

Absent/Missing Children/Young People

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1 Legislative Framework and Guidance

England

- Regulation 12: The protection of children standard
- Guide to the protection of children standard
- Regulation 34: Policies for the protection of children
- Regulation 40: Notification of a serious event

Wales

- Regulation 18: Provider Assessment
- Regulation 15: Personal plan
- Regulation 27: Safeguarding policies and procedures
- Notifications: Schedule 3
- Statutory Guidance on Regulated Services (Service Providers and Responsible Individuals) (Wales) Regulations 2017
- Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

2 Outcome

Children/Young people have a clear understanding of the consequences and risks of leaving the home without permission or consent.

3 Definitions

There are various different terms which are used in relation to missing children/young people. [Statutory Guidance On Children Who Run Away Or Go Missing From Home Or Care \(January 2014\)](#) uses the following definitions:

1. **Missing Child or Young Person:** A child or young person reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.
2. **Missing from Care:** A Looked After child or young person who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts are not known.
3. **Away from Placement Without Authorisation:** A Looked After child or young person whose whereabouts are known but who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.
4. **Young Runaway:** A child or young person who has run away from their Home or care

placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave. The Police ([ACPO Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons \(2013\)](#)) categorise children or young people as either Missing or Absent.

5. **Missing:** Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.
6. **Absent:** A person is not at a place where they are expected or required to be.

The police classification of a person as 'Missing' or 'Absent' will be based on on-going risk assessment. Note that Absent within the police definition would not include those defined as Away from Placement Without Authorisation above: a child or young person whose whereabouts are known would not be treated as either 'Missing' or 'Absent' under the police definitions. Police will not be sent to cases where children or young people are defined as being 'absent'. Instead the onus will be on care providers to take steps to locate the child or young person, with monitoring by the police and escalation to 'missing' if there is a change to the circumstances that has increased the level of risk. It is expected that all reasonable steps should be taken by care providers to locate the child or young person prior to making a report to the police. Where they remain absent, and the care provider feels that they may be at risk of harm, then a report should be made to the police. Police will attend reports of 'missing children or young people'.

4 Culture

1. Children/Young people are less likely to go missing or absent themselves without consent where they feel secure and safe, able to express their feelings and wishes, make appropriate choices and develop positive relationships with the staff and their peers, which are free from bullying.
2. Children/Young people should feel that their plans are being progressed, that they have a positive future and that staff are working enthusiastically to support, advice and listen to them.
3. They should also have a clear understanding of expectations upon them, the routines of the Home and house rules; to this end, they should know whether it is acceptable, or not, to leave the Home without permission or consent and they should be counselled and informed of the risks that are posed to them if they become missing or absent themselves, of the agencies that may be able to help them and of the consequences.
4. If Homes are experiencing high levels of absence or incidences of children/young people being missing, managers should 'take stock' – they should undertake a formal review of the culture and strategies being used in the Home and take steps to reduce the incidents.

4.1 Protection of Children/Young People

As part of the process of reducing absence, it is essential that children/young people are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. Staff have specific responsibilities to protect children/young people:

1. Assess whether each child/young person is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's/young person's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child/young person;
2. Help each child/young person to understand how to keep safe;
3. Have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child/young person is at risk of harm;
4. Manage relationships between children/young people to prevent them from harming each other;
5. Understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children/young people that are assigned to them by the registered person;
6. Take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's/young person's welfare; and
7. Be familiar with, and act in accordance with, the Home's child protection policies;
8. Ensure that the Home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child/young person safe and to protect each child/young person effectively from harm;
9. Ensure that the premises used for the purposes of the Home are located so that children/young people are effectively safeguarded;
10. Ensure that the premises used for the purposes of the Home are designed, furnished and maintained so as to protect each child/young person from avoidable hazards to the child's/young person's health;
11. Ensure that the effectiveness of the Home's child protection policies is monitored regularly.

4.2 Policies for the Protection of Children

The Registered Manager/Home Manager must prepare and implement a policy which is intended to safeguard children or young people accommodated in the children's Home from abuse or neglect; and sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect.

The procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect must:

1. Provide for liaison and co-operation with any local authority which are, or may be making a child protection enquiry in relation to a child or young person accommodated in the Home;
2. Provide for the prompt referral of an allegation about current or ongoing abuse or neglect in relation to a child or young person to the placing authority and, if different, the local

- authority in whose area the Home is located;
3. Provide for the prompt referral of an allegation about past abuse or neglect in relation to a child or young person to the placing authority and, if different, the local authority in whose area the alleged abuse or neglect occurred;
 4. Provide for records to be kept of an allegation of abuse or neglect, and the action taken in response;
 5. Describe the measures which may be necessary to protect children or young people following an allegation of abuse or neglect;
 6. Describe how and to whom staff are to report, without delay, any concern about abuse or neglect of a child or young person.

The Registered Manager/Home Manager must prepare and implement a policy for the prevention of bullying in the Home, which must in particular set out the procedure for dealing with an allegation of bullying.

The Registered Manager/Home Manager must prepare and implement a policy ('the missing child policy') setting out:

1. The steps taken, and to be taken, to prevent children or young people from being absent without permission
2. The procedures to be followed, and the roles and responsibilities of persons working at the Home, in relation to a child or young person who is, or has been, so absent.

Before implementing, or making an amendment which the registered person considers to be substantive to, the missing child policy, the registered person must:

1. Consult, and take into account the views of, each relevant person
2. Have regard to any relevant local authority or police protocols on missing children or young people.

The registered person must keep under review and, as necessary, revise the Home's child protection policies.

5 Planning and Prevention

1. All children/young people must have a Placement Plan which takes account of any likely risk of the child/young person becoming missing or absent without consent. Where there are child/young person protection concerns relating to a child/young person and/or where the child/young person has gone missing from the placement or from any previous placement, the Placement Plan must include information agreed between the local authority and the

placement provider about the day-to-day arrangements put in place to keep the child/young person safe.

2. At the request of the child/young person or where there are concerns about a child/young person who frequently becomes absent or missing, the Home's manager should consider raising concerns with the Child's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) or arranging a meeting between the child/young person and the placing authority to consider the reasons for the child/young person going missing and agree strategies to reduce the risk.
3. The child's/young person's Looked After Review should be brought forward in the following circumstances:
 - (a) Where the child/young person is, or has been, persistently absent from the placement;
 - (b) Where the Home, parents or area authority are concerned that the child/young person is at risk of harm;
 - (c) Where the child/young person so requests, unless the Independent Reviewing Officer considers that the review is not justified.
4. It is advisable that a Police 'Misper' form should be completed for all children/young people at the point of admission. The child's/young person's Placement Plan should be reviewed regularly and after any absence.

6 Leaving without Consent

1. If a child/young person indicates that they propose to leave the Home without consent, staff should remain aware that a child/young person might want a staff member to stop them or at least give them a good excuse for not going.
2. It is crucial that staff always show care and concern, even if they are sure that a child/young person is going to run away. It is important to make a point of showing care and concern both for their benefit and for other children/young people in the group. However, staff are responsible for taking all reasonable steps to prevent children/young people from leaving, especially if it will result in the child/young person or others being placed at risk.
3. As a last resort, this can include the use of physical restrictions such as the locking or bolting of door to restrict the child'/young person's movement¹ or Physical Intervention, if this is immediately necessary to prevent significant harm or serious damage to property. However, the use of such interventions may only be used as a last resort, if they are immediately necessary and the harm or damage to property is likely in the predictable future; in any case, the restrictions or interventions must be proportionate and must be compliant with Restrictive Physical Intervention Procedure. Staff must also consider the individual Placement or behaviour management plans for individual children/young people, which may state that

¹Doors may not be locked or bolted to restrict children's/young people's movement unless the Home's Statement of Purpose contains a policy on when and how the strategy may be used and staff have received training on the use of it.

specific strategies must be used.

7 Immediate Actions if a Child/Young Person is Absent or Missing

In the absence of any agreed Strategy the following must apply if it is apparent or suspected that a child/young person is absent or missing. In such circumstances, staff should take what actions are immediately necessary to recover the child/young person, in the context of risks posed to the child/young person or others.

7.1 Immediate Actions

1. If it is safe to do so, staff should undertake enquiries locally and with the other children/young people as to the whereabouts of the child/young person to establish that s/he is absent. This may include a thorough check of the local area and the Home and may include contacting people who know the child/young person or going out to look for them. If the child/young person has become absent during an activity away from the Home, staff should conduct a search of the vicinity, if it is safe to do so.
2. Searches beyond the local vicinity may only be undertaken with the approval of the manager.
3. If staff are satisfied that the child/young person is absent or missing but they are aware or suspect the whereabouts of a child/young person, they should consult a Manager with a view to recovering the child/young person. This may include attempting to communicate with the child/young person on his or her mobile phone, searching for the child/young person and/or obtaining information from others about the possible whereabouts of the child/young person.

7.2 Recovering the Child/Young Person

Any actions taken to recover the child/young person and return them to the Home must focus on promoting the child's/young person's welfare and must take account of their care or legal status, age, understanding and level of risk posed to the child/young person or others. If children/young people are found but refuse to return to the Home, staff must consult the manager (who should consult the child's/young person's Social Worker) or, in an emergency/where the child/young person or others are seriously at risk, call the Police. There may be circumstances where a child can be prevented from leaving a home – for example a child who is putting themselves at risk of injury by leaving the home to carry out gang related activities, use drugs or to meet someone who is sexually exploiting them or intends to do so. Any such measure of restraint must be proportionate and in place for no longer than is necessary to manage the immediate risk.

8 Risk Assessments, Monitoring and Notifications

Having established the child/young person is absent or missing, an assessment should be carried out to determine the level of risk that is posed to the child/young person i.e. if the risk is 'Low', 'Medium' or 'High' Risk. This assessment and any re-assessment must be recorded. The first assessment must be conducted once it is established the child/young person is absent or missing, then every two hours or as circumstances change.

8.1 Assessing Risks/Who to Notify

8.1.1 Low Level Concern

For Guidance on Assessing Risks see Appendix 1: Assessing Levels of Concern Guidance on page 12, if the child/young person is assessed as Low Risk.

1. Notifications: There is no requirement to notify the Police, Social Worker or parents.
2. Review of Risks: every 2 hours or as circumstances changes; if the child/young person is Absent/Missing for 6 hours he/she automatically becomes Medium Risk.

8.1.2 Medium Level Concern

If the child/young person has been Absent or Missing for 6 Hours (s)he must be categorised as Medium Risk. There may be other risk factors that categorise the child/young person as Medium Risk (see Appendix 1: Assessing Levels of Concern Guidance on 12) the following applies:

1. Notifications: The Police, Social Worker and parents may be consulted or verbally notified, for information, but there is no requirement to notify them formally.
2. Review of Risks: Every two hours by staff or as circumstances change. If a Missing child/young person remains in the Medium Category for a total of 6 hours he/she automatically falls into High Level Category.

8.1.3 High Level Concern

For Guidance on assessing Risks see Appendix 1: Assessing Levels of Concern Guidance on page 12. Notifications: If there is a High Level of Concern:

1. The Police in the area where the child/young person became absent must be formally notified;
2. The Social Worker must be notified as soon as practicable. The Social Worker should decide whether to notify the parent(s) and, if so, who should do so;

3. If the child/young person has Absconded from lawful custody, the Youth Offending Team (YOT) must be notified.

8.2 Information Sharing and Recording

When notifying/informing the Police (in the area where they have become absent e.g. if on an activity away from the Home), Social Worker or others e.g. Youth Offending Worker/Team, it is vital to provide information about the circumstances and risk factors that led to the notification; but it is also important to discuss possible strategies for finding and recovering the child/young person safely. Agreement should also be reached about others who may need to know the child/young person is Absent or Missing e.g. the child's/young person's parents. It is advisable that a Police 'Misper' form should be completed for all children/young people, at the point of admission. The child's/young person's Placement Plan should be reviewed regularly and after any absence, but they will require the following information:

1. A description of the child/young person, possibly a photograph;
2. When the child/young person was last seen and with whom;
3. A recent photograph of the child/young person;
4. Family addresses;
5. Other addresses of people the child/young person may make contact with;
6. Any previous history of the child/young person going missing;
7. The name and address of the child's/young person's GP and Dentist.

The Police, Social Worker and others notified must then be updated as circumstances change and when the child/young person returns. Staff must record the incident on the following and update these records as circumstances change or decisions/actions taken:

1. Daily Log;
2. Child's/young person's Daily Record/File;
3. Absence Log.

9 Prolonged Periods of Absence or being Missing

After 24 hours or on the first working day after the child/young person has been reported missing/absent, the Line Manager for the Home must be notified. Also, the Home should consult/update the Police and Social Worker/YOT Worker every day for the first 7 days, or as new information is available, to review the Strategies that can be adopted to find/return the child/young person. After 72 hours, the Police will notify the National Missing Persons Bureau. If the child/young person is still absent after 7 days, the Head of Care and child's/young person's Independent

Reviewing Officer (IRO) must be notified/consulted to decide what actions to take e.g.

1. The convening of a Strategy Discussion;
2. Use by the Police of their powers to recover the child/young person, for example, placing a child/young person in Police Protection;
3. An application for a Recovery Order;
4. The use of publicity.

10 Returning Children/Young People

If a child's/young person's whereabouts become known, staff should consult the registered manager/home manager social worker/YOT worker and Police about the most appropriate way to return the child/young person to the Home or care. Any actions taken should preferably be with the co-operation or by negotiation with the child/young person.

11 Upon Return of the Child/Young Person

1. The Police, Social Worker/YOT Worker and others notified of the absence must be informed when the child/young person returns. The child/young person must be welcomed back and must have the opportunity to talk about the reasons for leaving.
2. At the request of the child/young person or where there are concerns about a child/young person who frequently becomes absent or missing, the Home's Manager should consider arranging a meeting between the child/young person and the placing authority to consider the reasons for the child/young person going missing.
3. If the Social Worker is unable to see the child/young person, an independent professional or the Manager/supervisor of the Home may meet the child/young person on the Social Worker's behalf.
4. The Police may wish to carry out a 'Safe and Well' check, to check for any indications that the child/young person has suffered harm; where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them. However, where the child/young person goes missing frequently, the Police are likely to see them every time they return. However, a reasonable decision will be taken with regard to the frequency of such checks.
5. An Independent Return Interview should be carried out by an independent professional (e.g. a Social Worker, teacher, health professional or police officer, who does not usually work with the child/young person and is trained to carry out these interviews). Children/Young people sometimes need to build up trust with a person before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they ran away.
6. The person conducting the interview should usually be independent of the child's/young

person's placement and of the responsible local authority. An exception maybe where a child/young person has a strong relationship with a carer or Social Worker and has expressed a preference to talk to them, rather than an independent person, about the reasons they went missing.

7. The responsible local authority should ensure the Return Interview takes place, working closely with the host authority where appropriate. Contact should be made with the child/young person within 72 hours of them being located or returning from absence, to arrange an Independent Return Interview in a neutral place where they feel safe.
8. Where a looked after child/young person has run away they should have the opportunity to talk, before they return to their placement, to a person who is independent of their placement about the reasons they went missing. The child/young person should be offered the option of speaking to an independent representative or advocate.

12 Recording, Notifications and Review

12.1 Recording

For details about recording the initial incident (when the child/young person is reported as absent/missing) see Section 8.2 Information Sharing/Recording. Throughout, staff must update the following records:

1. Daily Log;
2. Child's/Young person's Daily Record/File;
3. Missing Persons Log.

12.2 Notifications

When the child/young person returns, all those notified of the absence must be informed. If the child/young person was involved in sexual exploitation, the Regulatory Authority and RI must be notified. If there is a pattern of persistent incidents or the circumstances gave rise for serious concern, the Home's Manager must notify the child's/young person's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The notification must be made or confirmed in writing.

12.3 Review

If a child/young person is, or has been, persistently absent without permission from the Home and/or the Manager considers that the child/young person is at risk of harm, the Manager will ask the placing authority to review the child's/young person's Care Plan. The Manager will consult the RI, child's/young person's Social Worker/YOT Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) with

a view to reviewing the Care Plan. If it is decided not to review the Care Plan, the Home's Manager should still review the Placement Plan.

13 Appendix 1: Assessing Levels of Concern Guidance

13.1 Section 1: Indicators/Categories of Risk

There is additional guidance in Section 2: Other Factors that Should be Considered.

13.1.1 High Risk

A child/young person is automatically High Risk in the following circumstances

1. If the child/young person is Remanded or otherwise Lawfully Detained, he/she is Absconded;
2. If the child/young person has been Absent/Missing for 12 hours;
3. The child's/young person's death may occur;
4. The child/young person may be at risk of serious injury or harm, e.g. from adverse weather conditions or the child's/young person's inability to stay safe;
5. The child/young person requires essential medication/medical attention;
6. The child/young person is likely to suffer Significant Harm;
7. The child/young person may come into contact with a person who may pose them a risk.
The child/young person may be injured, including self injury, and require medical attention;
8. There is a warrant for the child's/young person's arrest;
9. The child/young person may commit a violent or criminal offence;
10. The child/young person may be abducted;
11. If the child's/young person's name is on the list for a child/young person subject to a Child Protection Plan;
12. The child/young person is subject to Police Protection;
13. The child/young person is subject to an Emergency Protection Order or Recovery Order.

13.1.2 Other Risk Factors

These are risks/indicators that should be considered when assessing other children/young people , who do not automatically fall into the High Risk Category.

Time Factors:

Risks must be (re) assessed every two hours or if circumstances changes;

If a child/young person categorised as Low Risk has been Absent or Missing for 6 Hours he/she is

automatically categorised as Medium Risk;

If a child/young person or young person categorised as Medium Risk has been Absent or Missing for 6 Hours he/she is automatically categorised as High Risk.

Other Risk Factors that must be considered when assessing the risks to the child/young person or others:

1. Any guidance agreed within the child's/young person's Care Plan or Placement Plan;
2. Vulnerability due to age;
3. Particularly vulnerable (e.g. Learning/Physical disability, on child/young person subject to a child/young person Protection Plan);
4. In need of regular medication (e.g. diabetic);
5. Previous history of being missing;
6. History of self harming;
7. Possible involvement in crime;
8. Health, including mental health;
9. Weather (e.g. severe cold or heat), or geography (e.g. remote area);
10. Dependency on drugs and/or alcohol;
11. Known vulnerability of the child/young person, raising concern that they may have been led into danger, including sexual exploitation;
12. Known associates that give rise to heightened concerns over the missing child's/young person's safety (e.g. associates known to be involved in criminal activities);
13. Degree of risk to the public;
14. Recent significant events, contributory factors and the child's/young person's state of mind at the time of the absence;
15. Time of day/night;
16. Legal status.

13.2 Section 2: Other Factors that Should be Considered

The following should be considered alongside Section 1: Indicators/Categories of Risk

1. **Age and level of understanding:** Age and level of understanding Age is a factor, but not alone. Also consider level of understanding, ability to make informed decisions, the child's/young person's ability to operate in urban or rural environments, social and life skills, disability etc. The more able the child/young person is, the less concern staff should have.
2. **Number of Absences:** Consider the number of times the child/young person has absented themselves and from what situations. For example, children/young people who have absented themselves from similar accommodations and returned safely may be of less

concern than those who are not known to staff or who do not normally absent themselves.

3. **Behaviour whilst absent** Consider what the child/young person does or is suspected to get involved in whilst absent on previous occasions. Also consider how recent such problems have been. Higher levels of concern should be attributed to those who are known, recently, to have placed themselves or others at risk of significant harm. The factors that may result in higher levels of concern are that the child/young person has previously:
 - (a) Made contact with people who pose a risk to the child/young person;
 - (b) Been abducted;
 - (c) Self injured or attempted suicide;
 - (d) Committed or been associated with a serious or criminal offence;
 - (e) Been subject to sexual exploitation;
 - (f) Or other serious risks/concerns.
4. **Circumstances on the day** The following are examples of circumstances, which may be considered in deciding the level of concern on the day. The fact that they apply to a child/young person does not automatically mean there is a high level of concern; the decision rests with the Manager having considered all the circumstances.
 - (a) Out of character/unusual behaviour prior to disappearance;
 - (b) Absence with no prior indication;
 - (c) Possibility of sexual exploitation or being drawn into offending behaviour.

14 Revision History

Date of next review: August 2023

Date of review: August 2022

Date of review: June 2021

Date of review: July 2019

Date of review: June 2018

Date of review: May 2017

Date of review: May 2016

Date of review: April 2016

Date of review: February 2016

Date of release: April 2015