



Children Missing from Care and Home

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No	Content
1	Introduction and Context
2	Scope
3	Definitions
4	Roles and Responsibilities
5	Specific Risks
6	Children Missing from Home
7	Children who are Looked After and go Missing (including Care Leavers)
8	Publicity/Media Strategy
9	When a Child Missing from Home or Care is Located or Returns
10	Return Home Interview
11	Responding to Information from Prevention Interviews and Return Home Interviews
12	Assessments following a Missing Episode
13	The Missing Children Panel and Risk Management Meetings
14	Support for Families
15	Monitoring of Missing Children Data
	Appendix 1: Glossary
	Appendix 2: Helplines
	Appendix 3: Missing Persons Reporting Form
	Appendix 4: Partner Agency Contact Details

1. Introduction and Context

The following protocol and procedure has been created to provide a multi-agency response to children who are missing or have been missing from home and care. Going missing is a dangerous activity and a child who goes missing just once faces the same immediate risks as those who regularly go missing.

The National Crime Agency's latest report on missing persons showed that in 2014-15 there were a total of 60,657 individual children recorded as having been missing on police data systems in England and Wales. In total these children went missing some 127,424 times.

The immediate risks associated with going missing include:

- No means of support or legitimate income - leading to high-risk activities
- Involvement in criminal activities, including becoming a victim of crime
- Becoming a victim of abuse
- Alcohol/substance misuse
- Deterioration of physical and mental health
- Missing out on schooling and education
- Increased vulnerability
- Sexual exploitation
- Criminal exploitation

Longer-term risks include:

- Long-term drug dependency / alcohol dependency
- Criminal activity
- Homelessness
- Disengagement from education/training
- Poor physical and/or mental health

2. Scope

This joint procedure applies to:

- All children under 18 who go missing from their parents/carers/home
- Children "[Looked After](#)" by Surrey Council placed within the authority's boundaries
- Children "[Looked After](#)" by other local authorities, but placed within Surrey boundaries
- Children who are living in supported accommodation

3. Definitions

Missing - 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' to high-risk cases that require immediate, intensive action. Risk assessing is dynamic and can change with any new information

Anyone including children can be risk assessed as:

No Apparent Risk – there is no apparent risk of harm to either the subject or the public.

Low Risk – the risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but minimal.

Medium Risk – the risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.

High Risk – the risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.

If a child is assessed as No Apparent Risk a short review time will be set for actions to be carried out by the informant to gather more information or locate the missing person.

Risk of serious harm has been defined as (Home Office 2002 and OASys 2006):

‘A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible.’

LEAD PERSON WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE:

Surrey Children’s Service – Head of Safeguarding

Surrey Police – Detective Superintendent, Deputy Head of Public Protection

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 Local Authority

Local authorities must ensure that all incidents where children go missing are appropriately risk assessed, and should record all incidents of [looked after](#) children who are missing or away from placement without authorisation.

The local authority should consult with the police regarding what action should be taken to share information about a missing child who is [looked after](#), subject to a [child protection plan](#) or a [child in need](#). This should include an assessment of whether to release information to the media. The local authority should also notify other local authorities according to degree of concern. Consideration should also be given to whether the child or their family has links to other areas in the United Kingdom.

4.2 Police Powers

Police powers are limited and difficulties can arise when missing children are found but do not want to return to their placement.

Where there is a reasonable cause to believe a child under 18 could suffer [significant harm](#), the Police can take the child into Police Protection under the Children Act 1989. The child can be removed to suitable accommodation, which could include the home from which the child originally went missing.

Police will consider a range of options to secure the child safety. This may involve consideration of possible offences being committed under the Child Abduction Act 1984.

4.3 Health

Healthcare professionals have a key role in identifying and reporting children who may be missing from care, home and school.

Missing children access a number of services provided by a range of health providers, for example:

- Urgent Care Units
- Accident and Emergency Departments
- Genito-Urinary Medicine Clinics (GUM)
- Community Sexual Health Services
- Pharmacy Services

Health professionals should have an understanding of the vulnerabilities and risks associated with children that go missing. Staff working in health settings should be aware of their professional responsibilities and

the responses undertaken by the multi-agency partnership. Risks include sexual exploitation, trafficking, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

All professionals including the voluntary and independent sector and social workers must keep a full record of all the actions taken and messages received and given throughout the missing incident. Police will likewise keep a record on the appropriate missing person report and/or ICAD.

Each agency must update their agency IT systems to reflect all missing incidents.

The College of Policing has issued APP Guidance on missing persons which sets out the responsibilities of parents and carers, and when to make a referral to the local authority in relation to missing children

5. Specific Risks

5.1 Child Sexual Exploitation

The sexual exploitation of children involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where the young person (or third person/s) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common.

Involvement in exploitative relationships is characterised by the child's or young person's limited availability of choice as a result of their social, economic or emotional vulnerability.

A common feature of [CSE](#) is that the child or young person does not recognise the coercive nature of the relationship and does not see themselves as a victim of exploitation.

Going missing is a significant risk factor in relation to sexual exploitation:

- A child may go missing because they are being sexually exploited;
- A child's risk of being sexually exploited might increase because they are missing and are spending time with people who may seek to involve them in sexual exploitation. The risk is heightened whilst they are missing because the protective factors of family or care are not available to them.

Because there is such a strong link between children going missing and risk of sexual exploitation, professionals should always assess whether a child who has gone missing is being sexually exploited or at risk of being sexually exploited. See [SSCP procedure re. Child Sexual Exploitation](#)

5.2 Trafficking

Some of the children who local authorities look after may be unaccompanied asylum seeking children or other migrant children. Some children in this group may have been trafficked into the UK and may remain under the influence of their traffickers even while they are [looked after](#). Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing, with most going missing within one week of becoming [looked after](#) and many within 48 hours. Unaccompanied migrant or asylum seeking children, who go missing immediately after becoming [looked after](#), should be treated as children who may be victims of trafficking. If there is a concern that a child has been trafficked, a referral should be made to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). See also [SSCP Procedure re. Trafficking](#).

5.3 Grooming

[Grooming](#) is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of [sexual abuse](#) or exploitation. Children and young people can be groomed online or in the real world, by a stranger or by someone they know - for example a family member, friend or professional. Groomers may be male or female. They could be any age. Many children and young people don't understand that they have been groomed, or that what has happened is abuse.

Children can be groomed for the purpose of [sexual abuse](#) as well as other forms of exploitation including involvement in criminal and extremist activity. Children who are missing are more vulnerable to being groomed and may also go missing as a result of being groomed.

5.4 Radicalisation

Children and young people can suffer harm when exposed to extremist ideology. This harm can range from a child adopting or complying with extreme views which limit their social interaction and full engagement with their education, to children being groomed for involvement in violent attacks.

Children can be exposed to harmful, extremist ideology in the immediate or extended family, or relatives/family friends who live outside the family home but have influence over the child's life. Older children or young people might self-radicalise over the internet or through the influence of their peer network – in this instance their parents might not know about this or feel powerless to stop their child's radicalisation.

Going missing is a risk factor in relation to radicalisation:

- A child may go missing because they have already been radicalised;
- A child's risk of being radicalised might increase because they are missing and are spending time with people who may seek to involve them in radical/extreme activities. The risk is heightened whilst they are missing, because the protective factors of family or care are not available to them.

See also SSCP Procedure re. Supporting Children and Young People vulnerable to violent extremism

5.5 Homeless 16/17 year olds

When a 16 or 17 year old runs away or goes missing they are no less vulnerable than younger children and are equally at risk, particularly of sexual exploitation or involvement with gangs.

When a 16 -17 year old presents as homeless, local authority children's services must assess their needs as for any other child. Where this assessment indicates that the young person is in need and requires accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act 1989, they will usually become [looked after](#).

5.6 Risk of offending behaviour

Children and young people who go missing from care, home and education also need safeguarding against the risk of being drawn into offending behaviour. For example, some children may be used by gangs to transport and distribute drugs.

6. Children missing from home

6.1 Responsibility of the Alerter: Parents/Carers, Agencies and Voluntary Sector

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If a child is thought to be missing or not where they are supposed to be, immediate efforts should be made to try and locate him/her. Parents, carers or a responsible adult involved with the child are expected to undertake the following basic steps to try and locate the child if considered safe to do so:

- Search bedroom/house/outbuildings/vehicles;
- Contact known friends and relatives where child may be;
- Check mobile phone, email and internet sites i.e. Facebook;
- Visit locations that the child is known to frequent.

If the child cannot be found the parent/carer/responsible adult should report the situation to the police providing as much detail as possible. The police rely on full and accurate information in order to make risk assessments and pursue any subsequent investigation.

If it comes to the attention of any agency or voluntary organisation that a child is missing from home they must advise the parent/carer of the organisation's duty to ensure the matter is reported to the police. There is an expectation that parents/carers will report their child as missing, failure to do so may be raised as a child protection issue.

6.2 Police Response

When a child is reported as missing the Police will initiate an investigation that is appropriate to the level of risk. The parent/referrer must inform the Police of any relevant information that may alter the level of risk, and also notify Police if the child returns or is located as soon as possible. Once the child has returned the Police will attend and conduct a Prevention Interview to ensure the person is safe and well. The purpose of the prevention interview is to identify any ongoing risk or factors which may contribute to the child going missing again. Prevention interviews will therefore be carried out in all high, medium and low risk cases, they will also be considered on a case by case basis for no apparent risk cases. The interview provides a valuable opportunity to find out useful information that may indicate harm suffered by the returning person.

Police will investigate all missing children and will respond in accordance with the Surrey Police Missing Persons Policy and Procedure.

Arrangements should be agreed and made for when the child is located. The Police will not transport as a matter of routine, they will only assist if there is an evidenced risk of violence or risk to a child's safety. The person with parental responsibility will be expected to collect the child or arrange and pay for transport.

6.3 Risk Assessment

Where the information from the child, parent/carer / police gathered in the return home interview indicates the child has suffered, or is likely to suffer [significant harm](#) the C-SPA will review the level of risk and make any necessary decisions and outcomes.

6.4 Longer or Significant Missing episodes.

Whenever a child is missing for more than 48 hours, in the event of repeat episodes (3 episodes or more in a 90 day period); or where indicators of particular risk are identified, eg. contact with a person who poses a risk to children, risk of [child sexual exploitation](#) or risk of [significant harm](#), a Strategy Meeting, arranged by Surrey Children's Services, should be held.

This should be attended by:

- Police Missing Persons Unit;
- A representative of the local authority able to take authoritative decisions about the steps needed to locate and protect the child;
- Other relevant agencies, - e.g. representatives from the Surrey Family Services, [CAMHS](#), health, education and Catch 22;
- Person who has conducted return interview/s if different from above.

This meeting should try to identify any 'push' or 'pull' factors in the case and any other voluntary or statutory agency that has an interest, or may take an interest, in the missing child's welfare and

circumstances. In the case of 'pull' factors it may be necessary to target those in the community who harbour the missing child or exploit them with regard to crime, sex or drugs.

All agencies who attend/are invited to the meeting are responsible for ensuring that there is a clear statement of the actions being taken in respect of the missing child and should satisfy themselves that all possible steps are being taken to locate and ensure the welfare of the child.

Repeat missing episodes should be viewed with as much concern as children who go missing for the first time. The persistence of this behaviour would suggest at least that the action following from earlier assessments should be reviewed and alternative options considered.

6.5 Children for whom there is a [Child Protection Plan](#) or Subject to [Section 47](#) Enquiries who go Missing

Children who have a [Child Protection Plan](#) or who are subject to a [Section 47](#) enquiry need additional action to that required for other children.

This includes:

- The responsible social worker must inform the Head of Safeguarding Unit, Surrey Children's Services and the Lead Nurse Safeguarding Children using the Notification form.
- Where a child is missing for more than 48 hours, has had 3 or more missing episodes in a 90 day period; or where indicators of particular risk are identified, eg. contact with a person who poses a risk to children, risk of [child sexual exploitation](#) or risk of [significant harm](#), a Strategy Meeting, chaired by a Children's Service Manager should be arranged as soon as practicable and in any event within five working days of notification. A representative from the relevant Police Public Protection Investigation Unit should attend, and if possible, a representative from Police Missing Persons Unit, as well as other practitioners involved with the child.
- All members of the [Core group](#) must be informed that the child is missing and of the outcome of the Strategy discussion;
- Legal Services should be contacted if the child is subject to court proceedings. For [looked after](#) children, the procedure below should be followed.

6.6 Children who may have been Abducted or Kidnapped

The criteria for launching a Child Rescue Alert are strict so as to ensure the public, professionals and media do not become de-sensitised to them.

The four criteria, all of which MUST be satisfied before an alert is issued are:

- The child is apparently under 18 years old;
- There is a reasonable belief that the child has been kidnapped or abducted;
- There is a reasonable belief that the child is in imminent danger of serious harm or death;
- There is sufficient information available to enable the public to assist Police in locating the child.

In the case of a [Looked After](#) Child, Assistant Director of Children's Services will give permission for launching a child rescue alert.

7. Children who are in care and go missing (including care leavers)

7.1 Prevention and Planning

Prior to each accommodation requirement for a [looked after](#) child, the care planning process should consider all potential risks to the child, including an assessment of the potential for them to go missing including any missing episodes prior to the child becoming '[looked after](#)'.

It is essential that Police and Surrey Children's Services share information about children who are missing from care. It is good practice for Police to be notified of the following to assist in the early identification of risk for those individuals accommodated in Children's Homes.

Regular ongoing contact with the Missing Persons Unit should be established to provide updates and encourage the flow of information in order to safeguard the children resident in your home. The Missing Persons Unit should be alerted if a new child is admitted who poses a high risk of going missing.

7.2 Individual Risk Assessment

Individual risk assessments are an essential part of the care plan and will enable staff/carers to be clear what the risks are for the particular child. An evaluation of whether the child is likely to go missing should be based on information about their:

- Individual circumstances, including family circumstances;
- Motivation for going missing;
- Possible destination; and
- Recent pattern of missing episodes.

If the child has gone missing from residential or foster care and a risk assessment has not been completed in advance, the carer must contact the child's social worker/duty social worker or emergency duty team (if out of hours), who will assist with completion of the risk assessment and advise on reporting the child to Police.

7.3 Report to the Police

The initial responsibility for managing a missing incident lies with the staff of the children's home or foster carer. There is an expectation that staff or foster carers will make reasonable enquiries to locate the missing child and encourage them to return to where they should be.

Residential staff/foster carers must (in addition to notifying Police) inform the:

- Parents or guardians and those who have parental responsibility
- Social Worker and the accountable service manager
- Independent Reviewing Officer, Safeguarding Children Unit
- Emergency Duty Team if out of hours and the Social Worker and accountable team manager the next working day
- Supervising Social Worker where relevant
- Surrey Family Services if the Child is on remand
- Responsible authority for the child if they are [LAC](#) placed by another local authority

It is intended that everyone works together to ensure that:

- All appropriate agencies and individuals are notified if children and young people are missing and when they return
- All appropriate agencies and individuals are notified if a child is at risk of [CSE](#)
- A clear plan of effective inter-agency action is in place to trace or return children who run away or go missing

- A clear plan of effective inter-agency action is in place to manage and reduce the level of risk of [CSE](#) to individuals;
- Appropriate and effective actions are taken when children and young people return or are located. This includes; (1) Provision of a Prevention Interview by police, (2) a Return Home Interview) and (3) on-going support when required;
- Children and young people are positively encouraged to influence the outcome of any professional intervention;
- Vulnerable children are protected and prevented from going missing;

Effective and early intervention and prevention strategies are implemented to help reduce the potential of repeat cases.

7.4 Missing during External Activity of a Residential Home

If a child goes missing outside their area, the carer in charge of the external activity or holiday will:

- Arrange a search in the area where the child went missing
- And notify:
 - Local police for that area
 - A senior manager at the home if relevant
 - Parents or guardians and those who have parental responsibility
 - Social Worker and the accountable service manager
 - Independent Reviewing Officer, Safeguarding Children Unit
 - Surrey Family Services if the Child is on remand
 - Emergency Duty Team if out of hours and the Social Worker and accountable team manager the next working day
 - Supervising Social Worker where relevant
 - The responsible authority for the child if [Looked After](#) by another Local Authority

7.5 Police Response

Upon the report to Police, if the Police is assessed as missing High, Medium or Low risk they will initiate an investigation to locate the missing person. The care provider must inform the Police of any relevant information that may alter the level of risk, and also notify Police if the individual returns or is located as soon as possible. Police will attend and conduct a Prevention Interview to ensure the person is safe and well. The purpose of the prevention interview is to identify any ongoing risk or factors which may contribute to the child going missing again. Prevention interviews will therefore be carried out in all high, medium and low risk cases, they will also be considered on a case by case basis for no apparent risk cases. The interview provides a valuable opportunity to find out useful information that may indicate harm suffered by the returning person.

Police will investigate all missing children and will respond in accordance with the Surrey Police Missing Persons Policy and Procedure.

Where a child who is [Looked After](#) is reported as missing to the Police by a reporting care provider or agency and is subsequently found, it will remain the care provider's responsibility to arrange and provide transport for the return of the child into their care.

Police will assist with transportation if there is an evidenced risk of violence or risk to a child's safety. If on arrival at a location the care provider believes there is a risk, then Police should be contacted and they will make a decision on the information given as to whether they can assist with transport.

7.6 Longer and Significant Missing Episodes and Incidents of Specific Concern

An Intervention meeting will be called to develop a strategy whenever:

- A child is missing for more than 48 hours
- In the event of repeat episodes (3 episodes or more in a 90 day period); or
- Where indicators of particular risk are identified, e.g. contact with a Person who poses a risk to Children, risk of [child sexual exploitation](#) or a risk of [significant harm](#)

This will be based on the risk assessment and the child's individual circumstances and will take place within a maximum of 5 working days of the episode starting.

For these meetings to achieve positive outcomes the appropriate attendance and clarity of purpose are essential. The meetings should be chaired and recorded and the increased levels of concern reflected in the seniority of those attending. This meeting will involve:

- The accountable Service Manager (Chair) from the authority responsible for the child's care (or Area Manager if the child has had 5 missing episodes in a 90 day period)
- The local police officer for Missing Person Investigations
- The registered manager of the children's home or fostering service (or their nominee);
- Parents/carers
- Person who conducted Return Home Interview, if different from above
- Representatives from Health/Education/[CAMHS](#)/Surrey Family Service (as appropriate)
- Any other voluntary or statutory agency that has an interest, or may take an interest, in the child's welfare and circumstances

The purpose of the intervention meeting is to review the actions taken up to this point, and satisfy themselves that all possible steps are being taken to locate and return the child. The meeting should also consider what actions are required to reduce the risk of [significant harm](#). The meeting should try to identify any 'push' or 'pull' factor in the case and 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, sex or drugs.

This level of intervention meeting is the crucial stage in avoiding serious escalation and must, therefore, be given high priority by all concerned.

7.7 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

For unaccompanied asylum seeking children the following additional steps should be undertaken:

- The UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) Local Team should also be notified within 24 hours of the child being considered missing from care. Regular contact should be maintained to ensure that the local authority is informed if the child has been detained or returned to their country of origin by the UKVI
- If the child has a legal representative, they should also be notified
- If and when the child returns, the above agencies should be informed

When managing longer, or significant, missing episodes of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, the strategy meeting will have an agreed action plan as well as a review date. The review may be held linked to the child's [LAC](#) review, which may be brought forward.

7.8 Children Living in Supported Accommodation

Supported Accommodation can be any housing scheme where safe accommodation and appropriate support are provided as an integrated package to vulnerable children. 16 & 17 year olds living in supported accommodation are moving towards independence and adulthood but may remain highly vulnerable as with the other children described above.

Supported accommodation provision varies greatly in the level of support, supervision and monitoring that is available. Some is staffed on a 24 hour basis, some has resident volunteers who live in the accommodation (but will not be on site at all times) and some have visiting day time staff. All will as a minimum have an on call services available 24 hours a day for emergencies. Due to these differing arrangements there may not at all time be responsible adults available to immediately notice or act upon a child going missing.

When any 16/17 yr old moves into supported accommodation the housing provider and any lead professional involved in supporting the child should discuss the issue of the child being missing from the accommodation and agree the expectations of all parties. This should include an assessment of the risk of going missing and the level of vulnerability that would seem likely if this does happen. The child would be expected to sleep at the accommodation every night, unless otherwise agreed between the provider, child and lead professional (where appropriate) and a failure to do so would lead to a consideration that they may be missing.

In the event that a child is missing from the provision then providers (working with any lead professionals involved) should attempt to ascertain their whereabouts. As a minimum this would involve telephoning the child and their designated next of kin / the person nominated as an emergency contact. A child would be deemed to be missing if they are not on site and cannot be located during any "curfew" period in settings where a curfew is in place, or in other provision if it becomes apparent that they have not been at the property overnight and their whereabouts remains unknown.

If the child cannot be found the provider (or lead professional if available / when appropriate) should report the situation to the police providing as much detail as possible. The absence of a lead professional out of hours should not delay this report being made. The Police rely on full and accurate information in order to make risk assessments and pursue any subsequent investigation.

Upon notification of a missing child the Police will initiate an immediate investigation.

8. Publicity/Media Strategy

The Police and local authority have joint responsibility for advising the media regarding missing children and decisions will be based on a number of factors including the level of risk, relevant information, and the period of time the child has been missing. These decisions will be jointly made between the Police Missing Person Team and the Children's Services Assistant Director. Decisions to publicise will always be made in consultation with carers and parents where relevant.

Police may also utilise the services provided by the charity Missing People and the [National Crime Agency CEOP Command](#) to help assist with the locating and safeguarding of missing children. For more information on these services, please see [Appendix 2: Helplines](#).

9. When a child missing from home or care is located or returns

9.1 It is important to not just return the child to a safe environment and discover what happened to them whilst they were missing, but to ascertain the reason for their leaving in the first place. This may not always be apparent, nor may the child immediately disclose the actual reason. It may take some time to ascertain and will require professionals to work closely together.

9.2 Professionals should carefully consider the circumstances of the 'return' of the child to ensure that they are not being placed in a position of potential risk. If a child returns to their home or placement of their own accord then this may be seen to be a safe setting. If the child is 'found' then any signs of reluctance on their part to return to their home or placement should form part of a risk assessment before a child is 'returned' or accommodated elsewhere;

9.2 In all instances of the return of a child who has been reported missing, the Police will attend as soon as possible and in any event within 24 hours to undertake a Prevention Interview to confirm that the child is safe and well and to ensure as far as possible that it is safe to return home or to the care placement that they have been missing from.

9.3 The lead agency that first locates the child will inform the Parent/Carer, Police, Social Worker, School, Health Services, and all others informed of the missing episode, of the child's return without delay.

9.4 If the child is [looked after](#), the social worker and service manager need to liaise with the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) about convening a [Looked After](#) Child review. Any issues around the child going missing should be discussed and addressed, where possible, within the review of the child's Care Plan.

9.5 Where an allegation of physical or [sexual abuse](#) is made or becomes evident, [Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership Procedures](#) must be implemented;

If there is any suggestion that the child has been a victim or perpetrator of crime, consideration must be given to securing evidence by police including forensic examination, such as securing clothing and delaying washing/bathing in relevant cases. However, the welfare of the child is paramount at all times and careful consideration must be given to the potential effects on the child of securing evidence. Permission must be obtained from the child's parents and/or those with parental responsibility. The child cannot consent to these procedures taking place.

10. Return Home Interview

When a child who has been missing is found or returns, they will be offered an Independent Return Interview to try and uncover information to prevent the risk recurring and reduce exposure to risk while missing.

Children who are [Looked After](#) by Surrey Children's Service

The return home interview will be undertaken by the child's allocated social worker.

Children who are not [Looked After](#) by Surrey Children's Service

The Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA) will refer all missing children to Surrey Family Service who will undertake the return home interview.

The interview will be held in a neutral place where the child feels safe and provide an opportunity to hear from the child why they went missing and understand the risks and issues the child might have faced while missing. The length of the interview will depend on the circumstances, level of risk and the engagement of the child. At the start of any discussion it must be explained to the child that confidentiality will be respected unless there are welfare, child protection or serious criminal issues.

11. Responding to information from preventions interviews and return home interviews

Information gathered from Police Prevention Interviews, Return Home Interviews and any other discussions with parents/carers, should be jointly considered with the Police (and other agencies as appropriate) and an appropriate plan put in place for the child.

Consideration should also be given as to whether the child should be discussed at the appropriate Area Risk Management Meeting (see below).

12. Assessments following a missing episode

All missing episodes will be considered and assessed in the C-SPA. The outcome of this assessment may be an offer of [Early Help](#). A Child & Family Assessment, a strategy meeting or immediate safeguarding action.

All children will be offered a Return Home Interview within 72 hours (see above).

If a child is receiving a service as a [Child in Need](#), subject to a CP Plan or is [Looked After](#), the allocated social worker/SFS will re-assess and review the child's plan if required.

13. The Missing Children Panel and Risk Management Meetings

The Missing Children Panel is a multi-agency meeting which meets weekly to discuss children who have been missing. The group reviews completed Return Home Interviews and discusses children on the weekly missing list.

Area Risk Management Meetings have representation from Surrey Children's Services, Surrey Family Services, Police, Education and Health. The groups meet weekly to discuss children considered at risk of [CSE](#) (which may include some children with regular missing episodes).

14. Support for Families

When a child is missing it is important that parents/carers are offered support both during the episode and once the child has returned. For details of independent agencies that can help, see [Appendix 2](#)

15. Monitoring of Missing Children Data

Data regarding missing children is collated monthly from Police and Surrey Children's Service information and is reported to Surrey Police and Children's Services. This data is also compiled in quarterly reports which are shared with Surrey Police and Children's Services, the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership. This data is used to inform activity by agencies.

Appendix 1: Glossary

- Accommodated: A child is accommodated if the Local Authority looks after them with the voluntary agreement of his / her parents or with the child if s/he is over 16 years old.
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children: There are complex issues facing Asylum Seeking children. Information about some children's whereabouts is not always maintained due to the transient nature of their accommodation arrangements. Agencies must however, be alert to the fact that some children are trafficked into, within and out of the UK for custom related reasons, to be abused and exploited for commercial gain, i.e. through sex, for domestic servitude. The Local Authority, Police and other agency responses to an Asylum Seeking child going missing should be exactly the same as for all other children, whether they are [Looked After](#) or living in the community.
- Child: Refers to a person under the age of 18 years.
- 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.
- Child trafficking: The two most common terms used for the illegal movement of people - 'smuggling' and 'trafficking' - have very different meanings. In human smuggling, immigrants and asylum seekers pay people to help them enter the country illegally, after which there is no longer a relationship. Trafficked victims and/or their parents/carers are coerced or deceived by the person arranging their relocation. On arrival in the country of destination, the trafficked victim is forced into exploitation by the trafficker or person into whose control they are delivered or sold. Child Trafficking can also involve movement within a country, and movement out of the country. [DFE/Home Office Practice Procedure for Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked 2011](#)

- Children not receiving a suitable education: children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll, and are not receiving a suitable education otherwise than being in school, for example, at home, privately, or in alternative provision. Evidence suggests young runaways face more challenges to accessing universal services and may be missing from education
- Forced marriage: Young people, who leave home to escape a forced marriage, or the threat of one, often present specific difficulties in sharing information with families and other agencies. Some families go to considerable lengths to find their children and some may use subterfuge to locate and return them. Ultimately the first concern should be for the welfare of the young person and consideration must be given to the risk of [significant harm](#) if the young person is returned to their family. Further guidance and information can be found at: [Government Guidance re. Handling cases of forced marriage 2009](#)
- [Grooming](#) for potential sexual exploitation: In some cases, young people may run away or go missing following [grooming](#) by adults who will seek to exploit them sexually. Evidence suggests that 90 per cent of children subjected to sexual [grooming](#) go missing at some point and may be subject to repeat missing episodes. The supply of drugs and alcohol or the offering of gifts may be used to entice and coerce young people into associations with inappropriate adults. Both girls and boys are at risk of sexual exploitation. [Looked-after](#) children may also be targeted by those wishing to abuse and sexually exploit them, and encouraging these children to run in order to disrupt their placement is often part of this abuse. Young people living within residential care units are particularly vulnerable to being directly targeted in this way. Procedures have been produced to help local agencies identify children and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation and take action to safeguard and promote their welfare. [Statutory Guidance re. Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation 2013](#)
- See also: [Child Sexual Exploitation Procedure](#)
- Intervention Meeting: (network meeting) Convened by the Lead Professional or SCS, this meeting should identify the 'push' and 'pull' factors and agree a combined response to reduce the likelihood of the child going missing and the associated risk factors. [Statutory Guidance - 2009](#)
- [Looked After](#): A child is [looked after](#) by a local authority if s/he is "in care" by reason of a court order, or if s/he is provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by agreement with her/his parents or with the child if s/he is aged 16 or more.
- Prevention Interview: The Police will interview all children when they return. The Police officer should speak to the child alone, away from their parents or their carers. The following should be ascertained.
 - That the location to where the child/young people is to be returned is a suitable place for them and the Police officer should make note of the general cleanliness of the house how the parents/carer behaved in front of the child and police;
 - The parents/carers view of the child/young person and how they react to the child/young person returning. Are they annoyed or relieved etc;
 - The Police officer should ascertain a) Where the child/young person has been b) Who the child/young person has been with and c) Why have they been with them. Are they suitable people for the child/young person to be with;
 - Has the child/young person been involved or exposed to any criminality or anti-social behaviour and if so, what?
 - Has the child/young person been a victim of a crime and if so, what. What did the child/young person do regarding this, i.e. reporting it to Police or other agencies?
 - Do they have any visible injuries and if so how have they received them;
 - What is the child/young person's general demeanour is, i.e. are they unkempt, unwashed and if so, why?

- Is the child/young person currently under the influence or have they been drinking or taken any noxious, illegal substances whilst away and if so, what have they taken and what has been the effect?
- Return Home Interview. Following the Police Prevention Interview, all children will be offered the opportunity to talk to an independent person to try to understand their missing episode and prevent recurrences.

Lead Professional: Where it is decided that a child needs support from several agencies, having a Lead Professional should help ensure full co-ordination of the actions identified in the assessment process and provide a main point of contact for the child and, where appropriate, their family.

Appendix 2: Helplines

Missing People

The charity is there 24/7 to offer support to those who have run away, gone missing or been forced to leave. They are there to help talk things through, give confidential advice and pass a message home if a child / young person wishes for this.

The charity can also provide support and advice for the families of those who have gone missing.

Missing individuals and their families can contact Missing People for free and confidential advice, support, help and options by calling or texting 116 000, or emailing 116000@missingpeople.org.uk

Missing People also provide a range of services for Police handling missing person investigations, including taking referrals for family support and making publicity appeals. They can send supportive text messages to missing children with the service TextSafe.

Contact Missing People for any of these above services by calling 116 000 or emailing 116000@missingpeople.org.uk.cjsm.net

Please see the Missing People website for more information www.missingpeople.org.uk

Childline

Childline is a free and confidential helpline providing support for children and young people run by the [NSPCC](http://www.nspcc.org.uk).

Contact Childline by calling 0800 1111

Please see the Childline website for more information www.childline.org.uk

The National Crime Agency CEOP Command

The National Crime Agency CEOP Command works across the UK tackling child sex abuse and providing advice for parents, young people and children for keeping safe on line. They also provide advice to children and young people contemplating running away and help to locate missing children and young people by publicising them on the missingkids website www.missingkids.co.uk.

Please see the NCA website for further information www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk

Get Connected

Get connected is a free, confidential helpline for any young people under 25 who need help but don't know where to turn.

Call for free on 0808 808 4994 (13.00-23.00 7 days a week), text 80849 or email via their website.

Please see the Get Connected website for further information www.getconnected.org.uk

FRANK

FRANK is a confidential helpline for anyone in the UK concerned about drug use. Contact FRANK by calling 0800 77 66 00, texting 82111 or see their website for other options and information www.talktofrank.com

Appendix 3: Missing Persons Reporting Form

The following information must be available when reporting a child or young person as missing or absent in order for the Police to make an accurate assessment of the risk and locate the individual.

- Personal details of the individual (e.g. Name, DOB, Sex, Nationality)
- Relationship of caller
- Where they are missing/absent from
- Details of when and where they were last seen and by whom
- When they are / were due back
- Idea of where the individual may be
- Are they with anyone else (if yes, names and addresses/contact details of those people)
- Description of the child / young person including their clothing
- Specific concerns on this occasion*
- What enquiries have been carried out by the informant to locate the individual
- Is this out of character / are they a regular missing person / regular absences
- Have they been, or are likely to be subject of crime?*
- Is there a risk of harm to themselves or others?*
- Any medication required? When this is due, and the effects of not taking it?
- Does the individual have access to vehicles (registration / description if known)
- Their usual method of transport
- Language spoken / accent
- Contact details of the individual (mobile phone number and provider, social media sites)
- Do they have any money
- Places frequented by the child / young person
- Details of known associates
- Mental Health Act details
- Social services or court order details

* Please note that informants will be asked for the information which justifies these concerns and this will need this at the time of the call.

If the child / young person is categorised as missing, the informant will be asked to provide a recent photograph.

Appendix 4: Partner Agencies Contact Details

Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA): 0300 470 9100

Surrey Police Missing Persons Unit: 01483 639674

Surrey Safeguarding Children Unit: 01372 833314

Surrey Emergency Duty Team: 01483 517898

Surrey Children's Services: 0300 200 1006