

R5Care Ltd

Missing from Care Policy

Completed by:	Allen Robson
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Missing from Care (Introduction)

The safeguarding and continued welfare of the young people for whom we provide care is essential. This is a core part of our practice. Therefore, responding purposefully and responsively to children who are Missing from Care (MFC) or likely to go missing from care is critical.

The DfE Statutory Guidance on *Children who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care* 2014 report provides a positive framework for staff when responding to children who go Missing from Care.

When a Child is Missing from Care (MFC)

There are times when a young person may take it upon themselves' to leave home without the due authority to do so. These young people are particularly vulnerable.

If a child attempts to leave or is considered missing, staff will:

- Firmly discourage the child from leaving home; however if they do proceed to leave and can not be located staff will;
- Follow the missing from care protocol (attempt to contact / locate the child by all available means)
- Report the child as missing to the Police and EDT if they can not be located and begin the **Philomena Protocol** / documentation ready for police attendance at the home.
- Complete a missing from care record (Include the police **incident log number** and **badge number**)

In all cases where a child has been reported as MFC:

- Never encourage a child to leave home unsupervised.
- Report any serious concerns regarding safeguarding and child protection to the Homes Manager or Responsible Individual without delay;
- Report to the Police if they feel there is good reason to suspect that the child or children will be at risk of harm or potential harm and/or a crime may be committed.
- Refer to their risk management plan and relevant risk assessments and amend in the light of events.

Compliance with Regulations and Company Procedure

Duties and Responsibilities: This section clarifies the duties of the registered manager and staff regarding the planning, prevention and review of children who go MFC or are likely to go MFC.

Actions identified in this policy must be completed in all appropriate circumstances. This means that if there is a "known risk" that a child could go MFC, specific measures must be taken to best ensure the child's continued safety. Missing from care protocol must be in place and all staff must be aware of any identified signs, behaviours or triggers that could result in an incident.

Formal Definitions of 'Missing' and 'Absent'

Since April 2013, police forces have been rolling out new definitions of 'Missing' and 'absent' in relation to children and adults reported as missing to the police. These are:

- **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; and
- **Absent:** a person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.

Paragraph 19 of the above referenced Statutory Guidance on *Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care* (2014) explains how local protocols for safeguarding young runaways or children missing from home or care should reflect these definitions.



The registered manager is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the Child's MFC protocol is completed in respect to specific measures for any child if they are absent without authority. This will include any areas of increased risk of being absent, for example attending school, social events, holidays, levels of supervision, etc. and actions to be taken to prevent any authorised absence;
- Ensuring staff understand fully the Local 'Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) Protocol' which identifies details of the lead person in local authority, police and other agencies responsible for children missing from home or care;
- Ensure that the child's MFC protocol is discussed, approved and regularly reviewed with the child's social worker concerning any arrangements around being missing;
- Develop a strong working relationship with the local police in respect to the management of and any issues arising if a child is absent without authority;
- Review the Missing File (Schedule 3 Regulation 36 (14)) every month, ensuring that all incidents of children going missing from home have been included;
- Requesting that the local authority who looks after a child who is, or has been, persistently absent without permission or is at risk of harm to review the child's Care Plan;
- Regular review of all/any incidents of a child's absence without authority or incidents of MFC and consider developing strategies to prevent any future occurrences, including the supervision and monitoring of the child.

All staff must:

- Ensure they are familiar with any identified risks, for each child in the home;
- Have a clear understanding of individual risk management plan and MFC protocol, particularly where there are known concerns about a child's behaviour and/or vulnerability.
- Report any unusual behaviour or presentation (mood, etc.) that is out of character to the homes manager or Responsible individual, as well as colleagues.
- Report any suspicions arising from gifts, such as mobile phones for example, to homes manager or Responsible individual
- Ensure the expectations of this policy are applied to practice as soon as a child is reported as missing.

All staff should know that:

Physical intervention should only be used where there is an immediate risk of injury to a child or severe damage to property. If a child were to leave the home and there was a strong likelihood of injury to him/herself or others, it would be reasonable and proportionate to use physical restraint to prevent them from leaving. However, for a child whose absence from the home is judged unlikely to lead to serious risk of harm, injury or serious damage, physical restraint would be inappropriate. **The registered manager must consider the implications of a physical restraint very carefully.**

What to do when a Child is Identified as MFC

Staff must understand that:

Any instances where a child is considered as missing must be treated as a priority. Children who leave the home premises without the knowledge of staff should be regarded as at immediate risk of potential harm. Every child will have an individual missing from care protocol which will provide step to step guidance to staff on what to do to including:

- Attempts to prevent the child from going missing - diversion and re-engagement
- Actions to take to locate a child when child's whereabouts are unknown (contacting family friends, attempts to locate the child in known areas within the community)
- Actions to take if the child cannot be located as per agreement with the local authority and current safety plan (Report the child missing to the police and EDT, begin the Philomena Protocol and provide all relevant information on the form ready for collection by police attending the home)



Recording

All incidents where a child is identified as MFC will be recorded in writing in homes central MFC file, stating the time the child was identified as missing, all actions taken by the team to contact / locate the child, time reported missing to the Police, time reported as missing to EDT, her/his age, circumstances surrounding the absence, and their return home. All entries must be signed by a member of staff.

Staff should take care to incorporate any new information gained through the experience of the young person going MFC into their MFC protocol. This refers to antecedents (i.e. "what happened before"), changes in presentation or circumstances and known associates/peers who could encourage or manipulate a young person into going MFC. Any new information should also be updated as required on the Philomena Form and printed ready for police.

What to do when a Child is Found

Staff should immediately notify Police and EDT when the child has been found and returned safely to the home.

Safe and Well Checks

"Safe and well" checks are carried out by the Police when a child has been found. Their purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them.

When a child is found:

Staff must speak with the young person to establish where they have been, who they were with and what they have been doing while missing from home. Staff must record this information on the MFC form and report any concerns immediately to the home's manager.

Homes Manager/Deputy Manager must complete a debrief with a young person to establish why the young person had gone missing and if there are any further concerns that need to be raised to the child's social worker.

Independent Return Interview:

Every child must be offered an independent Return Interview (IRI) followed by a missing episode.

Independent return interviews provide an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children and young people from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their home.

Different local authorities may have their own procedures in regard to return home interviews. Request must be made to the social worker as soon as possible but within 24 hours of child's return for this to be completed. Staff must record their conversations when requesting these interviews and keep evidence of this request been made along with the missing from care report.

Assessing the Risk of Further incidents

Staff must review the child's MFC protocol and consider the:

- Individual circumstances, including family circumstances;
- Motivation for running away;
- Potential destinations and associates;
- Recent pattern of absences;
- Circumstances in which the child was found or returned; and
- Individual characteristics and risk factors such as whether a s/he has learning difficulties, mental health issues, depression and other vulnerabilities.

Following the safe and well check and independent return interview, staff should share information and work with local authority children's services, police and voluntary services (as appropriate) to:

- Build up a comprehensive picture of why the child went missing;
- Understand what happened while they were missing;
- Understand who they were with when they were missing and where they were found;
- What support they require upon returning to home; and
- Assist in care planning and risk assessment strategies.



R5CARE

The following chart shows the main steps that need to be taken when a child goes missing from local authority care, and where responsibility lies for those steps. It should be read alongside the full statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, and is not intended to be a comprehensive list of actions.

Children's home or foster carer

Responsible authority

Host authority

Local police

Planning and placement

Local authorities should agree with local police and other partners a runaway and missing from care and home (RMFCH) protocol. Carers, local authority and police staff should be aware of the protocol as appropriate. All partners should work together to assess risks and develop appropriate strategies to prevent children from going missing and respond when children do go missing. Staff should receive appropriate training.

Children's homes should have explicit procedures in place both to prevent children running away or going missing, and to locate, return and support a child who has run away or is missing from their placement. This procedure must have regard to local protocols of the host authority

Care planning should include assessment of appropriate placement arrangements to protect the child from the risk of going missing, and strategies for dealing with any known risks of running away.

When a child is placed out of area, the responsible authority must notify the host authority of the placement. Notification processes for missing episodes should be agreed between the responsible and host authorities.

When a looked after child goes missing

The carer should take agreed actions to locate the child. If they can not be located, they should inform the police, the responsible authority and anyone else identified in the child's care plan (such as their parents).

Useful information to report to the police include:

- the child's name, date of birth, description and a recent photograph
- any details of where and when the child was last seen, who they were with, etc
- details of family, friends and associates
- details of the responsible authority.

The responsible authority should provide relevant information about the missing child to the police to enable all the risk factors to be considered.

The responsible authority should notify the host authority that a child in their area has gone missing.

All new information should be added to the **Philomena Form** as part of the **Philomena Protocol** – This is to be printed out ready for police who will attend the home as part of the MFC process.

Police should perform a risk-assessment which will form the basis for their operational response. The case will remain the subject of constant review, particularly in the light of new information and changes in circumstances.

Children's home or foster carer

Responsible authority

Host authority

Local police

When a looked after child is found

If the child returns to their placement, the responsible authority and police should be informed.

Carers should continue to offer warm and consistent care when a child returns, and running away should not be viewed as behaviour that needs to be punished.

If the child is located but meaningful contact can not be established, the responsible authority and police should consider appropriate action.

An independent return interview should be offered and provided within 72 hours of the child's return. When a looked after child is placed in a host authority, the responsible authority should ensure the independent review interview takes place, working closely with the host authority.

A safe and well check should be carried out by the police as soon as possible after a child reported as missing has been found.

The responsible local authority should review whether the child's placement remains appropriate. The decision should be informed by discussions with the child and carers where appropriate.

Care plans should include a strategy to minimise future risk of repeated missing episodes.

IROs should be informed about missing episodes and address these in statutory reviews.

Data and analysis

Children's homes should be prepared to provide information on missing incidents to those conducting independent visits to monitor the effectiveness of the home.

Data on missing episodes, including intelligence from return interviews, should be analysed regularly by all relevant partners to map problems and patterns. Regular reports should be provided to council members and the LSCB.

Data for children missing or away from placement without authorisation should be reported to the Department for Education by the responsible authority through their annual data returns on looked after children.

Key Regulations

- The Quality and Purpose of Care Standard [Regulation 6](#)
- The Children's Views, Wishes and Feelings Standard [Regulation 7](#)
- The Positive Relationships Standard [Regulation 11](#)
- The Protection of Children Standard [Regulation 12](#)
- The Leadership and Management Standard [Regulation 13](#)
- Monitoring and Surveillance [Regulation 24](#)
- Employment of Staff [Regulation 33](#)
- Policies for The Protection of Children [Regulation 34](#)
- Information to Be Included in Each Child's Case Records [SCHEDULE 3 Regulation 36](#)



Registered Address: Collingwood Community Centre, Collingwood Drive, Birmingham, B43 7NF

Company Number: **16746333**