



Suffolk  
Safeguarding  
Partnership

# **Safeguarding Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care**

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**Policy, Procedures and Practice  
Guidance**

## Policy Version History

Version	Date	Date of PPE Approval	Author/Reviewer
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6	October 2017	19 <sup>th</sup> October 2017	Holly Boyd-Lambley Missing Children Coordinator
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## 1. Introduction

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1.1 This document provides guidance to professionals and volunteers from all agencies in Suffolk working to ensure a collaborative response when:

- A child is at risk of running away
- A child runs away and goes missing from home or care.

1.2 It aims to provide guidance for assessing both the risk to the child or young person and the support needs on return and should be read in conjunction with the *Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership Procedures* - <https://suffolksp.org.uk/>

1.3 The framework for the procedure is based on:

- [Statutory Guidance on children who runaway or go missing from care January 2014](#)
- [ACPO Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons 2010](#)
- [ACPO Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons 2013](#)
- [Children Act 2009](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018.](#)

## 2. Monitoring Arrangements for Missing Children

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2.1 The Head of Safeguarding, Directorate of Children and Young Peoples Services Suffolk County Council and the Detective Superintendent Public Protection (Protecting Vulnerable Persons), Suffolk Constabulary are responsible for the policy and procedures.

2.2 The Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership Multi-Agency Exploited Children Group will:

- Provide the strategic lead for the development of proactive work across the partnership on Exploited Children.
- Develop and monitor a Multi-Agency action plan to progress the identification and safeguarding of children who go missing from home or care.
- Provide regular updates to the Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership, highlighting progress on the action plan, areas for practice and policy development, outcomes of any county working groups and any data or statistics required for audit and scrutiny purposes.

- Link policy and practice initiatives to Children at risk of Exploitation/Gangs and Groups and Children Missing Education.
- Receive updates from the Missing Children Co-ordinator as to progress on the coordination of data on missing children, return interviews etc.
- The Missing Children Coordinator can be contacted via:  
[missing.children@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:missing.children@suffolk.gov.uk)

### 3. Definitions

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#### 3.1

- **Child:** anyone who has not yet reached their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- **Young runaway:** a child who has run away from their home or care placement or feels they have been forced to leave or lured to leave.
- **Missing child:** a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers\*.
- **Children in Care:** a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
- **Missing from care:** a child in care, who is not at their placement, or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts is not known.
- **Away from placement without Unauthorised absence** is where a child in care's whereabouts is known or thought to be known but unconfirmed, they are not missing and may instead be considered as absent without authorisation from their placement.
- **Child Abduction:** where a child has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence, this is a 'crime in action' and should be reported to the police immediately.

#### Police Definitions:

**Missing:** *A child whose whereabouts cannot be established, and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be a subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or others.*

### 4. The Legal Framework

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- 4.1 The law does not generally regard young people under the age of 16 as being able to live independently away from home.
- 4.2 Where a child/young person under 16 (or 18 if disabled) stays with a person (other than a person with parental responsibility or a close relative), for 28 days or more, the person caring for them is acting as a 'private foster carer' within the meaning of s66 of the

Children Act 1989 and therefore they must notify the local authority that they are privately fostering the child/young person. Failure to notify the Local Authority may be an offence.

- 4.3 Anyone who has care of a child without parental responsibility may do what *is reasonable* in all the circumstances to safeguard and promote the child's welfare (Children Act 1989 s3 (5)). It is likely to be 'reasonable' to inform the police, or Children's Social Care, and, if appropriate, their parents, of the child/ young person's safety and whereabouts.
- 4.4 Anyone who 'takes or detains' a runaway under 16 without lawful authority may be prosecuted under s2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984. The enforcement of this provision might be problematic, however, if the young person has chosen to stay with an adult of his or her own free will.

## 5. Causes of Running Away

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- 5.1 The reasons for running away are varied, complex and unique to individual children. Running away is often a sign that something is wrong in the child's or young person's life. Main reasons for running away are:
- Problems at home - ranging from arguments with parents to long-term abuse or maltreatment.
  - Mental health problems.
  - Bullying, racial harassment, homophobia.
  - Teenage pregnancy.
  - Wanting to be near friends or family - especially when a young person is in care and there are problems in contact arrangements with family and friends.
  - Grooming for sexual exploitation - evidence suggests that 90% of children subject to sexual exploitation go missing at some point. See guidance on Children Abused Through Sexual Exploitation.
  - Forced Marriage - some young people run away because they are at risk of or in a forced marriage. See guidance on Forced Marriage and Honour- Based Violence.
  - Child Trafficking - young people may go missing when they are being trafficked. See Guidance on Safeguarding Children from Trafficking.
  - Criminal exploitation or involvement in gangs and county lines. See guidance.

## **6. Children Missing Education**

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- 6.1 There may be concerns for children and young people who are going missing from home and school regarding their stability of education. Please consider the Children missing education procedures for these children - Children Missing Education Procedures
- 6.2 There is guidance for schools to follow when children are not missing education but truanting or runaway from school, or they don't turn up to school and whereabouts cannot be ascertained. These procedures can be found on the Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership website: <https://www.suffolksp.org.uk/assets/Working-with-Children-Adults/Education/2017-10-01-Missing-and-CE-Guidance-for-Schools.pdf>

## **7. Services to Young People Who May Run Away**

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- 7.1 All agencies will be alert to the needs of children who may run away and such services can be identified according to the specific needs of a young person through the CAF process. This will help to identify cases of running early and provide the opportunity to address these issues and prevent escalation.
- 7.2 Information for young people is available through the Suffolk Information. Advice & Guidance for young people website – [www.thesource.me.uk/care](http://www.thesource.me.uk/care).
- 7.3 Children with mental health needs, learning and physical disabilities are particularly vulnerable when going missing. They may have communication difficulties and they may have fewer opportunities to disclose reasons for running away. Practitioners should be alert to the particular needs of disabled children, making sure they know how to raise concerns and receive whatever additional assistance and support they require.
- 7.4 Practitioners should be aware that young people may run away because of issues of sexuality and may need support and access to specialist youth or advocacy services, information on national telephone helplines.
- 7.5 Suffolk County Council Directorate of Children and Young Peoples Services has emergency accommodation available for young people for whom it is not in their best interests to return home.

## 8. Police Actions When a Child Goes Missing from Home/Care

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- 8.1 In most cases a parent/carer will contact the police if they are concerned about a child who has not returned home as expected or whose whereabouts give rise for concern. There are some situations where a runaway/missing child comes to the attention of an agency/member of the community who may not been reported to the Police E.g. Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child and in these circumstances the Police must be contacted.

**Suffolk Police: Command and Control Room (CCR) 101 or 999 in an emergency.**

- 8.2 Norfolk and Suffolk Constabularies Missing and Absent Persons Policy details that they will not record any child (under 18), whose whereabouts is not known, as absent. The absent category is still considered in appropriate adult cases.

### 8.3 Missing

Where Police decide to deal with an episode as 'missing' a COMPACT record will be created, and an officer deployed to take a full missing person report. The officer will also make a full assessment of risk. The level of risk (high, medium, or low) will determine the police response. All children will be initially recorded as high risk until reviewed by a supervisor after which the risk may be downgraded to medium. COMPACT will be updated, and an automatic email notification sent to Customer First and the Missing Children Coordinator for review within the MASH. Police will submit a referral 'PVP' (Protecting Vulnerable People) to the MASH in addition, where there are additional safeguarding concerns for missing children as soon as the risk assessment has been completed.

A senior police officer will supervise the investigation to locate the missing child. Police will liaise with Directorate of Children and Young Peoples Services and other agencies at all stages of the investigation.

When the child is located it is the responsibility of the parent or carer to return the child. If the circumstances pose a risk to the child or the parent/carer, a police officer may accompany them, or the police may be requested to collect and return the child. More detailed guidance surrounding this can be found in section 16.5 'Guidance for Providers'.

The COMPACT record will be updated, and an automatic e-mail notification sent to Children and Young Peoples Services .

- 8.4 The Philomena Protocol will be promoted to all settings. This protocol greatly facilitates the linkage between care settings and the Police. The basis of the protocol is for vital information about the young person to be recorded which can be used to locate them safely and quickly. For further information and guidance in respect of the Philomena Protocol the Missing Person Advisors, Suffolk Constabulary can be contacted on [mpa@suffolk.pnn.police.uk](mailto:mpa@suffolk.pnn.police.uk)



## 9. Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

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9.1 Children and Young Peoples Services, Police and partner agencies in the MASH, will share information and assess the risks to the child *whether still missing or returned*. Particular attention will be paid to the child's age and vulnerability and ascertaining if the child has:

- Gone missing/run away on more than one occasion.
- Been missing/run away for more than 24 hours.
- Been involved as a victim or perpetrator of criminal behaviour or exploitation whilst missing/running way.
- Known mental health issues.
- Known risk of exploitation.
- Known risk of contact with persons posing risk to children.
- Incidents that have resulted in child protection/ children in need assessments.
- Domestic abuse/forced marriage/honour- based violence.

9.2 This discussion will be informed by the Police Safe and Well Check/Return Interview (see below) if the child has returned home and by information from other agencies.

9.3 Agreement will be reached and recorded about the course of action to assist or protect the child and may include:

- Completion of a Common Assessment (CAF). It may be appropriate for a professional already involved with the child to conduct a Return Interview as part of this e.g. a worker within an Early Help Team.

Assessment of need by Children's Social Care. The views of the child gained in the Return Interview will be of great importance and will inform the assessment and decision making. The arrangements for this will be co-ordinated by Children's Social Care and recorded as part of the social work assessment. An assessment may result in signposting a child/ family for a service, consideration under Common Assessment Framework (CAF) Process, services under s17 or action under s47 of the Children Act 1989. More information about the Common Assessment Framework process can be found on the Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership website: <https://suffolksp.org.uk/working-with-children-and-adults/children/early-help/>

- Consideration must be given to an assessment by social care or a strategy discussion convened where a return interview or police safe and well check has revealed concerns for the child's safety or wellbeing.
- A strategy threshold discussion must be convened by Children's Social Care and/or MASH, whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that the child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm during the missing episode or afterwards.

A strategy threshold discussion should also be considered if the child:

- Has been missing for 24 hours.
- Has been missing on 3 or more occasions within the previous 30 days depending on the level of risks and circumstances. If a strategy threshold discussion is deemed not appropriate, a management decision must be added to reflect reasons for this.

This should also be balanced with actions taken already for example when considering frequent missing children, if strategy meetings and presentation at the Tactical and Tasking Co-ordination Group etc. has occurred then it may not be necessary to initiate a strategy discussion on each occasion if there is no new information and no reasonable outcomes can be determined from this. This should be agreed by management, however.

- 9.4 The strategy discussion will determine actions, including undertaking and planning section 47 enquiries. Note that a [strategy discussion](#) in the form of a meeting must be considered where there are complex circumstances, is more than 1 child involved and always where child sexual abuse/multiple abuse is suspected.

Alerts to any other Local Authorities where the child may be located, health agencies, Children Missing Education service will be made by Children and Young Peoples Services where a child has not been located. This service can be provided via the [missing.children@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:missing.children@suffolk.gov.uk) inbox.

Actions identified for Police only resulting from information sharing with Children's Social Care/ other agencies.

- 9.4 If the child has been missing more than once within the month or over 24 hours s/he will be considered for Multi-Agency review at the Monthly Police-led Tactical & Tasking Co-ordination Group Meeting (TTCG). The role of the TTCG is to consider the children who are missing most often. This group meet monthly and the children subject to review here are agreed jointly between the Missing Persons Advisers (Suffolk Police) and the Missing Children Co-ordinator. Consideration is given based on frequency of missing episodes within the past month, duration of missing episode and complexity of concerns. Multi-Agency actions are drawn from this group to try to reduce repeat missing episodes or increase level of safety to the child if reported missing again.

## 10. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

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- 10.1 Children arriving in Suffolk unaccompanied will automatically be classified as high risk by police and social care due to their additional vulnerabilities including the potential of being trafficked.
- 10.2 There is Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) guidance available which outlines the procedures in more detail – please refer to this particularly if the

unaccompanied child is considered to be at risk of trafficking or has been trafficked. This can be found on the ADCS website:

<http://adcs.org.uk/safeguarding/article/care-of-unaccompanied-migrant-children-and-childvictims-of-modern-slavery>

- 10.3 Regional guidance for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is also in the process of being compiled with the aim of attempting to ensure there is a consistent robust response to UASC within our region. This guidance should be available by January 2019.

## 11. Emergency Duty Service

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- 11.1 Procedures are set out to include occasions when children and young people go missing/are located out-of-office hours and the involvement of the Emergency Duty Service (EDS) is required. The Emergency Duty Service has established protocols for working with other agencies where there are concerns about children. The EDS manager has a system for monitoring incidents of children who run away and go missing and ensures that these cases are sampled as part of the quality assurance process.
- 11.2 Where Police have immediate concerns about the circumstances of a child who has been reported missing from home out of office hours e.g. if there is concern that the child may be at risk if returned home, the Police will contact Emergency Duty Services to assess the child's needs and make appropriate arrangements for their accommodation. This will include young people who may be at risk of honour-based violence/forced marriage. The EDS service will engage with as many partners as it is practicable to do in order to agree how best to support and protect the child. This will always include the EDS operations manager and a senior police officer.
- 11.3 Should EDS have any involvement with a missing child who is allocated to a social care team they will inform the allocated team and worker, or in the case of a child not already receiving services from Children and Young Peoples Services, the MASH for action as soon as day time service resumes.

Social Care teams will send an alert to EDS where a child with whom they are working has run away/gone missing from home, with specific plans on location in case the child is located out of hours.

- 11.4 There is an established decision-making process for responding to children for whom there are concerns out of hours within residential or foster care. The Children's Home Out of Hours Support Service Manager or the Fostering Service Out of Hours Support Service Manager will liaise with and support carers in the decision regarding reporting a child missing to the Police. EDS will be informed and become involved when required e.g. if there is concern that an alternative placement is required for the child.

There is more information available regarding the EDS operational response to missing children which can be found on the EDS section of the good practice guide.

## 12. When a Child is Located

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### 12.1 Police Safe and Well Check

This will be carried out as soon as possible after the young person has returned home, or at the time of location if found by police. The purpose is to establish where the child has been, with whom and whether they came to any harm. It is common for children to be reluctant to engage in this process. If this is the case, it is important that the police officer conducting the check records their demeanour, their physical state and any other factors that may be relevant later – this is part of the investigation. The details will be recorded on the COMPACT and sent to the MASH if an unallocated case, or to the social worker if allocated.

### 12.2 Return Interviews

This interview should aim to take place within 72 hours of the young person being located or returning from absence and will be especially important if any risk factors are in evidence e.g. the child has been missing overnight, may have been involved in criminal activities during absence, has mental health issues or may have been hurt or harmed. If the return interview cannot be conducted within the 72hrs, the child or young person must be spoken to via the phone to ensure their safety and arrange a time to visit them within the next 5 working days.

Where the young person and family is being assisted through the CAF process, or a referral is made for a CAF, it will be undertaken by the Lead Professional and will update the assessment and plan for the child, unless there are additional safeguarding concerns that may indicate a need for step up to social care teams (MASH will determine upon receipt of found notification from police).

Where Children's Social Care are involved already with the child under CiN/ CP plan or are undertaking a Social work assessment they should conduct the return interview which will be an essential part of the assessment and decision-making process. It should be recorded on the child's electronic record. Other agencies supporting the child or young person already could also support on the return interview including Youth Offending Service, Family Support Practitioners, Make A Change Team etc. It is suggested that the professional with the best working relationship with the young person would be best placed to conduct the return interview. Despite this the ultimate responsibility lies with the allocated social worker and if the return interview is completed by another professional, the social worker should ensure they have oversight of this.

All children who go missing from home or care should be offered an independent return interview. Suffolk will offer a child an Independent Return Home Interview and this will

be facilitated via a pool of individuals independent of the Local Authority and accessed via the [missing.children@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:missing.children@suffolk.gov.uk)

The return interview will:

- Identify any harm the child may have suffered- including harm that might not have been disclosed as part of the Safe and Well Check – either before they ran away or whilst missing.
- Understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away
- Help the child feel safe and understand that they have options to prevent repeat instances of them running away.
- Develop a safety plan which will include information on how to stay safe if they choose to run away again, including helpline numbers or prevent additional future missing episodes.

Where young people refuse to take part in the return interview parents and carer must be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence of which they may be aware. This should help to prevent further instances of the child running away and identify early the support needed for them.

Carers and social workers should be ascertaining information about the circumstances that occurred leading to the child going missing and what occurred during the missing event.

### 12.3 Children Who Repeatedly Go Missing

For those young people who repeatedly go missing a strategy discussion should be held in the first instance between the allocated team management and MASH police. Where there are additional complex concerns, consideration should be given to a complex strategy meeting, to evaluate all information and determine whether there is a need to conduct enquiries under s47, convene an Initial Child Protection Conference etc.

It is likely these children will also be subject to discussion at the TTCG.

## 13. Children Who Have Not Been Found

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- 13.1 Police and Social Care will monitor the progress of efforts to locate children who have gone missing. If a child has not been found within 72 hours of receipt of referral or earlier depending on the age and circumstances of the child, the Head of Safeguarding and the Head of Children's Social Care Fieldwork should be informed who will need to satisfy themselves that everything is being done to locate and safeguard the child. Media assistance may be required and the authorisation for the release of a child's personal information into the public arena, if a child or young person is subject of Section 31 of the Children Act 1989, should be made by the Head of Children's Social Care Fieldwork or equivalent senior manager. In the event that a child or young person's details are required to be released to the media out of hours this authorisation

will be provided by the Emergency Duty Service Ops Manager (EDS Ops Manager). If a child is cared for by the Local Authority under Section 20 (voluntary care) then consent to release the child or young person's details to the media will need to be provided by the person who holds parental responsibility, in consultation with Suffolk Social Care, for the child or young person

Consideration should always be given to exploring the child or young person's vulnerability and the risk attached to releasing information about them into the public arena. For example will the child or young person be at further risk if members of the public are aware that they are missing/not with their carer or at their placement.

13.2 Suffolk's Children and Young Peoples Services Missing Children Coordinator is responsible for escalating and alerting senior management to these children unless there are immediate concerns in which case the allocated worker should alert their management in the first instance. The escalation process is as follows:

- Missing for 24 hours – alert sent to allocated worker and practice manager who at this stage should consider a strategy discussion with MASH/Police and consider if there is a need for a complex strategy meeting if concerns meet this threshold.
- Missing for 48 hours – alert sent to allocated worker, practice manager, service manager and safeguarding manager and consideration should be given to whether there is a need for a complex strategy meeting.
- Missing for 72 hours – alert sent to the above as well as the Head of Safeguarding and the Head of Children's Social Care. It is at this stage that a discussion must be held between the social care team manager or service manager as the county safeguarding manager to discuss if a complex strategy meeting should be held.

13.3 Strategy Meetings should be held by the manager of the Social Care Team in the first instance. Where there is a rapid increase and escalation of complex concerns for the child, a discussion should be held with the service manager and safeguarding manager to ascertain if a Complex Strategy Meeting is required. Should this be agreed, the Complex Strategy Meeting should be organised and chaired by the County Safeguarding Manager. Review strategy meetings should be considered for these children and timeframes for reviews agreed within the initial complex strategy meeting.

13.4 Case Closures:

The missing child(ren) case will remain open to police as either an active or inactive investigation. This will be decided by the superintendent on duty. The case will be subject to the COMPACT review process either way.

- CP Plan: If the child continues to be missing and is on a CP plan, the child protection plan can only be discontinued following a CP review conference where all efforts to locate the child are reviews and the arrangements for police reviews are confirmed. Additionally, the Head of Safeguarding must give approval for the child protection plan to be discontinued in these circumstances. The Head of Specialist Services should also be notified and agree closure.

- CiN Plan: Where the child is subject to a CiN plan, the case must be considered by the Multi-Agency group at a CiN review meeting and decisions made about the level of concerns and appropriate actions to be put in place. The Head of Specialist Services must be notified if consideration is being given to the closure of a missing person case.
- Child In Care: Where the child is a Child in Care, the missing procedures in respect of a Child in Care should be followed and the child subject to complex strategy meetings chaired by a Safeguarding Manager if deemed required as per the guidance for requests for strategy meetings. Should the Local Authority be considering a request to de accommodate the child a strategy meeting should be held with Suffolk Constabulary and other involved partners to ensure all efforts have been made to locate the child. Actions should be reviewed here, and this will inform the request for the child to be de-accommodated, if applicable. The final decision for case closure of a missing child will be made by the Service Director for Children and Young People. If a 16 / 17yr old child choses to de-accommodate themselves this needs to be agreed through the relevant procedures and where the child is missing, the usual escalation steps are to be followed.
- The case will only be considered for closure by Children's Social Care on the advice of the Head of Safeguarding and Head of Specialist Services / Co-corporate parenting following a final strategy meeting with Suffolk Constabulary where all efforts to locate the child have been reviewed.
- Legal advice should also be sought where applicable when considering closure of a case.
- All missing children, whether closed to services or not, will remain monitored by the missing children coordinator within Children and Young People Services.

## **14. Support for 16 and 17 Year Olds**

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- 14.1 16 and 17 year old's who run away or go missing are not necessarily any less vulnerable than younger children and are likely to need as much support to get their lives on track and make a successful transition into adulthood. However, as young people over 16 can choose to leave home it may be necessary to involve other services such as housing officers in the assessment of their needs. There are inter-agency arrangements for 'Young People of 16 & 17 years who are homeless' which must be used in these circumstances. Vulnerable young people need to be in a secure housing setting. No 16 or 17-year-old should be placed in Bed & Breakfast accommodation by housing or children's services, except in an emergency and for the shortest time possible, where B&B is the only available alternative to rooflessness.

## **15. Children in Care who Go Missing**

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- 15.1 The Local Authority has the same duty of care towards all children who are in care i.e. children accommodated under s20 of the Children Act 1989, and children who are subject of a care or interim care order.
- 15.2 It is important to be concerned for the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person who goes missing from care in terms of not only what might happen to them whilst missing, but also because of their reasons for doing so.
- 15.3 Where there is a possibility that a child in care will run away and go missing from a residential home or foster placement, then the child's care plan, along with the placement plan, should include a strategy to minimise this risk.
- 15.4 When it appears that a child is missing from any care setting the following steps should be reasonably undertaken, within at least 30 minutes before reporting the child missing:
- Has a check been made to ensure child not in the building or in the grounds.
  - Checks with colleagues to ensure that they have not had a discussion with a child and know where they are going or where they are.
  - Checks with other children in the setting to establish if they have knowledge of where the child is
  - Checking with the child's family and social circle to ensure, as far as possible there is no information of where the child may be.
  - Even after a child is reported missing it is important to check periodically the building and grounds.
- 15.5 Consideration should be given to an immediate report to the Police should there be pre-existing concerns about the risk of exploitation or harm in relation to a child, taking into account any outcomes or actions of strategy meetings held in respect of the child and specific Missing from Care Protocols
- 15.6 When the child is located there will be discussion between the care setting and the Police to determine how best the child can be safely returned as soon as possible.

## **16. Unauthorised Absence/Missing**

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- 16.1 Young people may be accidentally or deliberately late home whilst their whereabouts are known, and their safety or wellbeing is not necessarily jeopardised. These circumstances will not be treated as 'missing' and should not be reported to the Police.
- 16.2 Where young people are away from their placement and carers, in conjunction with managers, are concerned about their safety all efforts will be made to ensure the young person is returned to the placement. Where it is considered that there is a safeguarding issue e.g. the child is at risk of harm, then contact will be made with Police to agree actions.



16.3 Where there are repeated incidents of Unauthorised absences, consideration will be given to actions to safeguard the child.

16.4 Where it is judged that the child judged to be absent has in fact gone missing following review of risk which would include last known contact and time factors, then a missing report will be made to:

Suffolk Police: Command and Control Room (CCR)

□ 101 or 999 in an emergency.

16.5 Guidance for providers when responding to missing children in terms of reporting can be found on the Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership website:

<http://www.suffolkscb.org.uk/assets/Safeguarding-Topics/Missing-Children/2018-01-11Providers-Missing-Guidance-v3.pdf>

## 17. Children Missing from Residential Care

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➤ [Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards](#)

17.1 Suffolk County Council's own Children's Homes services staff will act in accordance with the Suffolk Children's Homes Missing Children Policy and individual child missing protocols.

17.2 Preventative work will be carried out within the Local Authority Children's Homes in partnership with the police and colleagues from CYPS in order to help prevent incidences of children going missing.

17.3 Before reporting a child as missing staff from the home, staff from the home should take all steps a responsible parent would take, to locate the child. (Also see point 15.4 & 15.5). Staff within the homes are experienced and qualified to assess if a child needs to be reported as missing, however this action may be taken in consultation with the social worker / social care manager or Children's Homes duty manager if out of hours (CHOOHSS).

17.4 Where the child's location or reason for absence is unknown and/or due to the circumstances, there is cause for significant concern for the child, the child must be reported missing to the Police in line with the child missing protocol.

17.5 Detailed information is made available to the Police by the Children's Home, in particular the risk assessment for the child including any reason to suspect that the child is at risk of significant harm in terms of abuse, self-harming behaviour, drugs, sexual exploitation or criminal behaviour and previous missing episodes.

17.6 Police have primary responsibility for locating children who are missing and will work in partnership with Children's Social Care. A record will be placed on COMPACT as

HIGH RISK and an active search commenced. The risk status will be monitored and may be downgraded depending on the risks identified.

## **18. Children Missing from Foster Care**

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- 18.1 Suffolk foster carers will report the situation to the child's social worker/social care manager and take all steps a responsible parent would take to locate the child. If the child goes missing/runs away out of office hours the foster carer will contact the foster care duty manager (FOOHSS) who will in turn liaise with EDS (section 6).
- 18.2 Where the child is not absent without authorisation and the child's location or reason for absence is unknown and due to the circumstances, there is cause for significant concern for the child, the child must be reported missing to the Police. See section 3.

## **19. Young People Who Are Support by the Leaving Care Service**

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- 19.1 The providers of this service in Suffolk, The Leaving Care Teams, will follow the Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership procedures and work with any associated partner providers such as YMCA, to ensure that procedures are in place to respond to situations where a young person they are supporting goes missing. Many of these young people are living in supported or independent settings and whilst the service has a duty to maintain regular contact there may be no 'onsite' carer. Staff will need to be alert to any risk factors which indicate a young person is likely to go missing and make plans on an individual case basis.
- 19.2 Some young people continue to be in care and others are not, but the same attention will be given to each young person in terms of risks of going missing. Return interviews will be arranged by the allocated social worker. Some young people may want to disengage from the service but where contact is lost completely and there are concerns, then the Leaving Care Service will liaise with Police and other colleagues.

## **20. Informing Parents**

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- 20.1 Parents and any persons with parental responsibility must be informed as soon as possible that their child is missing unless there are good reasons connected with the child's welfare for this to be inappropriate. Agreement must be reached about who will be responsible for informing the parents where the child is placed away from the family's home area – this will normally be the child's social worker. A record must be made as to when parents have been informed and what information has been given to them.

## **21. Children Who Go Missing from Care Who Are Placed in Suffolk by Another Local Authority**

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- 21.1 The registered manager of the Children's Home, or the fostering service, is responsible for ensuring that the accountable manager in the child's Local Authority has received the notification that a Child in Care is missing and has initiated the appropriate actions. Suffolk Children's Social Care will receive notification from Suffolk Police and forward the notification within 1 working day to the Local Authority responsible for the child.
- 21.2 For children placed in Suffolk by Other local authorities, who are repeatedly running away from their care placement in Suffolk, Suffolk MASH should forward the missing and found notifications to the responsible local authority with the recommendation that consideration is given to a strategy threshold discussion and/or early child in care review. Where there are additional concerns and/or escalation in the number of missing episodes for a child within a 2 month period, Suffolk MASH and the missing children's coordinator will liaise regarding potential escalation to the IRO/Safeguarding Service within the responsible local authority.
- 21.3 For children (not CiC) who reside in another local authority but are found in Suffolk following a missing episode, where there is reasonable cause to suspect the child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm, Suffolk MASH will liaise with the home residence local authority to agree which area should convene the strategy discussion. Suffolk MASH should recommend this strategy discussion is held by the home residence local authority however if this is not agreed, Suffolk MASH will convene and invite the home residence authority to participate. If participation is unsuccessful, Suffolk MASH will consider escalation of concerns via service management.
- 21.4 If there are no concerns of significant harm, Suffolk MASH will liaise with the home residence local authority to establish if child is known to their services and consultation will take place where needed. Suffolk MASH will make all attempts to contact the child to gather their views of what they want to happen and where appropriate liaise with family members to arrange safe return home.

## **22. Children Who Go Missing from Care Who Are Placed by Suffolk in Another Local Authority**

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- 22.1 Suffolk County Council will reduce the risk of child in care going missing by placing children in the most appropriate placement. Any decision by County Resource Panel to place a child at a distance will be based on an assessment of the child's needs including their need to be effectively safeguarded. All details of any history of running

away/or risk of running away will be in the child's Placement Information Record and checks will be made to ensure that the care provider (residential or foster care) has appropriate procedures in place.

22.2 This must include following the care providers local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care Procedures and contacting the child's social worker/ Social Care Manager in Suffolk who will consider the need for a [strategy discussion](#) to include local police and ensure that a return interview is conducted within 72 hours. An early child in care (CiC) Review may be convened to address issues for the child and placement.

22.3 If a child placed out of county is reported missing, once the social worker has been made aware, they are required to then inform the missing children coordinator of the details via the missing children inbox – [missing.children@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:missing.children@suffolk.gov.uk)

The Missing Children Coordinator will then track the missing episode to ensure all safeguarding procedures are carried out appropriately such as a strategy discussion, following the escalation process if necessary and ensuring a return interview is carried out once the child is located.

## **23. Planning for the Return**

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23.1 Where a child goes missing from their care placement, plans must be made to respond promptly once the child is located. If the child is located but the professionals involved are unable to establish meaningful contact with the child, perhaps because they are under duress or being harboured, then Children's Social Care will consider whether an application for a recovery order is required.

23.2 Children's Social Care will consider whether the child should be returned to their placement.

23.3 Care staff or foster parents will need to continue to offer warm and consistent care when they return.

23.4 An early CiC Review may be convened to address issues for the child and placement.

## **24. Care Planning for Children who Go Missing from Care**

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24.1 Statutory Reviews will provide the opportunity to ensure that the care plan is amended to address reasons why the child was missing, and the Independent Reviewing Officers will ensure that this includes a strategy to prevent re- occurrence. Where there is evidence that a child is vulnerable to exploitation, consideration must be given to convening a review to consider whether the placement is able to put in place a strategy

to minimise risk to the child or whether an alternative placement needs to be sought to keep the child safe.

- 24.2 Suffolk's Children and Young Peoples Services ensures that all providers of fostering services and residential care have policies and procedures for when children go missing from their care placement which are compatible with these procedures.
- 24.3 Safeguarding Managers who conduct 'Regulation 44' visits to residential establishments will ensure that records of children being absent without authority or going missing are updated and that procedures for each child have been followed.
- 24.4 Chronologies should be kept up to date for children who repeatedly go missing where this may be a significant event, to assist in identifying patterns of absence or concerns about care arrangements.
- 24.5 The children that are considered to be at the highest risk within the month will be subject of Multi-Agency review at the Monthly Police-led Tactical & Tasking Coordination Group Meeting (TTCG).
- 24.6 Helplines and other advice information:
- The [Missing People](#) charity provides crisis support to any young person who has run away from home or care, or been forced to leave through the Runaway Helpline contacted via Freefone 0800 800 7070
  - [UK Missing Persons Unit](#)
  - [Ofsted, Missing children, February 2013](#)
  - [Children who go missing from care: A participatory project with young people as peer interviewers. \(2012\). Taylor J., Rahilly T., and Hunter H., NSPCC](#)
  - [Safecall Service](#)