

**Missing Child/Young Person**

**(July 2020)**

One Minute Guide

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**Why children and young people run away?**

Children may run away from a problem such as abuse, neglect, being challenged at home or they may run away to somewhere they want to be and/or someone they want to be with. In some cases, they may have been coerced into running away by someone else and there are clear links between children running away/going missing and child sexual and child criminal exploitation.

It is vital that the missing episode itself is not seen as an isolated incident but as a symptom of other ongoing issues. Whilst it is important to locate the missing child and ensure they return safe and well, there needs to be ongoing work to identify the causes of the missing incident/s and preventing them reoccurring is as critical.

**What risks do children and young people face when they go missing?**

The immediate and long-term risks associated with running away/going missing, include:

* No means of support or legitimate income – leading to high risk activities
* Possible involvement in criminal activities
* Becoming a victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and exploitation
* Alcohol and substance misuse
* Deterioration of physical and mental/emotional health
* Loss of education and training
* Inappropriate/manipulative/exploitive relationships
* Being drawn into County lines/criminal exploitation
* Substance dependency
* Involvement in crime
* Involvement in sexual / criminal exploitation into adulthood, and
* Homelessness

**When is a person missing?**

A missing person is “**anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established**”. A person will be considered missing until they are located and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.

A child or young person is not missing if they are absent without authorisation or not where they are supposed to be. For example, this is when young people have not returned home and after a careful and thorough risk assessment their absence does not raise concern for their immediate safety or that of the public.

**What should I do when I believe a child has gone missing?**

**Before contacting the Police, proactive attempts to locate the child or young person must be made.**

When a child or young person is not at a location they are expected to be at, the reporting individual must take proactive steps to trace the child or young person’s whereabouts prior to contacting the Police and keep a record of the enquiries that they’ve made.

**Proactive attempts to locate the child or young person should include:**

* Physical checks of the residence, the Young person’s bedroom and any other location they may be hiding
* Physical checks of any garden, garage, sheds, grounds and area(s).
* Attempting to contact the missing person directly, via mobile phone, text, or social networking sites (i.e. Facebook/WhatsApp etc.).
* Contacting the missing young person’s wider family and friends to ascertain if the child has made contact with them.
* Where a young person is looked after in a residential home, National Minimum standards require that staff actively search for young people when they are not where they are expected to be.

Where a missing episode involving a looked after child does not necessitate a report to the police, details of the incident should be recorded in line with any care plans and other social care policies.

**What if the child or young person’s location is identified?**

If the child or young person’s location is identified then they will not be considered as missing. They are **“not where they are supposed to be”** and the **Police** should **NOT be called**.

Continue to make enquires to ascertain the safety of the child or young person and proactively look for the young person. If the situation changes then re-evaluate.

If a child or young person is “not where they are supposed to be” but you believe that they are at “**risk of harm**” at the location they are known to be at then REPORT them to the Police as a “**Concern for welfare of a child or young person at risk of harm**”. For example, where a child is staying over and refusing to leave a house where there is known drug dealing or in a residence of a known sex offender, a child or young person would not be classed as missing.

If they are NOT missing, but are at risk. You must record and relay to the police your reasons/concerns for believing they are at risk.

**If you believe the child has been abducted or forcibly removed, this is a HIGH RISK “crime in action” and should be reported to the Police immediately on 999.**

**What if I am unable to locate the child or young person?**

If after your enquires you cannot locate the child or young person, they **will** be considered as **MISSING** and you should **report** them to the **police** as missing. When reporting a child or young person as missing to the police you should provide details of:

* The child or young person, i.e. name, age, description and provide a photograph if available
* The searches and enquiries you have carried out
* Any mission action plans if available
* Known associates such as friends, family, etc. who they may reach out to
* The background of the child including any previous missing episodes and partnership information if available
* Any physical or mental impairments that might impact on the child’s level of development, functioning, understanding or appreciation of risk
* Any presenting circumstances and any reasonably foreseeable risks, and
* Any other information which may be relevant to assessing the level of risk to the child

The risk level will be assessed by the police based on the information and enquires you have made. The risk grading will be decided by the police and they will take the appropriate action.

Regardless of the police action unless advised not to do so by the police, for example in the case of serious risk of harm / High risk cases, you should continue to make enquires and proactively look for the child or young person. Pass any further information onto the police, and if you locate or establish the whereabouts of the child or young person, their status changes to “absent without authorisation”.

**How will risk be assessed?**

When a child or young person is considered missing they will be risk assessed as follows:

**Low**

The risk of harm to the child/young person, or public is assessed as possible but minimal. Proportionate enquires will be carried out to ensure the child/young person has not come to harm.

**Medium**

The risk of harm to the child/young person, or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.

This requires an active and measured response by the police and other agencies in order to trace the child/young person and support the person reporting.

**High**

The risk of serious harm to the child/young person or the public is assessed as very likely.

This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of police resources. This will include a senior management officer being involved, appointing an investigating officer, police search advisers and possible press strategy.

**What happens if the child/young person is found?**

When a reported child/young person returns or is located and returned to a safe place other than by the Police, the Police must be notified as soon as possible by the parent or carer. At this point, the Childs’ parents or carers will be asked if there is anything the Police need to know about or act on immediately. If there is, e.g. the child has been the victim of a crime whilst missing, the police will prioritise their attendance, if not, the Police will arrange for a ‘Safe & Well Check’ to be conducted as soon as possible but within 24 hours.

It is important to understand why they went missing, protect them from harm and prevent future missing episodes. The approach taken by professionals towards a missing child or young person can have a significant impact on how the child or young person engages with any subsequent investigations and protection planning. A supportive approach, actively listening and responding to a child or young person’s needs, will have a greater chance of preventing the child or young person from going missing again and safeguarding them against other risks.

**Where can I find more information?**

For more information please see the Missing from Home and Care Joint Protocol available from: <https://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/professionals/practice-guidance>