



Warwickshire
Safeguarding

Warwickshire Missing Children Protocol

Procedures for Children Missing from Home & Care

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1. Introduction

This Protocol provides guidance for professionals from all agencies and parents and carers on how to respond when a child is classified as missing. It is important for the safeguarding of Warwickshire children and those using services in the area. It should be read and implemented, where necessary, by all practitioners and managers, including partner agencies working with children who are at risk of going missing or have already gone missing from home or care settings.

The protocol provides a framework for a co-ordinated and consistent response by agencies to reports of children who go missing, to prevent the child suffering harm and recover them to a place they are safe as soon as possible, including what steps should be taken to try to prevent them going missing again. The most effective assessment and support comes through good information sharing, joint assessments of need and planning within the interagency network and joint action in partnership with families.

We all have a responsibility to safeguard vulnerable children. Going missing can be symptomatic of wider problems in a child's life. For whatever reason, children are vulnerable and those that decide to go missing have worries and are exposed to greater risk of suffering harm because of their basic need for food, safety and shelter and/or from the people with whom they may come into contact with. 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 with exposure to many risks often being apparent as outlined in section 2.

It should be recognised that many children will exhibit normal adolescent behaviour in testing boundaries and it is not helpful to consider every incident of lateness or absence for all people as high-risk concern. Children must not be reported missing as a behaviour management tool. However, some will need to be treated as missing immediately, due to their vulnerability and the protocol will guide practitioners to initiate effective responses in the best interests of the child.

The volume and frequency of missing children has risen year on year, posing a significant challenge for multi-agency partners and consequently the Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Partnership have placed missing children, along with exploitation, as a key priority. The [Warwickshire Exploitation Strategy 2020-2023](#) sets out the ambition.

NB: This Protocol corresponds with the Regional Child Protection Procedures for West Midlands Guidance for [Children Missing from Care, Home & Education](#), implemented to move to a more consistent regional approach to multi-agency working around safeguarding across boundary areas. That guidance provides a high-level overview of our responsibilities to missing children, however given the different needs, risks, service availability and implementation of the statutory guidance in each of the local police force and local authority areas, this Local Area Specific Protocol remains in place for Warwickshire to ensure that local processes, pathways and expectations are well understood. It has been developed in accordance with the statutory Guidance for Children who run away or go missing from home or care (2014) and the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice for missing people (2017). It complements Working Together to Safeguard Children and related statutory guidance (2018).

2. Risks faced by children who go missing

There are numerous reasons why children may go missing, usually referred to as the “push and pull” from home factors, which include arguments and conflicts, poor family relationships, physical, emotional or sexual abuse, peer pressure, mental ill-health, behaviour or boundaries and control. Some children are coerced or groomed to go missing by others who wish to exploit them or target them for this purpose while they are missing.

Going missing should therefore be treated as an indicator that the child may be at risk of harm. Evidence from missing episodes that occur in Warwickshire indicates that children are at significant risk when missing of:

- Child exploitation.
- Trafficking.
- Gang and serious youth violence.
- Modern slavery.
- Involvement in criminal activities.
- Victim of crime or abuse.
- Forced marriage and honour-based violence.
- Alcohol/substance misuse and long-term dependency.
- Homelessness.
- Disengagement from education.
- Deterioration of physical and/or mental health.

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, ongoing work to identify the causes of the missing incident/s and preventing them reoccurring is as crucial.

Exploitation & Trafficking

Over a third of children who go missing in Warwickshire have markers that indicate concerns of possible exploitation. More than two thirds of those identified as exposed to exploitation have been reported as missing at some stage. Intelligence gathered from children who have been missing has been essential in initiating safeguarding provisions for them.

Some children go missing because they have been trafficked and are being coerced by the traffickers, often utilising transport for the purposes of exploitation within Warwickshire or further afield. The recruitment, movement, receiving and harbouring of children for exploitation are all features of trafficking and practitioners must be cognisant of such concerns. Full consideration to

trafficking must be made when completing assessments and planning intervention for missing children.

Where there are concerns about trafficking, a referral under the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) framework is required for identifying victims of human trafficking and modern slavery to ensure they receive appropriate care.

For further guidance, see the [Children affected by Exploitation and Trafficking](#) procedure

Advice can also be sought by visiting <https://www.modernslaveryhelpline.org/>

3. Definitions

Missing

The College of Policing APP 2017 defines missing as:

“Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located and their well-being or otherwise confirmed. All reports of missing people sit within a continuum of risk from ‘no apparent risk (absent)’ through to high-risk cases that require immediate, intensive action.”

All reports of children going missing in Warwickshire will be assessed between medium and high risk depending on the presenting circumstances at the time and constant ongoing review. See section 4 for further details.

Unauthorised Absence

This category is critical to the clarification of roles of the Police and Children’s Social Care. Some children absent themselves from home or care for a short period and then return, often their whereabouts are known or may be quickly established through contact with family, friends, or places they frequent. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed as a boundary testing activity which is well within the range of normal adolescent behaviour. These children have taken ‘unauthorised absence’ and would not usually come within the definition of ‘missing’ for this protocol.

The National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) explains: If a child’s whereabouts are known then they cannot be ‘missing’. However, if they are known to be staying somewhere where they are in danger and it is not possible for the carer/person with parental responsibility to remove the child or young person, then it may still be necessary to involve Police and partners in safeguarding them. Social Workers and partner agencies should always consider whether unauthorised absence places a child at risk. Where a young person has breached a placement curfew and is not believed to be at risk of missing, the residential home or foster carer should first inform the EDT team where information will be passed to the appropriate social worker. The breaking of agreed curfews is not, by itself, a

reason to report to the police.

Other definitions that apply to this protocol and relate to children who go missing from home or care:

- **Child:** Anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' and 'young people' are used throughout this guidance to refer to anyone under the age of 18.
- **Child in Care (CiC):** A child who is in the care of a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
- **Responsible local authority:** The local authority that is responsible for a child in care and the care planning.
- **Host local authority:** The local authority in which a child in care is placed, when placed out of the responsible local authority's area.
- **Care leaver:** An eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.
- **Parent:** The parents, friends, relatives, or those providing private fostering arrangements who look after the child at their current place of residence.
- **Carer:** The care provider who has delegated responsibility by the local authority and those with parental responsibility for the child to act in 'loco parentis'.
- **Unaccompanied children from overseas:** Children who travel from abroad and are found without parents who live in the UK.
- **Children Missing from Education:** Children missing from education are defined as children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll and are not receiving a suitable education otherwise than at school, for example by being electively educated at home or in alternative provision.

4. Scope & Guiding Principles

This protocol relates to all children living within Warwickshire and children in the care of Warwickshire Children's services placed out of the authority area, categorised as follows:

- Children living at home or other non-care related address, including schools or hospitals.
- Children in care of Warwickshire Children's Services, placed in foster care, children's homes, or with relatives (whether in or out of county). This includes unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and Care Leavers for whom Warwickshire County Council has continuing responsibilities under The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.
- Children in the care of other local authorities and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children temporarily housed in Warwickshire for which the Home Office have responsibility.

Warwickshire Police is the first point of contact for a professional or parent concerned that a child has gone missing in Warwickshire. For children in care

resident outside of Warwickshire, this will be to the local Police force area. The Police have a duty to locate all missing children and will work closely with Children's Social Care, other partner agencies and parents/carers to locate children and return them safely.

Warwickshire Children's Service's has a corporate parenting responsibility for children in care, including children placed outside the Local Authority boundaries. In these cases, Warwickshire requires the placement provider to comply with this Protocol and with protocols local to their area.

Other Local Authorities placing children within Warwickshire boundaries will be required to comply with this Protocol. 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 co-ordinated.

Guiding Principles

In Warwickshire our joint aim is to reduce the incidents of missing children and the risk of harm they are exposed to whilst missing and additionally to provide support and guidance to the children and their families. The following principles will guide our response:

- Going missing is a dangerous activity and can have short and long-term consequences. Children who repeatedly go missing are at greater, rather than less risk, than those who go missing less frequently, potentially being enticed away from their home by risky activities that they see as exciting or by predatory influences. Though the length of time a child has been missing should be a contributory factor to the assessment of risk, short missing episodes can be as risky as lengthy ones.
- Prevention, identification and referral of missing children is everyone's responsibility. This includes statutory and voluntary agencies and the community. All services need to be aware and actively identify children who are commencing a pattern of missing episodes and provide the appropriate support at the earliest opportunity. Everyone, including parents, has a duty to report children who are missing to the Police.
- Accurate and up-to-date information from the child's past and present is key to appropriate risk assessment and an effective response to going missing, including safeguarding and prevention of further missing events. All information should be shared so a picture of a child's experiences can be developed.
- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children going missing, in particular protecting them from significant harm, is paramount and depends on effective joint working between agencies and professionals that have different roles and expertise. Where local agencies work together and ensure a coherent response to instances of missing, clear benefits have been seen in reducing the number of missing incidents and safeguarding issues.
- Early and effective sharing of information between professionals and local agencies is essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour. This may be used to identify areas of concern for an individual child, or to identify 'hotspots' of activity in a local area.

- For children in care, resident in another local authority area, any information regarding risks to the child, including trigger or safety plans, should be shared across local authorities and with the police so that all areas can act appropriately. Risks must be informed by and reflected in the placement information record and in the care plan.
- Except in emergency, parents or carers are expected to complete all reasonable checks to locate the child before the Police will act. Missing children remain the responsibility of the person / organisation which has Parental Responsibility for the child, even after they have been reported missing. The police are entitled to expect parents and carers, including staff acting in a parenting role in care homes, to accept normal parenting responsibilities and undertake reasonable actions to establish the whereabouts of the child. When a child's whereabouts are known, the child will not be considered as missing but may require other activity to ensure their welfare.
- Children's views and those of parents or carers must be a key feature in considering responses to missing episodes.
- Professionals need to be careful not to label children and avoid use of inappropriate descriptive language, regardless of frequency of missing events and/or challenging behaviour the young person is involved in. The starting point should always be that children who go missing are in potentially dangerous situations because of complex push and pull factors.
- Interventions are important in attempting to address and prevent repeat missing episodes and may be focused on the individual child, the child's home, or by targeting 'pull' factors in the community within the contexts they spend their time such as neighbourhoods, peer groups, and schools.

5. Procedures for a Child Missing from Home

Responsibility of parents/ carers

Children who go missing from their home may be at significant risk of harm as a result. The reasons for their missing are often varied and complex. Every 'missing' episode should be responded to effectively with professionals from all agencies and organisations involved with the child working together to ensure the child's safe return.

Parents and those with parental responsibility are expected to pursue normal parenting responsibilities and undertake reasonable actions to try and establish the whereabouts and well-being of the child, if considered safe to do so, prior to reporting the child as 'missing'. This also applies to providers for children in care (See Section 8).

- Search bedroom/ accommodation/ outbuildings/ vehicles.
- Contact known friends and relatives where the child may be.
- Visit locations that the child is known to frequent, if safe to do so.

- Attempt to contact the child on the telephone, via text or other known means.
- Check their social media sites.
- Check with the school, college, other education provider or work placement if applicable.
- If the child is in care, make appropriate enquiries with the child's parents and other relatives, make appropriate enquiries with other residential homes, foster carers, and residential schools and make enquiries with other carers and professionals who have been involved with the child.

However, if there is reasonable belief that the child may have been harmed, is at risk of being harmed or is especially vulnerable, then the Police must be informed **immediately** and the reasons communicated. Parents or carers may additionally need police support if they are very distressed or otherwise unable to undertake enquiries.

If the child cannot be located, all 'missing' children must be reported to the Police. Failure to do so by those with parental responsibility or delegated responsibility, could be considered as a safeguarding concern which may need further assessment.

To contact the Police about a missing child, dial 101 explain the circumstances of the child's disappearance and the reasons for the concern. If the situation suggests an emergency response is required however dial 999.

Any adult who has care of a child in a location unknown to those with parental responsibility, should do what is reasonable to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. They should inform the Police, Children & Families and the parents of their whereabouts and safety. If this is not complied with, the Police could consider advice or warning under the Child Abduction Act 1984, if considered appropriate, as anyone who 'takes or detains' a missing child under 16 years old without lawful authority may be prosecuted under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984.

Responsibility of all agencies

Children interface with several partner agencies and access a range of services, notably within Health and Education. All professionals have a key role in identifying and reporting children who may be missing from home or care, being aware of the associated risks, and actively supporting efforts to locate them.

Where it comes to the attention of any agency that a child is missing, they must advise the parent/carer of their need to report this matter to the police if this hasn't been conducted.

They also need to advise the parent of the agency's duty to ensure that the

matter is reported to the police and if necessary, follow this up by contacting the police to verify that the child has been reported missing.

Police response

Upon receiving a report of a child being missing from home, the Police will carry out enquiries aimed at locating the child as soon as possible.

It is important that in undertaking their investigative role the police have the full support of other agencies and other organisations and adopts an effective multi-agency approach in their efforts to trace the missing child.

The police will carry out a risk assessment for each child on each separate occasion they are reported missing, based on all the available information about the occurrence, characteristics, vulnerabilities and their background history including potential exposure to harm. Detailed and accurate information must be recorded about the circumstances and the reasons for making the report to ensure an appropriate level of risk is applied. This risk assessment will form the basis for the subsequent investigation into the child's disappearance.

The Police will share information that a child is missing with Warwickshire Children's Services Front Door electronically via the missing person database. This should normally be done as soon as possible, but in any case, within 24 hours of the report. In situations assessed as high risk, verbal notification will be provided to the Missing Team at the earliest opportunity.

Warwickshire Police will also share information with the schools of children that have gone missing between the ages of 4 and 17 years. This will be conducted each weekday morning as an extension of Operation Encompass, an initiative to provide timely and meaningful information to support risk assessment, understanding, safeguarding and information sharing to assist investigations to locate the child.

Throughout the missing episode, the Police are responsible for on-going enquiries to secure the child's safe return and will continuously review the risk to the child, with further assessments being made as an investigation progresses and new information comes to light. The passage of time itself can influence a risk grading. In the event of a continuing missing episode, good communication and close cooperation is essential to ensure that any significant concerns are identified and appropriate safeguarding action is taken.

Factors that can impact the assessment of risk should include:

- The circumstances of the missing episode.

- The child's age and maturity.
- Any physical or cognitive disability.
- Any continuing or urgent need for the child to have medication or treatment.
- The child's history and previous behaviour.
- The child's general vulnerability and any danger posed to themselves or others.
- The child's exposure to drug/substance misuse.
- The child's legal status and Care Plan.
- If the child is in care, any circumstances within the placement, with carers or other residents that may be relevant.
- The risk of offending.
- The influence of peer groups, families or friends and who they may be with.
- Predatory influences on the child, including exploitation.
- Any known risk of abduction.
- Environmental factors including weather, time of year, community events or tensions.

Where a child is not known to the Police, or there is limited information available, a joint assessment should be undertaken with multi-agency partners at the earliest opportunity to inform a review of the risk level.

Children reported as missing will not be classed as low risk in Warwickshire¹. The agreed risk levels relevant to missing children episodes occurring within Warwickshire, as outlined within Police authorised professional practice, are therefore as follows:

Level of risk	Definition	Actions required
Medium risk	The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.	This category requires an active and measured response by the Police and other agencies to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.
High risk	The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.	This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of Police resources - such cases should lead to the appointment of an Investigating Officer (IO) and additional specialist resources. There should be a media

¹ Note: This is different to the West Midlands Regional Guidance that stipulates: No child shall be deemed low or no risk missing who is: at risk of/experiencing child sexual or other forms of exploitation OR an unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC) OR under 12.

		<p>strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place where appropriate.</p> <p>Children & Families must also be notified immediately if the person is under 18.</p>
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A missing episode for a child known to be at risk of exploitation should be considered as a potential high risk subject to Police Inspector review, where there are presenting factors of concern giving grounds to suspect exploitation taking place.

All missing reports will be subject of continuous review, subject to the changing circumstances. Risk levels should only be reduced following review of new information by multi-agency partners, to ensure that there is no delay in safely locating the child at the earliest possible time.

It should be noted that Warwickshire children going missing in other authority areas will be responded to in accordance with that areas procedures and may lead to a different assessment being made. It is important in these circumstances that relevant information is shared with that area, to ensure an appropriate response is being instigated. Any concerns in respect of this should be escalated as outlined in Section 13.

Children who have gone missing may come to the attention of the Police in a variety of circumstances. Where the Police locate a child who they believe may be missing, although not reported by parents or carers, assessment should be made of the circumstances, including discussion with partner agencies and enquiries conducted at the home address.

If enquiries identify risk factors at the home address, safeguarding procedures will be implemented. If the Police decide not to return the child to the home address, this should be discussed with Children & Families (Emergency Duty Team after hours) to identify proportionate resolution, which may include mediation to return home, identifying suitable responsible adult(s) and/or accommodation.

6. Procedures for Children Missing from Care

Responding effectively to a child missing from care requires a partnership approach in which the Police, carers, the local authority, and other partner agencies work together in the best interests of the child to ensure their wellbeing and safety.

Providers of care for Warwickshire children are expected to comply with this protocol in addition to their local arrangements. Other Local authorities placing children in care within Warwickshire's boundary will be similarly required to comply with this protocol and must notify Warwickshire Local Authority of missing events

as well as the responsible authority.

Carer's Procedure

Warwickshire Safeguarding Partnership have implemented a [Care Providers Information Pack](#) containing information and advice about actions required where there is a risk a child may go missing from care. This must be referenced by providers to ensure roles and responsibilities are fully understood.

The level of intervention required when a child is not where they are expected to be, should be proportionate to the concerns held, together with the child's assessed vulnerability and the risk relating to the missing occurrence.

When a child is not where they are expected to be or is away from the home without permission, their carer holds the initial responsibility to contact and locate the child to ensure their safety and wellbeing and where possible their return, as outlined in the Providers of Care pack and the levels of intervention model shown at Appendix 3. This must be done prior to reporting the child as missing to the Police, unless there is immediate concern for the child's welfare or safety that justifies an immediate report.

As an example, a child who is late home beyond a curfew should not be regarded as missing until the carer has undertaken enquiries to locate them. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed, either on purpose to test boundaries, or accidentally. Additionally, some children are absent for a short period and then return, with their whereabouts known to the carer. Examples of situations are: running away after a dispute, failing to return on time, staying at a known location with a friend.

Where a carer due to practical reasons is unable to undertake physical searches, contingency planning regarding how and who should undertake these should have been agreed in the child's Placement Plan, so that action remains in accordance with the Care Providers guidance, where the level of intervention dictates a report to the Police isn't required at that time.

Carers should consider their role in the prevention of and response to, children going missing and consider what a responsible parent would do in the circumstances. Actions to be progressed should therefore be in accordance with that detailed in section 6 and comprise of the following basic actions:

- Conduct a thorough search of the premises.
- Speak to any known friends and relatives where child may be and visit known locations.
- Speak to other residents or other persons who may be able to assist with the investigation.
- Speak to other colleagues and care staff who may have had some form of earlier contact with the child.

There are risks to reporting a child missing inappropriately. Over involving the police can cause significant harm and damage the child's relationships with the professionals around them, so care should be taken only to report to Police in

appropriate circumstances as outlined in the pack within the levels of intervention. This should not be due to feeling compelled to follow policy or procedure other than that detailed in this protocol.

If the carer does assess that the child is at risk and they are concerned about their safety due to any factor/s known to the carer, then the child should be reported as missing without delay via 101 or 999 in an emergency and the assessed risk clearly communicated to the Police.

When making a missing person's report to the police, the carer should state that the Philomena Protocol applies and share a copy of an up-to-date Philomena Missing Person's Incident form & Risk Assessed Locations form to inform the Police response. This will help attending officers with initial enquiries and ensuring proportionate risk assessments. See Section 7.

Following a missing report being made to the police, there remains an expectation that the carer and the child's social worker will continue to try and make contact to locate and ensure the safe return of the child. They are expected to maintain an active interest in the investigation, passing on all information that may help to locate and protect the child, including assisting with ongoing contact with relevant persons unless they are requested not to do so by the Police.

If the assessment of the carer is that there are no concerns and a report isn't required at that time, it is still important that staff / carers record these 'absent without authority' incidences in the child's record, share them with the social worker or EDT at the earliest opportunity and consider if there are changes required in the care of the child that reflects the response and behaviour. In addition, carers should always start a dated / timed record of their contacts, risk assessment and decisions throughout the episode from the point that they are aware of the child's absence, in the event the level of concern changes and a missing report is required in accordance with the level of intervention.

If the child's whereabouts are known when they are away from the home without authority, this will not constitute a missing event, although if there is concern that they are at risk of harm, Police assistance may be sought appropriate to the circumstances and agreement reached on how to proceed. This should take full account of the welfare and safety of the child and of others.

Carers for children who are in care concerned about their whereabouts when away from the home (whether a report has been made to the Police or not) should notify without delay the child's social worker or out-of-hours, the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) and parents, or those who have parental responsibility (unless indicated otherwise on the care plan).

Carers should always be cognisant of child exploitation, or any other situation which indicates that the child may have been subject to, or at risk of, significant harm when away from the home and similarly notify their concerns.

Children's Social Care Procedures

Care should be taken when establishing where a child should be accommodated

to minimise the risk that they will go missing:

- Is the home a good match for the child and able to meet their needs?
- Will the child fit into the existing structure of that home?
- How will a new resident interact with existing residents?
- Are there external factors in the area of the residence which need to be taken into account when considering this becoming their home?
- Contact should be made with the local Police to secure this information prior to any placement, or retrospectively in emergency situations.

When placing a child, the social worker must:

- Ensure that there is a photograph which is a good likeness of the child on file with a copy available for the carer.
- Check that the carer will have enough information to conduct a missing report to the police if required.
- Consider all potential risks to the child including an assessment of the potential for them to go missing.
- Involve the child, their carer and normally the parents in discussing the child's needs, previous history and views.
- Consider any previous missing episodes.

When considering placing children outside of Warwickshire, the social worker should consult with the 'host' local authority for the area of the home prior to placing the child to determine the suitability of the proposed placement and to discuss any known risks. If the placement is conducted, they must follow the Formal Notification Process to inform the 'host' authority that a child in care is being placed in their area, again in advance of this being conducted. If the child has a history of going missing, the social worker should also talk to the Host authority's safeguarding service about the child and any risks in the area to which they are moving. Should the movement of the child to a new home be conducted in an emergency, the checks, notifications and information sharing discussions must be conducted within 72 hours. Children placed out of area that go missing should be subject to equal rigour of reporting, missing intervention meetings, return conversations and care planning as specified in these procedures.

A Care Plan & Placement Plan completed by Children's Social Care must include an evaluation of whether a child is likely to go missing and actions required should that occur. Where this is likely, the Philomena Protocol must be initiated (see below) and strategies should be put in place to minimise risk. The child's allocated social worker should work with the residential home manager, supported accommodation, or foster carers to complete the Philomena Protocol forms and kept them updated as circumstances change. When the placements are unplanned, there is an expectation that the forms should be completed within 5 days.

The Placement Plan should cover:

- Trigger points for missing episodes.
- Risks to themselves, the public and/or the carer before, during or after a

- missing episode including when being picked up.
- What steps can be taken to reduce the likelihood of the child going missing and coming to any harm or harming others.
- The views of parents/carers on their child's needs and the action that needs to be taken if the child is absent.
- Friends and family details and contact numbers as well as addresses commonly found at.
- Expectations of the young person: i.e. curfew, when and how to make contact, consequences of lateness etc.
- The young person's view.
- Expectations of the care provider: i.e. at which point the Police will be notified as outlined in the Warwickshire Providers of Care Pack, what processes will follow an incident, who will collect a child if they are missing, details of who conducts immediate assessments on their return and arrangements for Return Conversations.
- Agreements around rules for staying overnight at friend's houses or going on trips.

Placement Agreements should be sought to secure the agreement of the 'host' local authority to adherence to this protocol, arrangements for the provision of Return Conversations and commitment for them to hold or be involved in multi-agency meetings at the relevant trigger points as outlined in section 10, to enable an effective response to missing events and risks posed to the child.

When a child in care has gone missing, the allocated social worker must actively support the missing investigation to locate them, collaborating and sharing information with the Police. The child's care plan must be kept under review and should be revised as appropriate considering continued missing events and increased vulnerability.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) should be informed about all episodes of missing so that these can be addressed via review meetings, considering whether changes are required to address the reasons and prevent re-occurrence. It may be necessary to convene a review to consider whether the home is able to put in place a strategy to minimise any risk to the child, or whether it may be necessary to look for an alternative home to keep the child safe.

In situations of high-risk concern regarding the child going missing, especially where exploitation is a factor, a risk management plan should be put in place in addition to implementing the Philomena Protocol in the form of a missing trigger plan (action plan). This should be formulated within 5 days of being placed in their new home and agreed by all relevant parties including the local authority, the Police and placement provider. It will inform specific decisions about what action to take in response to a missing event beyond general information sharing within Philomena. Where children repeatedly go missing, these profiles are important to offer an immediate response to a missing episode.

The child and if appropriate, their parents or carers should be involved in the missing trigger plan and if appropriate, be given a copy. It should also be included in the placement plan and in the child's Care Plan, which must also include a

strategy to prevent the child absconding and consider any needs for additional resources to keep the child safe.

Philomena Protocol

The Warwickshire approach to children missing from care is additionally based on the Philomena Protocol, an initiative adopted to help locate and safely return children in care as quickly as possible when they are missing. The basis of the scheme is for vital information about the young person to be recorded, which can be used to locate them safely and quickly and to prevent ongoing reoccurrences.

Carers and residential staff must support completing Part A of the protocol 'Incident Form' and the 'Location Form' in conjunction with the child's allocated social worker (ideally prior to the child's move to the home when planned, but in any case, within 5 days of their arrival) in the following circumstances:

- When there is a risk that the child will go missing.
- The first missing episode of the child (upon which Part B of the Incident Form must also be completed).

The child's allocated social worker is responsible for ensuring the protocol forms are completed in the above circumstances, supporting the process and sharing information with carers. They must ensure the Incident Form and Location Form move with the child to new carers in the event of a change of home.

In order to ensure that the forms are fit for purpose and reflect current information that will contribute to the safe return of children, it is important that they are reviewed on a regular basis and updated when necessary. They should be reviewed and updated in accordance with the child's plan reviews, within any Strategy Meeting to ensure they support actions to locate and minimise exposure to harm and at any time when there has been a significant change in the child's circumstances. IRO's and where appropriate Child Protection Chairs should have oversight of the information and compliance with Philomena, using the local safeguarding escalation procedure if practice in respect of missing is not being followed in accordance with this protocol.

The forms can be accessed here:

[Part A of the Missing Person Incident form](#)
[Risk Assessed Locations and Contacts form](#)
[Information for carers](#)
[Philomena Protocol Flowchart](#)

Other Local Authority areas

Where a child in care from another local authority area is provided a home in Warwickshire, it is expected that the above procedures will be complied with both pre and post placement and that multi-agency meetings will be convened in adherence with section 10 to manage ongoing risk. It is essential that all information and intelligence is shared between authorities that impacts the safety or wellbeing of the child, notably regarding missing and/or exploitation concerns, to ensure that risks are understood and can be acted upon. The escalation process

should be utilised if there is concern about the other authority's response to these requirements.

If the 'responsible' local authority conducts their own Return Conversations with the child for missing episodes in Warwickshire, this should be shared with Warwickshire FAST Missing Team to enable updating of records (all children going missing in Warwickshire will be offered a Return Conversation) and inform local assessment of the risks and planning where appropriate.

Out of Hours – Emergency Duty Team (EDT)

When EDT are notified of a child who goes missing out of hours, it is the responsibility of the out of hours EDT social worker to review the risk and need and liaise with Police and the professional network as required to ensure appropriate risk management plans, information sharing, recording and to clarify expectations. Whilst each missing episode will be different, the general principles for EDT action should be:

- Contact the foster carer to discuss the missing episode and actions taken or required and keep the foster carer updated of any EDT and/or Police actions.
- Review Mosaic record to identify any key risk factors or safety plans that may need to be reported to the Police.
- Liaise with the Police to coordinate any necessary safeguarding actions and safety plan.
- Consider anyone within the child's network that needs to be notified out of hours.
- Consider needs of any siblings that could also be impacted or placed at risk from the missing episode.
- Consider if the on-call senior manager needs to be informed (high risk missing incidents).
- Consider if a missing Strategy Discussion is needed. Over weekends and bank holidays, a child may be missing for 48 hours or longer without the team around the child being informed and reviews may be necessary in accordance with this protocol to consider safeguarding and what more can be done to find the child.

7. Children Missing in Specific Circumstances

Care Leavers

Care Leavers may have an increased vulnerability because of their history and experiences. Children's Social Care therefore remains responsible for them from the time they leave care up until 25. Pathway Plans should set out where a young person may be vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking or going missing, and support services to minimise this risk should be put in place. If a Care Leaver does go missing, the Warwickshire Leaving Care Service may need to re-assess the support offered and if 18 years of age or over, consider whether a Return

Conversation from the Missing Children Practitioners may be beneficial. Particular focus must be given to the period of transition to adulthood, ensuring ongoing consistent delivery of services where risks remain in accordance with this Protocol.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are likely to be placed in the care of the local authority. Many may have been trafficked into the UK for criminal purposes and they present a high level of risk of going missing following coercion and threats from traffickers. If they subsequently go missing, they are to be treated as missing children, not failed asylum seekers or illegal immigrants.

The local authority should consider the risk that a trafficked child is likely to go missing and take all appropriate measures to prevent and reduce this risk. An assessment should seek to establish:

- Relevant details about the child'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 remaining under the influence of traffickers.
- A risk assessment as to the likelihood of the child going missing.
- The appropriateness of information being divulged as to the whereabouts of the young person.

Children's Social Care in partnership with Police should follow the ethos of Operation Innerste as a response to such a child coming to notice in Warwickshire, which is aimed at maximising efforts to prevent missing events and when they do occur to secure the safe and quick return of the missing child. The Philomena Protocol should then be implemented upon placement in a home.

In circumstances where trafficking is suspected, a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) must be completed. For further guidance, see the [Children affected by Exploitation and Trafficking](#) procedure.

The Home Office should be informed of the child's missing status.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children Temporarily Housed in Hotels

A unique situation has evolved where, due to unprecedented numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children seeking refuge in the United Kingdom, the Home Office have placed these children in hotels utilised for the purpose, acting as temporary support before they move on to the care of a Local Authority through the National Transfer Scheme. The Home Office retains responsibility for them during this time.

Warwickshire are impacted by this and have developed specific partnership procedures and practices via Operation Encoder due to the challenges presented. This is to ensure appropriate and consistent responses to missing events, often preceded by limited available information to assist enquiries, ongoing proportionate review should they not be located, and action to be taken when found, with the area located becoming the responsible authority for their

subsequent care. As outlined above, many of the children may be victims of being trafficked into the UK for criminal purposes and are at heightened risk of going missing and being exploited. These bespoke arrangements will ensure we are responding proportionately in accordance with our stated intentions.

Children Missing from Education

Children missing education have the potential to be exposed to higher degrees of risk. These risks could include engagement in anti-social or criminal behaviour, social disengagement and/or subject of exploitation. Whenever a child is missing from education, the possibility of exploitation must be assessed. A child going missing from education is also a potential indicator of abuse or neglect. It is vital that all practitioners work together to identify and re-engage children missing from education as quickly as possible.

Practitioners in all agencies should be aware of the need to identify children missing from education and how to notify the Local Authority where they know or suspect that a child is missing from education. Guidance can be found via the Children Missing Education (CME) Protocol ([link](#)).

In the event of a child going missing from education premises, schools and other education establishments, action should be taken to trace children whose whereabouts are not known, for example if they are truanting or have been pulled into activities that are exploitative. Pupils who have gone missing either at the start or part way through a school day, need to be accounted for and risks fully understood. Schools should contact parents or carers, take account of known risks and advise of the need to report the missing event to the Police in appropriate circumstances where there is concern. It is the duty of the agency to verify that the child has been reported missing.

Anyone with a concern that a child is missing education can make a referral to the Children Missing Education Team at Warwickshire County Council. Complete the [Children Missing Education \(CME\) Referral Form](#) and send securely to cme@warwickshire.gov.uk

Absconder / Unlawfully at Large

A child is to be considered as having 'absconded' or being 'unlawfully at large' when he / she is absent from their home without permission and is subject to an order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process (e.g. where the child has appeared before a youth court and has been remanded into Local Authority accommodation or on bail with conditions) or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceeding. A child in this category must be reported to the Police without delay.

Warwickshire Police will treat the matter as BOTH a missing child case AND an unlawfully at large case. This means that it will be necessary to provide detailed information to the Police. When the child is traced however, it is likely that they will also be arrested or dealt with by the Police in relation to any offence or breach. It is essential however, that they are also viewed as a child in need of protection and safeguarding and any risks exposed to during their absence must be reviewed

fully. In most cases where children are remanded by the courts into local authority accommodation, they will also be open to the Youth Justice Service and may be subject to statutory court ordered supervision, so regular sharing of information and coordinated planning between Police, Local Authorities and Youth Justice Service is important.

8. Publicity and Media Strategy

In some cases, particularly where a missing child is felt to be especially vulnerable or where they have been missing for a long period of time, it may be necessary to publicise the case via the media. Such an approach is not routine but is usually a response to very serious concerns for the child's safety. Either parents / carers / guardians or the Police may suggest such an approach, which must be carefully considered in terms of positive and negative impact, including long term effects. Decisions to publicise will be made jointly wherever possible and appropriate, in consultation with parents or carers, Warwickshire Police and Warwickshire Children's Services. The consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any subsequent missing person investigation.

Any decision regarding a proposed media release involving a Warwickshire Child in Care must be in collaboration and agreement with Warwickshire Children Services.

Decisions to inform the media will be taken at a senior level by the Police Inspector, together with an Operations Manager of the Children & Families service. The Operations Manager will take responsibility for informing the Head of Service, Safeguarding Communities, with lead responsibility for missing children. The media should only be informed when all enquiries have been exhausted and following an updated risk assessment determining the level of concern

Where children are subject to proceedings within the Family Court, legal advice must be obtained and usually an urgent court hearing should be sought before publicity is initiated.

The Police will take a lead role in advising the media regarding any missing child, sharing and agreeing content with Warwickshire County Council Communications Team before it is released. Parents and carers should always be informed of details being released to the media prior to this taking place, ideally through the child's social worker.

9. Location and Return of Missing Children

When a missing child is found, their parents or carers must be informed immediately. If the child has returned home of their own accord, or is found by parents or carers, they must inform the Police immediately.

The Police will notify Children & Families Front Door of the child's return via the missing person database and additionally any other person or agency that has

been participating in the investigation. As with notification of missing reports, the Police will specifically share the found report with the child's school as part of the Operation Encompass initiative.

The Police, along with the Local Authority, have certain powers to help recover and safeguard missing children when required and to disrupt their association with adults in circumstances of concern for their safety. These include exercising police protection to recover a child to a safe place where they are at risk of significant harm. If there are insufficient grounds to instigate this, or the child does not cooperate, then the Police must liaise with Children & Families to agree what steps may be appropriate and necessary to safeguard the child. If the child is subject to a care order, then the local authority should seek legal advice and actively consider approaching the courts for a recovery order. A list of legislative powers that can be exercised in relation to recovery of missing children is detailed at Appendix 2.

It may be apparent when a child returns to their home that they have been the victim of a crime whilst they were away, or that they may be in danger from any person associated with them being missing. In this event, parents or carers should make this clear to Police to enable them to act without delay to protect the child and/or preserve and recover evidence, which may include the need to seize items or take samples from the child. In matters of exploitation, or any other situation which indicates that the child may have been subject to, or was at risk of significant harm, a referral must be made to the Front Door in accordance with safeguarding procedures.

Whoever finds a child has a responsibility to try and find out why the child ran away. This may be the only opportunity a child has to report abuse, bullying or mistreatment at home, in care, at school, within the community spaces they spend time, or their peer networks. The person finding the child should update the professionals who have been involved in the episode on any information gathered from the child.

It should be acknowledged that a returning child may well share different parts of their experience with different people. It is the responsibility of all professionals involved with the child therefore, to attend to issues of immediate safety and share information gathered, to cross reference what is known and support ongoing safeguarding needs.

It is important for professionals to listen to the voice of the child to ensure their views and opinions are always considered when it comes to responding to, supporting and delivering services that affect them and their families

Returning a Child to their Home

For a child missing from home, family or friends locating a child should return them to their home address. Where a risk is present, a Police Officer may accompany the parent/carer to assist in recovering the child.

For a child in care, Children's Services or the carers are responsible for returning the child to their home unless the Police have found the child and it is reasonable for them to do so and in the child's interests of a safe and swift return. This should be part of the planning undertaken by the child's social worker, with the carers and placement provider, the Police and parents (unless there is a reason why not) to prepare for the child's return.

On the child's return, parents or carers should:

- Make clear to the child that they are relieved to see them safe and well.
- Assess their general condition immediately and if appropriate, arrange for medical attention.
- Provide food and drink as a priority.
- Ensure the safety of the child, especially if it seems that they have gone missing because of bullying or harassment.
- Update the professionals who have been involved in the episode on any information gathered from the child.

Parents / carers and/or other professionals may have concerns about the safety of the child in their home. If this is the case then the parent/carer, Police, or other responsible person, should contact the Integrated Front Door or the out-of-hours Emergency Duty Team (EDT) before the child is returned.

Prevention Interview

Warwickshire Police will carry out a Prevention Interview on all children who have been categorised as missing, as soon as practicable after they are found and, in any event, within 24 hours of the person being located. The purpose is to establish the child's wellbeing and safety, whether they were the victim of abuse or a crime whilst missing (including possible exploitation or trafficking) and to identify any ongoing risk or factors which may contribute to the person going missing again. The 'Prevention Interview' will secure the voice of the child and inform the Police and Children's Services about whether there are concerns about the child's safety that they need to address. The police have a responsibility to ensure that the returning person is safe and well via a physical check, where viable, speaking to the young person independent of the parent or carer. In exceptional circumstances this could be conducted over the phone or virtually where the return is confirmed by a trusted professional, which must be justified on a case-by-case basis. The Police should also speak to the child or

young person's parents or carers to satisfy themselves that the child or young person is safe and will inform the child and their parents or carers that: a. the relevant Local Authority Children's Services has been notified of the missing episode; and b. that they will be contacted to be offered an Independent Return Conversation.

Prevention Interviews should be carried out following all missing children's episodes unless in exceptional circumstances as agreed by the Police, Children's Services and the parent/carer. As well as providing a valuable opportunity to find out useful information indicating exposure to harm, the interview can also identify details that may help trace the person in the event of a future missing episode.

The details will be recorded on the missing person database and passed on to Warwickshire Children's Services and the responsible local authority if a child in care from a different area.

Return Conversation

In addition to the Police Prevention Interview, a Return Conversation should be carried out by a professional trained to conduct it, within 72 hours of receiving notification that a child has returned from a missing episode. As with the Prevention Interview, the Return Conversation will inform the Police and Children's Services about whether there are concerns for the child's safety that they need to address. A Return Conversation is important because it is more in-depth than the Police Prevention Interview and provides an opportunity to hear from a child about:

- Why they went missing.
- The circumstances which led to the missing episode(s).
- The activities, associates, risks and any victimisation involved in the missing episode and where possible to address those risks with appropriate and proactive strategies such as the use of the Child Abduction Warning Notices.
- To inform future prevention strategies and any future missing person investigation should that person go missing again.
- To provide information on how to stay safe, including helpline numbers.

The interview will be conducted by a professional independent of the child's home or care to give the child opportunity to talk freely about their situation. In Warwickshire, the Return Conversation is conducted by a team of Independent Missing Children Practitioners within the WCC Children & Families FAST (Family & Adolescent Support Team) service.

The Missing Children Practitioners will conduct this process for all Warwickshire children going missing, including children in care placed in other authority areas. Warwickshire will also undertake Return Conversations for other authority children placed in its area without charge, subject to discussion with the Responsible Authority, if this is considered appropriate in the circumstances. Warwickshire expects this to be replicated by other authorities for Warwickshire children in care

placed in their areas, where circumstances make it impractical for the Missing Children Practitioners to conduct it due to reasons such as distance and frequency of episodes. Where this is refused, this will be challenged by the Operations Manager with lead responsibility for missing children and arrangements made to ensure a Return Conversation is conducted.

Missing children reports and found reports when they are located or have returned, are received in the Front Door from the Police and other sources (such as the Emergency Duty Team) and screened by the Missing Coordinator for assessment of action required, including notifying allocated workers and highlighting where a referral may be required to address identified safeguarding concerns. Events of children found or returning after a missing episode are allocated to the Missing Children Practitioners to seek their engagement to complete the Return Conversation.

Children sometimes need to build up trust with a person before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they went missing. Missing Children Practitioners will seek to build good quality relationships with vulnerable young people and design an action plan or contribute to an already existing plan, such as Child in Need, Child Protection Plan or to the Care Plan to address those issues. This process should lead to a high level of analysis regarding the underlying issues and problems that increase the risk of the child going missing from home.

The person conducting the return conversation will seek the parent or carers consent and the child's agreement, explaining that the interview will be shared with Police and Children's Services.

A Return Conversation must always be offered to a child and an allocated social worker and/or foster carer cannot refuse unless it is agreed that it is inappropriate in the circumstances or by an Operations Manager upon escalation.

Professionals should be alert to the fact that a decline to partake in a return conversation may highlight concern. In cases of exploitation and trafficking for example, the child may be being controlled by individuals of whom they are fearful.

If a parent has refused a Return Conversation, the Missing Children's Practitioners will explore the reasons and consider what action needs to be taken if there are concerns about the child's welfare or parental capacity, including whether an approach to the child is appropriate and necessary in view of safeguarding risk, a referral to the Front Door is required, or sharing with any allocated workers to allow further assessment.

Account should be taken of any preference the child has for conducting the return conversation and this should be identified in any intervention plan. This should include any preferred venue and whether the child wishes to have a responsible person or advocate present. Communication aids such as an interpreter or signer will be used as necessary. If a child declines to speak with a Missing Children Practitioner, or this is felt likely, it should be explored whether there is another identified independent practitioner, especially trusted persons, who can advocate or undertake the return conversation on their behalf.

Where it has not been possible to conduct a Return Conversation, parents and carers must be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence. This should help to prevent further instances of the child running away and identify the support needed for them going forward. Any allocated social worker or other involved professional should seek to engage the child in understanding what happened and support plans to reduce the likelihood of future missing episodes.

Declined Return Conversations will be reviewed by a manager in FAST to consider the circumstances and any follow up action required, including consideration whether a referral is required so the child's circumstances can be assessed. If a child frequently going missing repeatedly declines, a multi-agency meeting should be convened to consider what action if any, is required and how engagement can be achieved.

Information from the Return Conversation will be recorded in the child's record and the document will be shared with the allocated social worker.

This document will also be shared with the Police to inform any future risk assessment for ongoing safeguarding and prevention activity and to assist in finding the child should they go missing again. If they disclose being victim of a crime, this should be reported to the Police via 101 to avoid any delay and enable securing and preserving of any available evidence. Any intelligence disclosed should also be disseminated via the Protected Partner Intelligence Form.

Information should also be shared with other relevant professionals or agencies where appropriate and proportionate, such as the lead professional for the child, school, or GP. This will help build up a comprehensive picture of why the child was missing and what support they and their carers may require to reduce future missing episodes and risk to the child. The decision to share information and the level of detail should be based on:

- The child's wishes and feelings.
- The need to maintain a dialogue with the child, who may stop talking if they consider their confidentiality is breached.
- The ability of the recipient not to divulge information to potential abusers and exploiters; and importantly.
- The need for parents and other professionals, including carers, to understand what is happening in order to keep the child safe.

Children will be informed at the beginning of the conversation that information is shared with other agencies. Where they disagree with this being conducted, the Police will be informed of the child's wishes and consideration taken of what information should be shared regarding the safety and well-being of the individual and others who may be affected by their actions. Relevant personal information can be shared lawfully if it is to keep a child or individual at risk safe from neglect or physical, emotional, or mental harm, or if it is protecting their physical, mental, or emotional well-being. A record should be made of what is shared and the reasons for it. Such situations should be rare and be part of an overall strategy of engagement with the child towards sharing information with agencies in their best interests.

In some circumstances the child may make extremely sensitive disclosures that need particularly careful management, which should be recorded separately but referred to on the return conversation form and discussed with relevant professionals.

The Return Conversation will include a plan of action in response to identified concerns. Missing Children Practitioners will ensure that any appropriate referral and plan of intervention is initiated, which might include initiation of an early help assessment and support, a referral to the Front Door if safeguarding concerns are identified, advocacy referral, or requests to the allocated worker for changes to the Care Plan to support the child e.g. more contact with family or increased support at home or in placement.

Support beyond the Return Conversation

Where children are at high risk of repeatedly going missing, it is vital that work is completed to fully understand the reasons they are continuing to have missing episodes. This work should be completed by a professional who has a connection with the child and who the child is engaging with and is usually undertaken by a Missing Children's Practitioner where that has been achieved via Return Conversations. This direct work is time limited, and goal orientated and may include:

- Development of strategies aimed to reduce risk or harm, such as reducing association with risky peers / adults, prevention of substance misuse, sexual health strategies.
- Practical and emotional support (including mediation and support to succeed in education) with children and their families.
- Support to families/parents to enable them to understand why the child is going missing, identification of CE risks and prevention strategies.
- Promoting and linking young people with positive activities within the local community.
- Onward referral to other sources of support.

Children going missing or at risk of doing so, and their parents or carers, should be provided with information leaflets about help lines and support services following the Return Conversation process. Support should also be made available to families if required to help them understand why the child has run away and how they can support them on their return. The Missing People charity offer a support group and counselling service families as well as a helpline, accessible via <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/get-help>

There is a requirement for a multi-agency meeting to be undertaken when children have repeatedly been missing or if they have remained missing for a significant period.

The aim of multi-agency missing meetings is to consider any 'push' or 'pull' factors which impact on the missing child's welfare and circumstances and seek to:

- Share information known to discuss the reasons for the missing episode and review action taken to locate the child and what additional action is required.
- Develop an intervention to support recovering the child.
- In the case of 'pull' factors, it may be necessary to target those in the community who harbour the missing person or exploit them with regard to crime, trafficking, sex or drugs.
- Consider the use of publicity.
- Consider other bodies who should be involved e.g. the Foreign and Commonwealth Forced Marriage Unit for situations where there is a risk of Forced Marriage or Honour-based Violence or tracking via the Benefits system.
- Check that arrangements for the child's return are still adequate.
- Make a plan for responding to escalating missing episodes, including when further planning will be triggered.

Information from previous episodes, assessments, Prevention Interviews and Return Conversations should be shared and considered when reviewing the response required to ensure a full understanding of the child's experiences.

For children who are placed in Warwickshire by other local authorities, these meetings should be convened and attended by the responsible Children's Social Care in adherence to these procedures to determine action and ensure change, which should be agreed as part of the placing arrangements.

Multi-agency meetings

The following meetings will be conducted:

All children assessed as high risk or that have been missing for over 24 hours will be subject of multi-agency review at a Warwickshire Daily Risk of Exploitation & Missing (DREAMM) meeting to review progress of the investigation, adherence to protocol requirements, and facilitate information sharing with the purpose of addressing safeguarding needs and securing their safe return at the earliest opportunity.

A Strategy Meeting should be convened for children that continue to remain

missing 72 hours from the time of them going missing, or earlier in cases of significant concern such as episodes graded as high risk, which should occur within 48 hours proportionate to the situation. This should be chaired by a responsible Team Leader or Lead Practitioner within Children & Families (Front Door if not an open case) and attended by the Police Missing Team. This meeting should be held under the child protection procedures and decision whether to initiate Section 47 enquiries due to concerns regarding the welfare of the child. The meeting should review actions to locate the child, risk assessment and interventions, communication needs, media, and arrangements for their return. Additionally, consideration should be given to requesting an NHS alert to flag the child as missing and whether a NRM referral is required where there are concerns of exploitation and trafficking or other form of modern slavery.

A further Strategy Meeting should be convened if a child continues to be missing by the 5th day, chaired by an Operations Manager within Children & Families. This needs to occur within 5 days of the initial Strategy Meeting. Further weekly multi-agency meetings should then take place until the child is found unless the procedure for children not found (see section 16) is initiated.

Multi-agency meetings should also be considered for children who are persistently not engaging in Return Conversations to problem solve the situation. Engagement in the conversations is voluntary, however children who frequently go missing, whether from home or care and do not engage in the independent support to have their circumstances assessed may also be at high risk. This should be organised by the social worker, or the Missing Children Team where the young person is not involved in social care, where engagement has been declined on 3 consecutive occasions.

Missing Intervention Meetings (MIM)

Formal intervention meetings in response to escalating concerns must take place in the event of repeat episodes of children going missing. For these meetings to be effective and thereby improve our collective responses, appropriate attendance and clarity of purpose are essential. The intervention meetings should be held within 5 working days of any trigger episode and require a separate meeting outside of any established care planning meetings.

Trigger points

If a child has gone missing two or more times, agencies should consider if there is requirement to hold a recorded discussion, either with the child, their family or both, to offer further support and guidance. Actions following earlier incidents should be reviewed and alternative strategies considered.

If a child has been recorded as having 3 missing episodes within a 90 day or 3

month period, *or following the first missing episode in a situation where the risks involved in even a single future missing episode are very high, such as due to exploitation*, a Stage1 MIM should be convened by the allocated worker and chaired by a responsible Lead Practitioner or Team Manager (depending on assessed complexity and concern regarding number, frequency and length of episodes, the child's vulnerability and exposure to harm), (or within the Front Door if the child is not open to a team, however this will meet the threshold to be allocated for assessment). This level of intervention meeting is the crucial stage in avoiding serious escalation and must, therefore, be given high priority by all concerned.

A Stage 2 MIM should be convened if missing episodes continue resulting in 6 episodes occurring within a 90 day or 3 month period, or where concerns about a young person are at an agreed level that this second stage intervention meeting is required. This meeting will be chaired by a more senior manager (responsible Team Leader or Operations Manager subject to Stage 1 chair arrangement and the level of concern for the child as detailed above) and should also quality assure compliance with the protocols and the efficacy of the Stage 1 intervention meeting and return conversations.

Continuance of missing episodes after these processes to 9 within a 90 day or 3 month period should lead to an Escalation MIM again chaired by a more senior manager and in accordance with the assessed concern (responsible Operations Manager or Head of Service as appropriate).

Missing Intervention will commence at Stage 1 regardless of a higher threshold being met before the meeting is held, though this should be avoided by responding quickly to developing concerns. If higher thresholds are met within 5 working days of an intervention meeting, the responsible manager should review the situation and the plan initiated and apply a proportionate response as to whether and when the next Stage meeting is held.

MIM's will include:

- The child.
- Parent and/or carer, residential worker or foster carer, Social Worker or lead professional.
- WCC FAST Missing representative.
- Police Missing Team representative.
- Other relevant professionals around the child such as Education, Health, and Youth Justice.

It is expected that, if a child's situation progresses beyond a Stage 1 MIM due to continuance of missing events, in accordance with escalating concerns, this

should be reflected in the increased seniority of representatives attending.

An intervention plan should be created to support the child that is focused on reducing missing and working with the child to prevent any further episodes. The plan should be monitored, usually through social work intervention that is already in place on a Child in Need, child protection, or Child in Care process, or by a lead professional through the early help process.

The plan with the minutes should be circulated to all relevant agencies within 5 days of the meeting and in the case of a child in care, to the allocated Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

Note: The volume of missing episodes is not the only reason to trigger an intervention or to escalate the level of intervention. This can be initiated for any child where the risks involved in even a single future-missing episode is very high such as due to exploitation and situations where it has been identified that immediate action is necessary to ensure the well-being of the child such as due to a prolonged missing event of several days.

If two or more children have gone missing together from their home and meet the above criteria for review, the responsible workers should consider whether to arrange a joint missing persons' multi-agency meeting to address the needs of all the missing children. Unless there is a specific reason as to why this joint meeting should not or cannot take place, this should be considered as the most appropriate way to ensure a holistic picture is obtained, minimise duplication and ensure a plan of action is timely and co-ordinated. In so doing, careful consideration should be given to the issue of confidentiality, information should be shared on a 'need to know' basis and should be relevant to the missing episode(s). A separate individual record of the meeting and a separate action plan must be drawn up for each child

Management Oversight

Supervisors of practitioners working with children and conducting missing investigations or follow up support should be notified of all children that have gone missing to provide oversight and direction.

The Operations Manager with lead responsibility for children who are missing should be informed of all children who are assessed as high risk as soon as practicable the same working day (including children not graded as high risk by the Police but considered especially vulnerable due to factors such as special educational need and disabilities, exploitation and parental abduction, as identified in DREAMM) and children missing for more than 72 hours. They will inform the Head of Service, Safeguarding Communities and Director, Children &

Families.

Within the Police, reviews are conducted by managers at a Daily Management Briefing. High risk cases should additionally be reviewed by a Detective Inspector as soon as practicable the same day and for medium risk within 48 hours. A Detective Chief Inspector should conduct a review at 7 days.

This is a minimum standard and further reviews should be considered proportionate to a child's circumstances and the presenting risks. Senior officers in Police and Children & Families must liaise regarding reviews and satisfy themselves that all necessary actions are being taken to locate the child.

Monitoring and oversight of missing children

It is vital that the local profile of missing young people is understood by all professionals and senior officers within all agencies. Information collected about missing children will be regularly reviewed and those considered at most risk (based on factors such as frequency of episodes, risk of harm and progress towards improving outcomes) will be referred to monthly multi-agency Locality Contextual Safeguarding Meetings within the North, South and East of Warwickshire to assess the concern and review support and intervention necessary to reduce harm and increase protection.

The Warwickshire Contextual Safeguarding Operational Group will analyse data and outcomes about missing children from the locality meetings to influence practice and coordinate approaches to identified themes, patterns, and trends. This will enable the partnership to have a proactive approach to the needs of children going missing.

Data analysis over the last 3 years indicates that 3% of children accounted for over a quarter of all missing episodes in Warwickshire and consequently the multi-agency Operational Group will undertake reviews where considered appropriate for children with the highest volume of missing episodes to assure effective practice in compliance with this protocol and support problem solving.

11. Children who are not found

There are rare occasions where children who are missing are not found. Where children remain missing for 6 weeks a Head of Service within Children & Families and a Chief Inspector from the Police with lead responsibility for missing should review the investigation and satisfy themselves that all possible avenues of enquiry have been pursued to locate the child. If this is agreed, missing strategy meetings can cease being held until any further evidence is found and the matter will be referred to the Warwickshire multi-agency Long Term Missing Panel that meets quarterly. The Panel will conduct the ongoing reviews for children that

remain missing 3 months or more, with a view to identifying any information that may lead to the child being located.

Consideration must be taken at every stage of whether there are presenting factors of reasonable grounds to suspect the child is a victim of Modern Slavery/Trafficking, that relevant safeguarding procedures have been followed, and an NRM referral has been made if appropriate.

For children in care, such as unaccompanied children from abroad, the Director, Children & Families will agree with the Executive Director of People Group whether the intervention will end upon receipt of a report from the relevant Head of Service. Any decision to close the case should be on the proviso that it is reopened if the child is located and found to be in need of services as an eligible, relevant or former relevant child and an assessment undertaken to understand the child's experiences whilst they were missing.

12. Escalation & Conflict Resolution

There may on occasion be a disagreement between the Police and other professionals, including Children's Social Care, as to the level of risk posed to a missing child that remains unresolved. Professionals may also have concern about the response to a missing child, inadequate action, or lack of adherence to these procedures. If this happens, it should be resolved through escalation to the managers of the practitioner's involved (Missing Persons Team if involving the Police). This should be conducted the same working day the matter is raised and prioritised in accordance with the concern and level of risk. If the matter remains unresolved it will be progressed in accordance with the Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Partnership escalation procedure until resolution is achieved, progressing to more senior managers such as the Operations Manager and Head of Service responsible for missing children in Children's Social Care and the Detective Inspector and Detective Chief Inspector equivalent in the Police before being presented to the relevant agencies Safeguarding Board representatives if required.

13. Governance & Strategic Oversight

Warwickshire Safeguarding Partnership (WSP) expects all agencies working with children who are missing from home or care to implement this protocol and ensure that all relevant staff are aware of it and how to use it via training and awareness raising and as part of induction processes. This should include residential and supported accommodation staff, foster carers, social workers, family support workers, the Emergency Duty Team, foster carer support staff, police officers and staff providing services direct to missing children. All agencies working with children however should be cognisant of it and know what to do if a child may be missing.

The Exploitation Subgroup of WSP are responsible for overseeing and reviewing

the protocol and assuring compliance with the arrangements. WSP will consider the provision of services for children missing from both local authority care and home and children being exploited, identifying any gaps in service delivery and patterns and trends across the contextual safeguarding agenda. This will include disseminating good practise to promote effective responses to missing children.

Data about children who go missing from home or care will be reported to the Exploitation Subgroup and should be included in regular reports to leaders within the Police and Local Authority to enable statistical analysis of local needs arising and any identified gaps in service delivery. This should also feature within commissioning and residential providers assessments of children going missing from their establishments. It is vital for senior leaders in all organisations to have a comprehensive understanding of the local profile in order that they can take action to ensure children who go missing receive a robust, proactive, and preventative response.

14. Useful contacts

If you believe that a child is at immediate risk, this should be reported without delay to Police where the child has gone missing from via 999. Non-emergency reporting can be made by calling 101.

If you have a safeguarding concern, then you should contact Warwickshire Children's Services via the Integrated Front Door on:

Telephone: 01926 414144

Email: TriageHub@Warwickshire.gov.uk

Warwickshire Police Missing Persons Team can be contacted regarding missing children's investigations as follows:

Email: missing.person@warwickshire.police.uk

Telephone: 101 Ext. 4484

Missing People Helpline:

116 000 to call or text - 116000@missingpeople.org.uk to email or online chat via <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/talk-to-us>

UK Missing Persons Unit (National Crime Agency):

<https://missingpersons.police.uk/en-gb/home#>

15. Appendices

[Appendix 1: Missing children procedure flowchart](#)

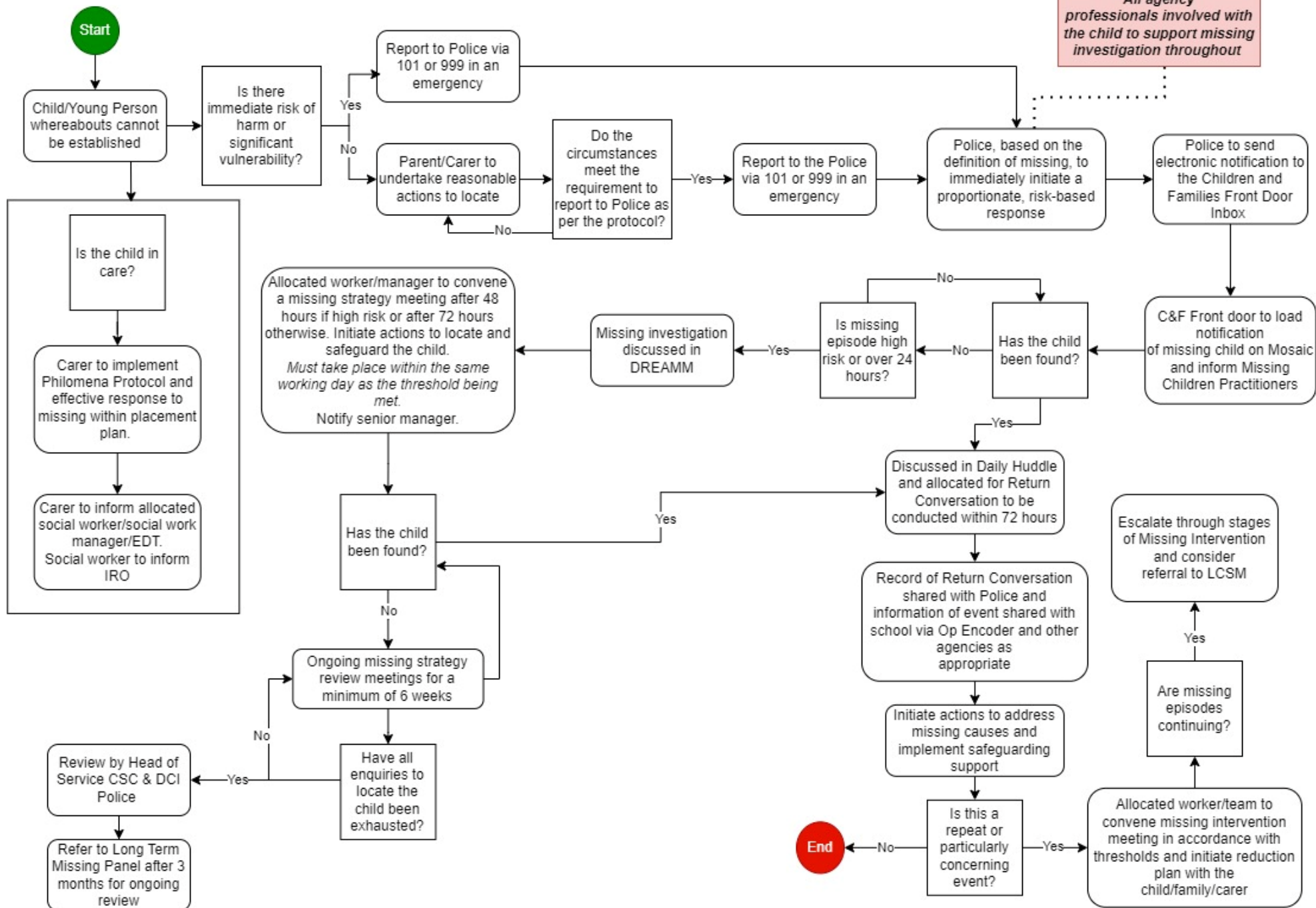
[Appendix 2: Legislation to assist with recovery of missing children](#)

[Appendix 3: Levels of Intervention Model](#)

Appendix 1

Warwickshire Missing Children Protocol Flowchart September 2023

All agency professionals involved with the child to support missing investigation throughout



Appendix 2

Relevant Legislation and Summary of Police Powers in relation to Children who go Missing.

CHILDREN ACT 1989: S49 Abduction of Children in Care

This offence applies to any child/young person subject to a Care Order, Emergency Protection Order or in Police Protection even if the child/young person is 16 or over providing the Care Order has not elapsed.

Offence:

- A person is guilty of an offence if, knowingly and without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, takes a child to whom this section applies away from the responsible person; keeps such a child away from the responsible person; or induces, assists, or incites such a child to run away or stay away from the responsible person.

Points to prove:

- That the offender knew:
 - That the child is subject to a Care Order, Emergency Protection Order or in Police Protection.
 - That the responsible person had not given their permission for the child to stay with the offender.
- That the offender has either:
 - Taken the child.
 - Kept such a child away from the responsible person.
 - Induced/assisted/incited such a child to run/stay away from the responsible person.

CHILD ABDUCTION ACT 1984, S2 Abduction of a Child This offence applies to any child under 16, or under 18 if in the care of the local authority under section 31.

Offence:

- A person not connected with the child is guilty of an offence if, without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, he takes or detains a child under the age of 16.
- So as to remove him from the lawful control of any person having lawful control of the child.
- So as to keep him out of the lawful control of any person entitled to lawful control of the child.

Guidance Notes

A person is connected with a child if:

- He is a parent of the child.
- In the case of a child whose parents were not married to each other at the time of his birth, there are reasonable grounds for believing that he is the father of the child, or he is the guardian of the child.
- He is a person in whose favour a residence order is in force with respect to the child or He has custody of the child. Therefore, if the child is in the Care of the Local Authority and is being kept away from the foster carer or residential home by a natural parent, the S49 Children Act offence should be used, not the S2 Child Abduction Act 1984.

Points to prove:

- That the child was under 16 (or 18 if in care).
- That the offender acted without lawful authority or reasonable excuse.
- That the offender was not connected with the child.
- The offender took or detained the child. So as to remove/keep him/her from lawful control.

CHILDREN ACT 1989, S46 Place of Safety Power to Remove to Place of Safety or Prevent Removal from Where a Constable has reasonable cause to believe that a child would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm, they may:

- Remove the child to suitable accommodation and keep them there.
- Take such 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. This is the primary power for the police in emergency situations.

CHILDREN ACT 1989, S44 Where a person applies to the court for an order to be made under this section concerning a child, the court may make the order if, but only if, it is satisfied that there is reasonable cause to believe that the child is likely to suffer significant harm if:

- He is not removed to accommodation provided by or on behalf of the applicant.
- He does not remain in the place where he is then being accommodated.

CHILDREN ACT 1989, S50 Emergency Protection Orders, Duty to Disclose Child's Whereabouts & Authorisation to Enter Premises Where it appears to a court making an Emergency Protection Order that adequate information as to the child's


whereabouts:


- Is not available to the applicant for the order; but
- Is available to another person, it may include in the order a provision requiring that other person to disclose, if asked to do so by the applicant, any information that he may have as to the child's whereabouts (S48 (1)). An Emergency Protection Order may authorise the applicant to enter premises.


HOME OFFICE CIRCULAR 17/2008, S15, 16. The duties and powers of the police under The Children Act 1989 Police protection is an emergency power and should only be used when necessary, the principle being that wherever possible the decision to remove a child/children from a parent or carer should be made by a court. All local authorities should have in place local arrangements (through their local Chief Executive and Clerks to the Justices) whereby out of hours applications for Emergency Protection Orders may be made speedily and without an excess of bureaucracy. Police protection powers should only be used when this is not possible.

Appendix 3

Levels of Intervention

Assessed Level of Concern		Intervention
<p>No Immediate Intervention Required</p> 	<p>The carer is not concerned for the child's safety at this time, or the safety of others based on the information they have about the child and the circumstances of the missing occurrence.</p>	<p>Based on the information known about the child and the circumstances of the missing occurrence, the carer makes an informed decision to wait some time, to see if the child returns of their own accord.</p>
Actions and Outcomes		
<p>Actions The carer waits a reasonable time* to see if the child returns of their own accord.</p> <p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child returns of their own accord. • The child contacts the carer (or another) and child agrees to either return home independently or be collected by the carer. • The child contacts the carer and what the child says raises the level of concern to either carer intervention or police intervention. • The carer receives information that raises the level of concern to either carer intervention or police intervention. <p style="text-align: center;">The child does not return within a reasonable time, so the level of concern raises to carer intervention</p>		

Assessed Level of Concern		Intervention
<p>Carer Intervention</p> 	<p>The carer has some concerns about the child and their whereabouts, but at the outset of the missing occurrence the carer does not have any immediate concerns about the child's safety or the safety of others that would warrant contacting the police immediately.</p>	<p>The carer takes responsibility for trying to locate the child and ensure their safe return.</p>
Actions and Outcomes		
<p>Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The carer considers if there has been any precursor behaviour or trigger incident that warrants the child being immediately reported to the police as missing. • The carer/child's social worker continually tries to contact the child by phone, text, and social media. • The carer undertakes a search of the home and surrounding areas (or agrees with the child's social worker who will do this if they are unable to). • The carer undertakes a search of the place the child was expected to be and the place the child was last seen (or agrees with the child's social worker who will do this if they are unable to). • The carer/child's social worker contacts family and friends. • If possible and safe to do, the carer/ child's social worker visits locations and addresses where the child may be. • The carer and the child's social worker continue to liaise until the child is found or returns. <p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child returns of their own accord. • The child contacts the carer (or another). • The carer contacts the child. • Contact is made and the child agrees to return home independently. • Contact is made and the child agrees to be collected. This is arranged by/between the carer and the child's social worker. <p>Contact is made and what the child says raises the level of concern to police intervention, so the child is reported as missing to the police. The carer/ child's social worker receives information that raises the level of concern to police intervention, so the child is reported as missing to the police.</p>		

Assessed Level of Concern		Intervention
<p>Police Intervention</p> 	<p>Based on the information the carer has about the child and the circumstances of the missing occurrence, the carer is worried about the child's safety. The carer has been unable to contact the child, or they have made contact, but have assessed that the child or others are not safe.</p>	<p>The carer/child's social worker reports the child as missing to the police.</p>
Actions and Outcomes		
<p>Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The carer/child's social worker shares their concerns with the police. • Where applicable, the carer / child's social worker shares the child's Missing Assessment / Plan / Incident form with the police. • In most cases, where the carer / child's social worker has completed basic enquiries, the Communications Centre will record the child as missing. According to policy a child will never be recorded as 'absent' or 'standard', as a minimum they will be recorded as medium risk. <p style="text-align: center;">If the police have recorded the child as missing, the police conduct enquiries to locate the child</p>		