children's Services or is placed in Medway by another Local Authority then a contact and referral will be opened, recommending a strategy discussion to consider what actions are required. If safeguarding concerns are identified for a child receiving services from Children's Services, the strategy discussion will be convened by the allocated team.

In addition to checking Mosaic for current involvement, the Missing Information Officer will also screen Care + and Synergy systems to identify any children who are involved with either the Youth Offending Service or the Children Missing from Education Team and Inclusion. If involvement is identified, then the relevant teams are notified. It has been recognised that a cohesive approach between professionals involved with a child is required to ensure that all risks are identified and addressed.

If the child is a child in care placed by another Local Authority, then the other Local Authority has a statutory duty to notify Medway Children's Services of the placement. If the Missing Information Officer identifies that this notification has not been submitted this is highlighted to the Other Local Authority Placement Officer to follow up with the placing Authority. The Other Local Authority will be contacted to request a copy of the Return Home Interview form and a young person profile and trigger plan; once this has been received it is uploaded to

Mosaic as a document and a copy forwarded to the Missing and Exploitation Lead and Kent Police to gather intelligence.

If there is a child /young person missing who is deemed high risk and information is required urgently, the Missing Person Liaison Officer within Kent Police will contact the Missing Information Officer in the Adolescent Team. If the child is open to Safeguarding Children's Services, the Missing Information Officer will provide details of the allocated social worker to the Missing Person Liaison Officer within Kent Police. If the child or young person is not known next steps will be determined in First Response and the Missing Person Liaison Officer will be notified of the outcome.

Medway Local Authority will respond to missing episodes in accordance with current legislation and guidance with specific reference to the updated [Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care](#) issued by Department of Education in January 2014.

First Response will consider what intervention and/or Assessment needs to be carried out following a missing person's episode and will give due consideration to the level of risk and vulnerability for the child or young person in deciding on the most appropriate response. Children and young people who go missing from home or care may be considered as 'Children in Need' and may therefore be entitled to a service under [Section 17 of The Children Act 1989](#). Furthermore, it is recognised that dependent on individual circumstances such as parental response, the child or young person may be considered at risk of, or subject to, significant harm and therefore a child in need of help and protection. In these circumstances child protection procedures would be followed. If these thresholds are not met the child's needs may be responded to by a multi- agency approach through Early Help Services.

At any point following notification being received, a strategy meeting will be considered on a case-by-case basis dependent on risk. However, as a minimum standard whenever a child is missing from home or from care for more than 48 hours, the relevant Head of Service will be notified and a strategy meeting must be held with all relevant professionals, including the designated IRO or Child protection Chair as appropriate. The chair of the strategy meeting will ensure that there is a SMART Plan, and this will be shared with the relevant Head of Service.

With agreement from the relevant Head of Service, consideration can be given to the following:

- Any Press or publicity
- Notifications to other authorities
- Ports and Airports alert

### **Daily Missing Report**

A daily missing report is compiled by the Missing Information Officer for all children in Medway who have been missing during the last 24 hours and/or are still missing. This report captures the assessed level of risk given by Kent Police and recommends actions for the allocated worker. The report provides a direct reporting line to senior managers. It is sent to the relevant allocated worker's managers, along with the Assistant Director of Children's Services and the Director of People.

### **Longer absences of a "missing" child - more than twenty-four hours**

Whenever a child who is not open to Children Services goes missing for longer than 24 hours a contact and referral must be made to Medway First Response Team by the Missing Information Officer.

The contact & referral will then be passed to a Team Manager within First Response where it will be reviewed and allocated to a social worker for further exploration.

For a child that has an allocated worker the Missing Information Officer (MIO) will, on receiving the information upload it via a significant contact episode on Mosaic, assigning the episode to the allocated Team Manager and Social Worker so appropriate action can be taken.

For a child in care or child subject to a child protection plan the designated IRO or Child Protection Chair and the Senior Leadership team must be informed by the social worker within 24 hours in the form of a Need-to-Know document, which must also be sent to the misper email box.

### **Longer absences of a "missing" child -**

Whenever a child is missing (from home or from care) for 48 hours a strategy meeting should be held with all the relevant professionals including for a child in care or child subject to a child protection plan the designated IRO or Child Protection Chair.

The allocated IRO/Child Protection Chair should be invited to attend the strategy meeting and will consider convening the next LAC review or Review Child Protection Case Conference earlier than planned in order to ensure that there is co-ordinated partnership working amongst all agencies to ensure the safe return of the young person and that agencies work together to prevent them going missing again once found.

The chair of the strategy meeting should elicit a clear statement about the actions being taken in respect of the absence and its precipitating factors as known and actions taken to recover the child.

Consideration should be given to the following:

- Any press or publicity issues
- Notification of other authorities
- All ports and airports alert.

Risk factors that the meeting/s must consider include:

- Sexual exploitation and child trafficking
- Forced marriage
- Genital mutilation
- Honour based killings
- Domestic violence
- Self-harming or suicidal behaviours
- Known mental health issues
- Known risk of contact with persons posing a risk to children.
- Linked to gang activity

At 24 hours the relevant Head of Service should update and alert the senior leadership team, via the Need-to-Know protocol.

If the child remains missing, regular review strategy meetings should be held at appropriate intervals. The relevant Group Manager should consider the need for an urgent legal professionals meeting to secure a court order to affect the safe return of the young person.

The Head of Service and Assistant Director should formally review all cases where children have been absent for two months or more.

## **Informing the press**

For a child who is missing from home, the police will liaise with the child's parents about informing the press.

For a looked after child who is missing, a decision to publicise by press and/or television will be made by the Assistant Director for Children's Services only after consultation with the child's social worker and the police and having been provided with a briefing on the absence and action taken to date by the relevant Team Manager and Group Manager, and with prior warning in order to allow the child's parents to be informed. This will be done in accordance with police rules about communications with the media.

Where a young person is subject to S20 accommodation and parents disagree with publicity, Legal Services will be consulted about options available. Where the young person is subject to a S31 Care Order, agreement for publicity rests with the Assistant Director for Children Services but parents must be consulted and informed as far as is practicable.

## **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children**

There are many additional factors to consider when Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children are reported missing. Close cooperation with UK Immigration and the Police is important.

The assessment of need, undertaken as soon as the child has become accommodated will be critical in these circumstances and should seek to establish:

- Relevant details about the child/young person's background before they came to the UK;
- An understanding of the reasons that the child came to the UK;
- An analysis of the child's vulnerability to being at risk from traffickers;
- A risk assessment as to the likelihood of the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking child going missing; and
- The appropriateness of information being divulged as to the whereabouts of the young person.

When Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children are reported missing, they will retain their status of Child in Care unless one or more of the criteria are met.

- They return to a birth parent/someone with parental responsibility;

- They are located in another country;
- Case responsibility is taken over by another Local Authority; and / or
- They are age assessed as being over 18yrs old

Children reported as missing, will be reviewed by the MCET on a regular basis. 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.

Where an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child or young person remains missing up to and beyond 18-years old, Medway Council will retain responsibility for the young person as a former relevant child and provide appropriate assistance, should they be found again or present seeking support as a former child in care.

When an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child is missing for 28 days, a multi-disciplinary professionals meeting must be held and attended by the appropriate a Head of Service from Medway Children’s Services and a senior officer from Kent Police. This meeting should elicit a clear statement of the actions being taken in respect of the missing child. Managers should satisfy themselves that all that should be done to try and locate the child, is being done. The Missing Information officer must be informed that the review process has commenced, as the child will then be removed from the daily missing report.

Whilst the child remains missing, his/her case should be identified as “open” on Mosaic and must be reviewed on a bi-monthly basis for the first 6 months.

**"When to Review" Table**

When to Review	Action to be Taken	By Whom
Child Missing over 24 hours	Need To Know process initiated to ensure senior leader’s oversight.	Group Manager and Head of Service
Fortnightly review – In the first 28 days	Service Missing Exploitation Discussion to be held and chaired by the Group Manager.	Social Worker, MCET Police and Group Manager
Child missing for 2 months	Review of Child’s case record	Head of Service

Bi-Monthly Multi-Disciplinary Professionals Meeting Review up to 6-month stage	Child missing after 28 days up to 6 months. If child not found, case to remain open in manager's work tray.	Head of Service from Medway Children's Service and a Senior Officer from Kent Police
Multi-Disciplinary Professionals Meeting (at 6-month point)	Meeting to ensure that all actions are being taken to recover the child, in light of any new information/events. At this point the Head of Service should make a judgement whether there is a continuing need for the child's case to remain open to Children's Services. This judgement needs to include consideration of whether all actions have been exhausted and there are no further actions for Children's Services. The Head of Service must be assured that all necessary action to locate the child will continue to be undertaken by Police, United Kingdom Visa and Immigration Service (UKVIS) and other relevant agencies. A decision to end Children's Services involvement can only be made where accountability for continuing action is taken over by another agency.	Head of Service to chair this meeting. Assistant Director to ratify any decision to close the child's case to CSC

### Trafficked Children

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 gives Local Authorities, (in this case social workers) the duty to notify when there are reasonable grounds to believe a person may be a victim of slavery or human trafficking. Children can be exploited in a variety of ways including sexually and criminally. When the risk of trafficking has been identified, it is the responsibility of the allocated social worker to complete the National Referral Mechanism referral and forward it to the Modern Slavery Trafficking Unit at the National Crime Agency. There is no consent required if it is in relation to a child. The form should be emailed securely to:

[nrm@nca.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:nrm@nca.x.gsi.gov.uk).

### Children Missing from Education



(Also see separate policy and procedures - Children Missing from Education)

Children identified as missing education, who are not on a school roll, are investigated by the Children Missing Education Officer. Investigations are thorough and information requests are sent out to other authorities, NHS, Local Councils, Police and Early Help. Officers research in depth using a number of Council databases to be able to identify where the child missing education is living. Where investigations lead us to believe the young person has left the country, a referral is made to the Border Agency to clarify that the family are no longer in the UK and a 'No Trace' Report is reported to the Police.

When all avenues of investigation are exhausted advice will be sought initially from the Education Safeguarding Officer to consider what actions are required and a 'No Trace' report will be reported to the Police. If appropriate, the Children Missing Education Officer will complete a contact and referral via the portal to First Response and a record is made in Mosaic which ensures that appropriate professionals are aware of the child/young person and their circumstances should they or their family come to their attention.

The Children Missing Education Officer will not close any cases where a child is not found, the case is filed as dormant, and the files reviewed regularly until information is received that confirms the whereabouts of the child/young person.

### **Children placed in Medway by another Local Authority**

For children in care placed by another Local Authority, the Missing Episode will be opened on Mosaic and an e-mail sent to the Local Authority, outlining their responsibility to complete a Return Interview, asking for a copy to be sent to the Adolescent Team. It is the responsibility of the children/young people's social worker from the placing Authority to ensure the Return Home Interview is undertaken.

## **When a Child/ Young Person is found**

### **Response from the Police**

Once a child has returned home, Kent Police will carry out a Safe and Well Check as soon as possible. The aim of this is to check for any indications that the child/young person has

suffered harm; establish the reasons for their disappearance; find out where and with whom they have been and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them. There may be occasions when it is appropriate or necessary for agencies and the family to discuss who will be responsible for returning the child. Police should not be requested to provide transport, unless absolutely necessary. In some instances, it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home or placement and in such cases Kent Police will liaise with First Response or the relevant Emergency Duty Team (out of hours) for an evaluation of their safety.

Where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child is likely to suffer significant harm, particularly if returned home, Kent Police can take that child into Police Protection and remove them to suitable accommodation and keep them there; or take steps as are reasonable to ensure that the child's removal from any hospital, or other place, in which the child is then being accommodated is prevented. In particular circumstances this could include the home from which the child originally went missing (Section 46 of the Children Act 1989). However, the Police are not given the power to use force to take a child into Police Protection but "reasonable force" may be used to prevent a child suffering significant harm. Police may also be required to assist Children's Services in implementing Emergency Recovery Orders granted by the courts.

Once the Safe and Well Check has been done a Found Report will be added which will trigger an automatic notification to First Response to enable the commencement of the Return Home Interview process.

If a child/ young person is identified as particularly vulnerable, is missing for a period of 48 hours, or is reported missing 3 times within a 90-day period then the Missing Person Liaison Officer will organise a professionals meeting. This may be predicted by a pre-existing structured meeting arranged for the future. If necessary, the Missing Person Liaison Officer or another Officer will submit Child Protection Referrals to highlight safeguarding concerns, which may lead to Children's Services instigating a strategy discussion and potential Section 47 investigation.

## **Response from Local Authority**

See [Child/ Young Person Missing from Home and Care Process Flow Chart](#) Appendix 1

Ordinarily, it is expected that parents will return their child to their home unless the child is located by Police. In some instances, it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home and in such cases the Police will contact Children's Services or the Out of Hours Duty Team for an evaluation of their safety.

Where the child/ young person is Looked After by Medway Local Authority, Children's Services will be responsible for either returning or making arrangements for their return to the Residential Unit/ 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.

Risk Factors should be recorded in the Missing Episode on Mosaic on every occasion where a child is 'missing'. This may include input from other practitioners/agencies currently involved in supporting the child such as Social Worker, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Inclusion or the school.

The plan should outline any individual vulnerability and risk factors that could increase the chances of the child/ young person 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.

### **Specific consideration for Child in Care and Children subject to a Child Protection Plan**

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 as a whole.

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 of their own accord, then this may be seen to be a safe setting. If the child/ young person is 'found' then any signs of reluctance on the part of 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/ young person's return their health condition should be discussed with the child and the parents/carers immediately with an offer made to arrange medical attention if necessary. There may be some children or young people who should always be seen by a doctor e.g. with diabetes or young pregnant teenagers. If the nature for medical attention is, or has the potential to be, part of a 'Child Protection' investigation then those procedures should be implemented.

The child/ young person 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 children and young people placed outside of the Local Authority and at some distance, arrangements should have been made at the outset of the placement for a person independent of the placement to undertake the Return to Home Interview. In these circumstances this may not be the child's Social Worker but an appropriate professional acting on behalf of Safeguarding Children's Service.

In all cases, the Independent Reviewing Officer and the Senior Leadership team should be informed of the child/ young person's return and updated regarding any circumstances of the episode via the Need to Know process. The Independent Reviewing Officer may consider convening a Looked After Child Review if the missing person's episode(s) are raising significant concerns regarding the child's safety and wellbeing or are likely to impact on the stability of the placement.

### **Response from Family Solutions/Youth Service**

When a missing child/ young person has been found or has returned home, the Police will endeavour to complete a Safe and Well visit, after which they are required to submit a record of this is the Found Report which is forwarded to the Missing Information Officers in the Adolescent Team.

Any safeguarding concerns identified at this point are raised with a Team Manager in First Response for a decision as to whether a Contact & Referral should be made (this includes where the child/ young person has had 3 or more missing episodes). If a Contact & Referral

is required, this will be completed by the allocated worker and sent to First Response on Mosaic.

### **Return Home Interviews**

When a missing child is located a found notification is sent to the Missing Information Officer by the police COMPACT system. On receipt the Missing Information Officer will update the missing episode on Mosaic and if required seek consent from parents/carers for a Return Home Interview. The Missing Information Officer will notify the allocated social worker and team manager (where relevant) and assign the Missing Episode to the Return Home Interviewer to complete the Return Home Interview, unless the distance at which the child is placed is prohibitive. In these circumstances, arrangements for the completion of return home interviews would be commissioned alongside the placement provision.

Children/ young people who have returned home after being missing, will always be offered an independent Return Home Interview. However, if after trying to make contact by phone and letter more than three times and still being unsuccessful, the episode will be closed on Mosaic and recorded as a decline. A letter will be sent to outline that the young person can make contact in the future if they change their mind and provide details of free telephone numbers that may be useful to them.

The Return Home Interview should take place within 72 hours of the Found Report being received. This is then recorded and uploaded on Mosaic and notified to the social worker and team manager to review. All Return Home Interviews will be read by the Missing and Exploitation Coordinator to ensure that trends and themes are effectively gathered to understand the profile of children going missing.

In some cases, the young person may not want to talk to a Return Home Interviewer in a Return Home Interview scenario but may be open to having a conversation with their social worker or an early help worker. The important thing is that the young person is offered the opportunity to talk about the reason 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.

Consideration will be given to the needs of the child/ young person and whether there are needs that can either be met via services available in the community or Early Help or if safeguarding concerns are identified, a contact to First Response.

For children who are already open to Family Solutions or social care, the child's plan will be reviewed and if necessary updated where required include the work identified within the Return Interview process and ensure steps are taken to safeguard the child.

### **Response from Other Local Authorities placed children**

Following receipt of a Missing Notification, an e-mail together with the notification, is sent to the relevant Other Local Authority by the Missing Information Officers and a copy uploaded to Mosaic. The e-mail confirms the episode of missing and requests a copy of the Return Interview form of any relevant summary, once undertaken.

The Found Notification is passed on to the Other Local Authority as it is received and a reminder request for the Return Interview Form or other relevant summary (if not received) is sent by the Missing and Exploitation Coordinator 2 weeks after the due date. If a response is not received at this point, then the request is escalated by the Missing and Exploitation Co-ordinator within the Local Authority. If two weeks after that a response is not received, then the Missing and Exploitation Coordinator will follow up with Other Local Authority Social Workers/Managers. Where Return Interviews are persistently not received the Missing and Exploitation Lead will escalate within Medway Children's Services with reference to the MSCB Escalation Policy.

All Return Interviews are uploaded onto Mosaic as documents by Referral and Information Officers and copies sent to the Kent Police.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1

### Child/Young Person Missing from Home and Care Process

