

CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE MISSING FROM FOSTER CARE

Before a placement starts discussions will take place between the child's social worker, the young person and you as to what to do if the young person goes missing. Foster carers should be given quite clear guidance as to what to do if the young person doesn't return on time. Foster carers should make their own risk assessment (see below) based on their current knowledge of the child and about any possible risks to the child remembering that this may of course change over time. Very young children or children with learning disabilities will obviously need an immediate search. Young people who are always late returning from a parental visit will cause less concern than a child who has never gone missing before.

We ask all carers to inform the Social Worker and the Family Placement Team when a child/young person goes missing so that this information can be recorded. As many young people go missing out of hours and at weekends foster carers should also inform the EDT service, who will advise you about when to inform the police. (These arrangements may be different for young people who are known to go missing regularly).

A New Procedure

On Wednesday 1 December 1999 we changed the way we respond when looked after children go missing. There is no longer an automatic referral to the police in every case. The full procedure is contained in a multi-agency protocol. This brief guide summarises the key steps to be taken when a missing episode occurs.

First Steps

1. Check the care plan or other information for guidance about your response should this child go missing.
2. Try to find out where the young person is - by, for example, phoning parents and friends.
3. If you locate the young person, try to persuade him/her to return. If he/she refuses to return, make a risk assessment.
4. If you can't locate the young person, make a risk assessment.

The Risk Assessment

Every time a young person goes missing, he or she is at risk, and may pose a risk to other people. The risk assessment helps to assess the seriousness of the missing episode, and determines what needs to be done next.

Elements of a Risk Assessment

- The young person's legal status;
- The vulnerability of the young person: for example, because of age or disability;
- Their state of mind, and whether going missing is unusual behaviour;
- Whether they may be running to, or away from, an unacceptable situation;
- Whether they are likely to be involved in offending behaviour; or be at risk of being victims of offences by others;

The young person's social worker (or their team's duty officer) should now be informed that the young person is missing. Out of hours, tell the Emergency Duty Team. The Risk Assessment should make it clear which of the following three categories the missing behaviour falls into:

1 Absconded

Children and young people who are required to be at the placement by virtue of a court order or police power. These include:

- Court remands to the local authority, or orders with a residence requirement;
- Section 38(6) PACE detentions;
- Emergency Protection Orders or because the child is in police protection under Section 46 of the Children Act;
- In some circumstances, children on care orders where they may have gone, or been forcibly taken, to an unsafe place.

Young people in the 'absconded' category should be reported as missing to the police without delay.

2 Missing with 'Cause for Concern'

'Cause for concern' will be established by the risk assessment. You, as the carer with day-to-day contact, are in the best position to judge whether there is cause for concern about a particular young person. The risk assessment may have revealed immediate concerns about the young person's safety. Alternatively, the young person may have been missing for some hours, and there is no clue to their whereabouts. Other examples of causes for concern are going missing in the middle of the night, or still missing an hour after the last bus back.

Young people in the 'missing with cause for concern' category should be reported to the police without delay.

3 Unauthorised Absence

Sometimes, young people absent themselves for a short period, and then return of their own accord. The risk assessment will show they are not necessarily at risk – they may be testing boundaries, or have stayed out (on purpose or by accident) longer than agreed.

A young person who is regarded as unauthorised absent should not be reported as missing to the police. However, the situation must be kept under review by repeated risk assessments until the young person either returns or becomes 'missing with cause for concern'.

Reporting to the Police

Only report young people regarded as 'absconded' or 'missing with cause for concern'. Telephone ☎0116 2222222 and ask for the force operations room. You will be asked to supply the details of the risk assessment that shows why the young person is considered at risk, together with the usual details of legal status, physical description, friends and family, etc. A recent photograph, if available, will be helpful. The police will want to do their own independent search for the child or young person, this will include searching your house and grounds. The police do not suspect you of harbouring the child, this is their routine procedure.

The Return

If the young person returns of his/her own accord, please inform the social worker or Emergency Duty Team. If a report has been made to the police, they should also be notified.

Tell the young person that someone will talk to them about their absence, to try and sort out any problems that might have led to their going missing. This will normally be his or her own social worker, but could be someone else if necessary.

If the young person has urgent concerns they need to talk about, or you are worried about their behaviour or location whilst absent, tell the social worker or Emergency Duty Team about this.


Record Keeping

A record should be made every time a young person goes missing. It should detail the time absence was noted; time and circumstances of return; any explanations given for the absence; and any other relevant information. Foster carers should send this record to the administrative officer at Bassett Street. (A sample form is attached) We will provide you with stamped addressed envelopes.

We hope this new approach to young people going missing will be helpful in reducing the number of missing episodes. The underlying theme of the approach is that we want to give looked after children the same caring response that they should get from a 'good' parent.

The young person's social worker (during office hours) and the Emergency Duty Team (outside office hours) will give every assistance they can in ensuring the safe return of missing looked after children. Please don't hesitate to approach them for advice and help.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Foster Carers Support Line	 0776 8592077
Police	 0116 2222222
Emergency Duty Team	 0116 2551606
The Family Placement Team	 0116 2759321
Coalville Office	 01530 275200
Hinckley Office	 01455 636964
Loughborough Office Gladstone	 01509 610311
Melton Mowbray Office	 01664 564698
Market Harborough Office	 01858 465331
Oadby and Wigston Office	 0116 2787111

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S
SERVICE



Police Contact and Missing from care - Monthly Summary Form:

Please use this form to let us know about young people who have been reported as missing from care. If young people have an unauthorised absence you should still discuss the situation with EDT and let the child's social worker know the next morning but you do not need to complete this form.

Please also use this form to let us know if a child has been reported to the police for any other reason.

Please send to: -

The Administrative Officer, Family Placement Team, Children and Young People's Service, Bassett Street, South Wigston, Leicestershire LE18 4PE

Name and Address:	
Contact Tel. Number	

Missing from Care

Name of young person	Time and date missing	Time and date of return	Were EDT informed?	Time police informed	<u>Was there an independent interview before return?</u>

Contact with the Police

Name of young person	Brief reasons why police were called	Were EDT consulted first?	Time and date police informed

Please continue on a separate sheet as necessary.