

# Factsheet 4: Missing



GREENWICH  
**Safeguarding  
Children**  
PARTNERSHIP

## Our Key Principles:

- *Children who go missing are vulnerable children and assumed to be at risk of harm*
- *Practitioners and leaders should remain curious about children's circumstances*
- *Practitioners should look at push & pull factors*
- *Repeatedly going missing should never be viewed as a normal pattern of behaviour*
- *If a child has been missing for 72 hours, the Service Leader must report this to the Senior Assistant Director for Children's Safeguarding and Social Care*
- *Prompt, regular oversight of all missing children is essential, both individually and as an organisation.*
- *Return Home Conversations should always take place and are essential to understand what can be done to help to stop the child going missing again in future.*

## Purpose of the Document

This document provides guidance for assessing the risks to a child who has gone missing as well as the actions that should be taken by workers in Children's Services to locate the child, assist with their return, identify the issues which caused, and may continue to cause, the child to go missing and identify and respond to other adolescent risks.

## Background

A child can go missing at any time. In the vast majority of occasions, they return of their own accord, safe and well, but there is always the potential for children to come to serious harm while missing.

Going missing can be a symptom of an existing problem at school, at home or in a placement and also put children at increased risk of harm through being trafficked, sexually exploited and drawn into crime and gangs. It is essential that everyone involved with the child is prepared and knows what to do in the event that a child does go missing.

### **The role of the Missing Children's Coordinator in Greenwich is to:**

- Maintain oversight of Missing children in Greenwich including those in the Local Authority's care and in other areas and improving practice relating to missing children
- To monitor performance and improving the outcomes for children and young people, ensuring that appropriate safeguards and support are in place;
- Building effective partnerships and raising awareness with colleagues across Children's Services, partner agencies and the public.

## When a Child is Missing

If the information about a child going missing were not reported to police, the worker should ensure that the child has been reported to the police by the parent or carer, and if this has not been done, report it themselves.

For practitioners outside of Children's Social Care or the Family Advisory & Support Service (FASS), a referral should be made to the allocated worker (if known) or the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

The Children's Services worker should complete an immediate analysis of risk on MOSAIC. The SW will look at possible 'push' and 'pull factors', some of these might include problems at home, mental health as well as grooming and issues around child sexual or criminal exploitation (CSE/CCE).

If the case is unallocated and there are concerns about additional vulnerability or complex safeguarding issues, consideration will be given for case to be allocated for a Child and Family Assessment to be undertaken.

Consideration on both unallocated and allocated cases should be given as to whether a Section 47 Strategy meeting should be convened.

Workers in FASS should consider whether case escalation is appropriate or deemed necessary in the event that serious safeguarding issues are identified.

Consideration should be given as to whether to present the case or young person to the Pre-Mace Panel (multiagency panel) to discuss any concerns around contextual harm and identify support for the child.

Workers should keep in touch with the family/carers to offer advice and support and either maintain or try to maintain contact with the child.

If this is a Looked After Child in the care of the local authority, the SW will obtain updates from the carer/children's home on a daily basis. If it is known that a different professional is able to engage the child, this should be agreed by the professional network at the beginning of the missing episode.

The message of all contacts with the child should be clear and unambiguous: our primary concern is for the child and that there will be support when they return. If it is agreed that a professional who is not employed by RBG is the best link with the child then there should be a written note of this agreement and what form the contact will take.

***“The message of all contacts to the child should be clear and unambiguous: our primary concern is for the child and there will be support when they return.”***

The professional network should also agree who is best placed to do the Return Home Interview when the child has returned is a child in our care a Missing Strategy Meeting should always be held by the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of missing or earlier if the child is deemed to be at high risk or vulnerable whilst they are missing. Missing Strategy Meetings should decide what actions need to be taken and by whom to ensure that the child is found as soon as possible. This could include the Police searching for information about the child's whereabouts online and all information about the child's family and social networks and the sharing of intelligence. It should be agreed what the family will be told, and how often, if the child does not usually live with family.

Missing Strategy Meetings should be held monthly if the child is still missing and regular liaison with the key agencies and professional network should occur outside of the meeting. Team Leaders and Practice Leaders will review these weekly reports and ensure that prompt and appropriate action is taken to find children who are missing, and that they are seen when they return and Return Home Conversations are taking place. The Senior Assistant Director must be informed whenever a child has been missing for 72 hours, whether from home or from care.



### ***Missing or Absent or Unauthorised Absence - What is the Difference?***

A child is **absent** if they are not at a place where they are expected or required to be.

A child is **missing** when their whereabouts cannot be established and where:

- *The circumstances are out of character*
- *The context suggests the child may be subject of a crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.*

## When a Child Returns

Parents, carers and professionals should promptly inform the police and the rest of the professional network when a child returns or is found. If the child is a child in our care, the IRO should be informed.

Once a child is found, the police may carry out a **Safe and Well** check. The purpose of these interviews is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give the child an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them.

Within 72 hours of the child being located, a **Return Home Conversation** (RHC) should be offered.

### **The purpose of the conversation:**

- The conversation should be as soon as possible after the child has returned
- Best practice is for this conversation to be face to face, but it can also be over the phone.
- If over the phone, then you should include observations from the person who saw the child when they returned
- The purpose is to gather information about the child's life with a holistic perspective. This helps to identify reasons for going missing and to plan to stop this happening again
- The conversation is an opportunity for the child to speak to a professional. It is usually best for this to be the allocated social worker, but the child should be told that they can talk to someone independent if they

prefer – this could be their IRO or Child Protection Conference Chair, or an advocate, or another professional

This is an in-depth conversation carried out by a professional (e.g. a social worker, teacher, health professional or police officer) who is not involved in the direct care of the child. The RHC will need to address the young person's movements whilst they were missing, possible associations. It is expected that the SW/professional will remain curious about the young person's whereabouts during the missing period.

The child should be seen on their own unless they specifically request to have someone with them. Ideally this conversation should be face to face, however what is most important is that the conversation happens and so it may take place over the phone.

Regardless of who completes the Return Home Interview, it is the responsibility of the worker in Children's Services to ensure that the record is loaded onto the child's electronic file.

The record should include observations from parents or carers about how the child was when they came back – how they looked and sounded, what they said, whether they were hungry, what they did next. This information will inform an updated risk analysis and safety plan.



## **If Repeated Missing Episodes Occur**

We know from experience that the risks to the child will increase

We must never treat this as ‘normal behaviour’

We should review the strategy – is there someone else in the professional network who the child might engage with?

We will not give up. We will continue to offer return home interviews, seek advice and support and keep trying to change the situation.



## **The Police Role in Missing Children**

*The Metropolitan Police Service is the lead agency for investigating and finding missing children.*

*All children recorded by police as missing are monitored on the police. Monitoring is ongoing and subject to regular reviews to ensure risk levels do not change. Where information comes to light which introduces any risk to the child, then the risk level may be changed.*

*All children recorded as missing are categorised by the police as low, medium or high risk.*

*A missing child incident would be prioritised as **High Risk** where:*

- The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.*
- A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible.*
- A high risk missing child requires the immediate deployment of police resources. A member of the senior management team or similar command level must be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels. An Investigating Officer and possibly a Senior Investigating Officer and a Police Search Advisor (PoSA) should be appointed. There should be a media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place. The UK Missing Persons Bureau should be notified of the case immediately. CEOP and local authority children's services should also be notified.*
- **Medium Risk** – The risk of harm to the subject or public is assessed as likely but not serious.*

*This category requires an active and measured response by police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.*

***Low Risk** – The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but minimal. Proportionate enquiries should be carried out to ensure that the individual has not come to harm.*

*The Missing Children Coordinator and other leaders will ensure regular tracking and analysis through weekly meetings with the police and in other meetings to consider themes and map problems and patterns and a wider consideration of risk.*