



Children Looked After, Missing from Care Protocol

Author:

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1. Introduction

1.1 This guidance has been produced to advise specifically placements and those Social Workers who are case holders for any Child Looked After who goes missing.

1.2 The management of missing episodes should be in accordance with *the 'Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or go Missing from Home or Care'* and *'Greater Manchester Standardised Approach to dealing with Missing and Absent Children and Young People across Greater Manchester.'* Which is embedded in the relevant procedures for missing children as defined in Social Care Tri-X procedures.

1.3 The process as described in this protocol is to ensure effective and timely decision making and support to the child or young person who goes missing and upon their return understand the reasons for going missing, in order to inform care planning. Notifications and information sharing are key. This guidance will support understanding of the process and how it is applied in Bolton.

1.4 For providers of care, be it foster placements or residential, expectations will be to know the process as defined by this protocol and to comply with it. Please note that there are variations to the process for those placements within a 5 miles radius of Bolton and that of Out of Borough Placements outside that 5 mile radius and will be referenced where applicable in this document. This compliance is in accordance with agreements signed at the start of the placement.

2. When a Child/Young Person goes Missing

2.1 When a child or young person is not where they are supposed to be, prior to reporting them as missing the responsible adult is expected to take proactive steps to trace the young person prior to contacting the Police. This would include actions like:

- Physical checks of the persons residence or where they might be hiding
- Physical checks of the garden, garage, sheds, grounds and surrounding areas
- Attempts must be made to contact the person directly, via mobile phone, text or social networking sites like Facebook and twitter
- Contacting family and friends to ascertain if they are located there
- Any other likely place they would be at.

2.2 If the person is located through such enquiries, they should not be reported as missing to the Police unless there are significant safety issues with the person being there. In such circumstances, the reporting individual should contact the police and request a 'Concern for Welfare' address check.

2.3 If a child is located but does not wish to return, the police may be requested to assist in their safe return; however the individual **Must Not** be reported a missing simply to ensure police involvement in the return of a child.

2.4 Having attempted to find the child or young person should it be clear that they are missing, the placement must complete certain tasks. The placement will in the first instance

report to the local Police that the child or young person is missing and any relevant details that would assist the Police in locating the young person. Dependent on the level of perceived risk this could be by 111 or 999.

2.5 The Placement must also update the allocated Social Worker of the event and log the event with the Missing from Home Section using the appropriate e mail address. The contents required for the notification are listed in Figure 1.

Notification to Local Authority of Child / Young Person going missing

1. Name of Child
2. Date and Time they went missing
3. Date and Time it was reported to the Police
4. Summary of circumstances leading to the missing episode
5. What do you think is the intent of the child/ young person going missing, where they are likely to heading if known
6. Nominated person and phone number for contact and discussion

Figure 1

2.6 The Social Worker will ensure that the information is transferred onto the case note in Liquid Logic. Upon notification the Social Worker is expected to reflect on the current situation and where they are able participate in attempts to find the child/young person and support their return to the placement, they should do so. The Social Worker will be expected to know the procedure for missing and comply with the guidance as listed. In particular Social Workers should consider the application of Child Protection Procedures, including Strategy Discussions if necessary and due to Corporate Parenting responsibilities, the use of Senior Management Alerts to advise of the situation and risks with regards to a particular child/ young person goes missing.

2.7 It is expected that the Social Worker will keep in regular contact with all parties, including Parents, Police and placement for the duration of the missing episode. Activities are to be evidenced on file.

2.8 Placement will also have sent the e mail to the missing from Home section. The incident will be logged and the start date will be triggered for an episode, which will appear in the daily reports that are distributed. This action will ensure there is no delay in reporting for management oversight.

Process of Reporting



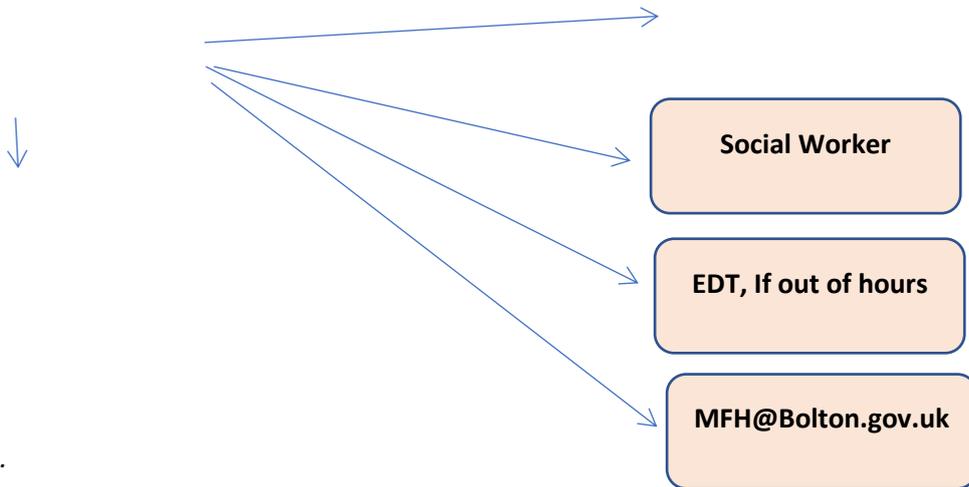


Figure 2.

2.9 If the child or young person goes missing out of hours, a report should be sent through to EDT. EDT will then have the up to date information should further discussions and arrangements are required with the Police and placement. The Social Worker should also provide additional advisory note to EDT should following an incident of missing specific arrangements had been made for the child or young person upon being found. Without that additional guidance EDT will be reliant on the information within the casefile which in a rapidly changing situation may not be up to date with regards to discussions. EDT will of course update with regards to any activity overnight and will update the casefile. The presumption unless other guidance is advised the child / young person should always return to their placement.

3. Once the Child / Young Person has Returned.

3.1 Having been missing the process as described in figure one is repeated. Should the child or young person return of their own volition the Placement must immediately advise the Police of the fact and also advise the Social Worker, EDT if applicable and the Missing from Home section that they have returned. As before certain information needs to be relayed back to the Local Authority for consideration as to next steps. The information required is laid out in Figure 3.

Notification to Local Authority of Child / Young Person Returning to Placement having been Missing

1. Name of Child
2. Date and Time they went missing
3. Date and Time they returned to placement
4. If not directly returned to placement where were they found
5. Any commentary provided by the child/young person as to their activities
6. Any alterations in care made by the placement to reduce the likelihood of further missing episodes
7. Is placement location within 5 miles of Bolton

Nominated person and phone number for contact and discussion

Figure 3

3.2 This information should then be distributed in the same way as that of the original notification as described in *Figure 2*. However, should the Police have been involved in returning the child or young person to placement then Police notification would not be required.

3.3 The process however will not be completed with the return of the child or young person to the placement. There is a statutory requirement for a Return Interview to be conducted with the child or young person within 72 hours.

3.4 Despite that in any event the Social Worker will be expected to reflect on the current placement and Care Plan considering whether and changes should be made and how best to support the child or young person to divert and prevent a further episode of Missing.

4. Independent Return Interviews

4.1 Following an episode of missing there is a requirement for an Independent Return Interview to take place within 72 hours if the child or young person agrees. The choice must always be given. Whilst the notification of the child or young person's return is sent to the Social Worker, it should also be received by the Missing from Home in box.

4.2 The notification of the end of an episode that is sent to the Missing from Home in box leads to some further steps. The log of children currently missing is updated and their names are removed from the missing report that is distributed daily. Thus ensuring the service maintains accurate information and oversight of this vulnerable cohort.

4.3 If in the e mail confirmation is received that the placement is within 5 miles of Bolton, the Missing from Home administrator will forward to the Provider Service for Independent Return Interviews to undertake a Return Interview within the 72 hour period and for the report to be added onto the casefile for review.

4.4 If the Placement is beyond a 5 mile radius of Bolton then it will fall on the allocated Social Worker to take further steps.

4.5 The Social Worker upon receipt of the information that the child/young person has returned will need to ensure the notification is added to the information on casefile as a case note. Should a Senior Manager alert have been completed as part of the missing episode, the Social Worker should immediately advise Senior Management of the return and what steps are being taken to divert or minimise a further incident of missing.

4.6 Should the notification relate to a child or young person who lives beyond five miles radius from Bolton the service provider for Independent Return Interviews are not commissioned to undertake work beyond that boundary. Therefore, the Social Worker must offer a return Interview within 72 hours and if agreed speak to the child/young person and complete the appropriate report of the interview that can be accessed in Forms in the children's information system. Location of the form is held under the Missing tab on Liquid Logic and will need completing regardless of whether the young person agrees or not. If they do not agree to an interview that is to be clearly stated on the form and completed. That will then conclude the process in respect of missing.

4.7 The Social Worker should again reflect on any additional information drawn from the above activity and integrate the learning in the Care Planning process and look to enhance the child's/Young person's experience and take measures to reduce the risk of repeat patterns of behaviour and divert the young person from taking such dramatic action that leaves them at risk. Indeed, where a pattern of missing remains as part of the overall summary, a safety Plan should be detailed where it is clear what actions have been agreed to undertake.

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