



A Stepping Stone to a Brighter Future

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

5. MISSING CHILD POLICY Scotland





A Stepping Stone to a Brighter Future

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Principles

When a child/young person goes missing from placement it is important that action is taken to ensure their safety and promote their welfare. The Lead Professionals has a responsibility to clarify concerns raised about a looked after child in collaboration with the child protection arrangements in their area as well as with the service managers of 'the company'.

Going missing can be a means by which a child/young person signals that he/she is unhappy or experiencing difficulties in placement or may indicate wider concerns associated with drug/alcohol misuse, child sexual exploitation, self harm issues, family issues, bullying or other serious matters.

When children/young people go missing from residential care, staff must respond appropriately and proportionately in partnership with Police, education, local social services authority and the placing authority. The level of response will be determined by the child/young person's legal status, vulnerability and the degree of risk their absence might pose to themselves and others. Each case will be treated individually, with clear recorded attempts at appropriate engagement from staff prior to any missing from home occurring and during the incident to attempt a safe return.

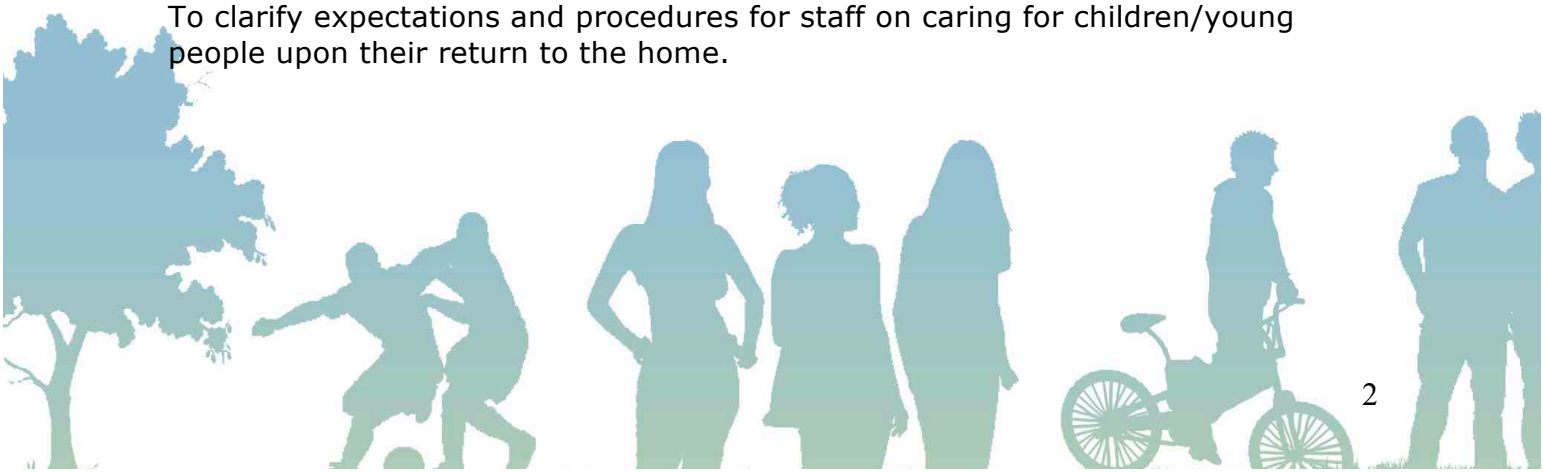
Aims and Objectives

To comply with the expectations of the National Care Standards: care homes for Children and Young People (Scottish Executive 2005)(currently under review), Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 and GIRFEC principles.

To protect and promote the welfare and wellbeing of children/young people who choose to absent themselves without authority.

To clarify for staff their duties, responsibilities and outline the procedures when children go missing.

To clarify expectations and procedures for staff on caring for children/young people upon their return to the home.





A Stepping Stone to a Brighter Future

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

To emphasise the need to employ effective preventive measures and to learn from experience when these fail and children/young people absent themselves without authority.

If a child is absent from the home and their whereabouts are not known (i.e. the child/young person is missing), the homes procedures are compatible with the local protocols and procedures applicable to where the home is located.

To provide clarity of 'the company' expectations of external agencies roles in protecting children/young people who put themselves at risk of harm when they go missing from home.

To ensure that on a day to day basis, all staff of the company endeavour to positively engage children/young people in services provided by the home.

Definitions

There are four categories within which a child/young person's absence from home without authority may be considered:

1. **Absent from Care** – some children/young people absent themselves for a short period of time without permission and then return, or they may simply be late or may have left the home to cool off. Sometimes children/young people stay out longer than agreed to test boundaries and assert their independence. Providing the child/young person's risk assessment does not give rise to cause for concern, this behaviour should be seen as part of normal adolescent development and managed through the child/young person's care plan.

Such situations will remain under review for staff to be prepared to re-classify absences as time passes or circumstances change.

2. **Missing from Care** – children/young people are to be deemed missing when:

- Their whereabouts are unknown and there is no indication that they will return within a short space of time





A Stepping Stone to a Brighter Future

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

- There is cause for concern because of the child/young person's vulnerability and/or
- There is a potential danger to the public caused by the child/young person's absence.

3. **Abandoned** – the absence of a child/young person from placement who is subject to Police Protection, or is remanded by the courts pending further action and placed by Partners in 'the company' or otherwise lawfully detained.

4. **Abducted** – a child/young person removed from placement against his/her will. This is a criminal offence and should be reported to the police immediately.

Prevention

Children/young people are less likely to absent themselves from homes in which they are well cared for (*is this research??? If so you might want to note where this is from...*), feel safe and enjoy positive, warm and respectful relationships with their carers. Positive engagement of children/young people in activities that they like/personalising their bedrooms to their choice has in the past proved to reduce levels of missing from home. In these circumstances children/young people are enabled and empowered to talk about their difficulties and seek help from their carers in finding solutions. They also feel valued and worthy and see their home as their own and a place of safety.

Prior to and at the beginning of each placement the issue of missing from home must be considered and preventative/incident management strategies agreed. The preventative strategy should include consideration of:

- Completing the initial Risk Assessment, Care Plans and Behaviour Management Plans at the start of the placement. Where placements are planned, these should be completed as part of the placement consideration and matching process and be accompanied by detailed risk assessment plans that are agreed by all concerned and known to all the staff working in the home prior to the child/young person being admitted into the home. Where it is an emergency placement, the homes manager must complete the above within 24 hours of the admission.





A Stepping Stone to a Brighter Future

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

- An understanding of the likelihood of a child/young person going missing and their degree of vulnerability in such circumstances.
- Information about past history of going missing including triggers, known associates or places where the child/young person usually goes.
- The level of support and supervision to be given by carers.
- The child/young person's views about going missing.
- Parental views and advice about what action should be taken if the child/young person goes missing and when they wish to be informed.
- The level of risk presented to others if the child/young person goes missing

These issues should be taken into account and incorporated into the child/young person's care plan and behaviour management plans/risk assessment and agreed with all concerned, including the child/young person, their parents, the police, the social worker, Youth Justice, CAMHS, the relevant regional heads etc.

All staff **must** familiarise themselves with this information and work actively to minimise the likelihood of a child/young person leaving home without permission and placing him/herself in an unsafe position.

When missing from home is an issue, staff should liaise closely with the child/young person's school to ensure the contact person is aware of the concerns and involved in the ongoing management of the problem and their agreement to the behaviour management plan/risk assessment sought and recorded as such.

Incident Management

Whenever a child/young person goes missing it is important to quickly establish the category of the risk level of absences on the young person through carrying out a risk assessment. If it is decided that the child/young person is absent from care, this will be managed in line with their care plan and behaviour management/risk assessment plan.





A Stepping Stone to a Brighter Future

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

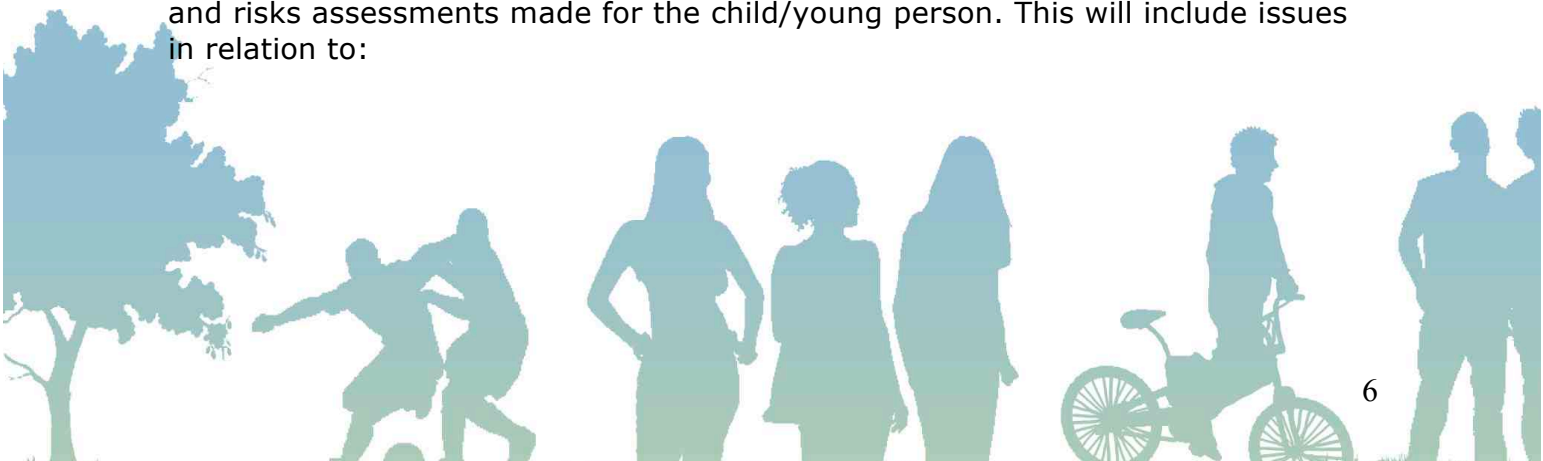
This decision will be kept under review until the child/young person returns home and can be revised depending on how long the child/young person has been absent and any change of circumstances.

If it is believed a child/young person has been abducted the matter should be reported to the police immediately, the Home Manager and Area Manager, the child's/young person's social worker, parents and significant others should also be notified.

If a child/young person has gone missing or has absconded the following initial actions should be taken prior to reporting them missing from home to the police:-

- If the child/young person has not previously been noted as leaving the home, check the building and immediate grounds of the home and other parts of the property where the child/young person may be hiding.
- Search the immediate vicinity of the home providing that a risk assessment indicates that it is safe to do so. Drive out to known addresses, local areas and known hang out points.
- Check out any sources of information that may be helpful in locating the child/young person i.e. other children/young people or staff in the home or anyone the child/young person may have been with beforehand.
- Call the child/young person's mobile phone to try to ascertain their whereabouts – this must be at regular intervals in line with what has been defined within their individual behaviour management/risk assessment plans.
- If a child/young person is found by staff but refuses to return, staff must contact the police and request assistance due to the vulnerability of the child/young person. (If the risk assessment dictates vulnerability).
- All absconders must be reported to the police immediately as must all children/young people who are subject to Curfew Orders and do not return on time
- Contact child/young persons' family/friends/associates.

For all children/young people who are missing – the decision on whether and when to inform the police and others will be based upon the situation, care plans and risks assessments made for the child/young person. This will include issues in relation to:





A Stepping Stone to a Brighter Future

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

- Any medical condition the child/young person might have.
- The child/young person's mental state including issues relating to self harm.
- Previously assessed levels of vulnerability.
- The child/young person's age and level of maturity.
- Any concerns about physical or learning difficulties.
- Previous patterns of behaviour including criminality, drug/alcohol misuse.
- Known associates when missing
- The risk of sexual exploitation.
- Any risk a parent or carer might present – e.g. substance misuse, domestic violence, child protection issues, mental health problems.
- Complete child/young person's missing persons risk assessment

A missing person risk assessment should be completed, this will indicate whether the child/young person is deemed at low, medium or high risk. **All high risk cases should be referred immediately to the police.** Low and medium risk outcomes must be kept under regular review and may be revised upwards as time passes and circumstances change. Any such changes in missing episodes will be discussed with the social worker/Area Manager/Head of Care/other relevant parties with subsequent control measures being approved by all parties.

When it is decided that a missing child/young person should be reported to the police the informing carer should provide the following information:

- The child/young person's name, age and date of birth
- Legal status
- Child/young person's Social Worker (and contact number) and placing authority
- Parent's address (if applicable)
- What attempts the staff at the home have made to encourage the child/young person not to go missing as well as attempts to safely return them prior to police involvement
- Contact name and number for the home
- Known addresses, local areas and known hang out points
- Additional features that would make the child/young person more vulnerable such as a history of self harming, child sexual exploitation, drug &/or alcohol misuse, family contact concerns





A Stepping Stone to a Brighter Future

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

- The clothes the child/young person left in, what they said before they went

The member of staff should also inform the Homes Manager at the earliest opportunity and the child/young person's Social Worker (out of hours). The member of staff, in consultation with the Manager, and in line with the child/young person's placement plan and behaviour plan/risk assessment, will decide when to inform the child/young person's parents. As the legal responsibility rests with the Registered Manager, he/she must be notified. During periods of leave, the relevant Area Manager is to take lead in this area and guide relevant deputy managers or team leaders.

While waiting for the police to arrive at the home the following should be collated:

- A detailed description of the child/young person and what they were wearing when last seen
- A recent photograph of the child/young person
- A list of the child/young person's known associates or places when they usually go – including places they may not be allowed to visit
- Contact details for the child/young person's family
- Additional features that would make the child/young person more vulnerable such as a history of self harming, child sexual exploitation, drug &/or alcohol misuse, family contact concerns

If there are any further developments or if the child/young person makes contact with the home this information must be passed to the police and Social Worker without delay.

All actions taken must be recorded in log book/missing persons book/police contact.

When the child/young person is found or confirms his/her location, arrangements should be made for his/her return home. Best practice suggests that this should be facilitated by a member of staff from the child/young person's home (circumstances and staffing levels permitting).





A Stepping Stone to a Brighter Future

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

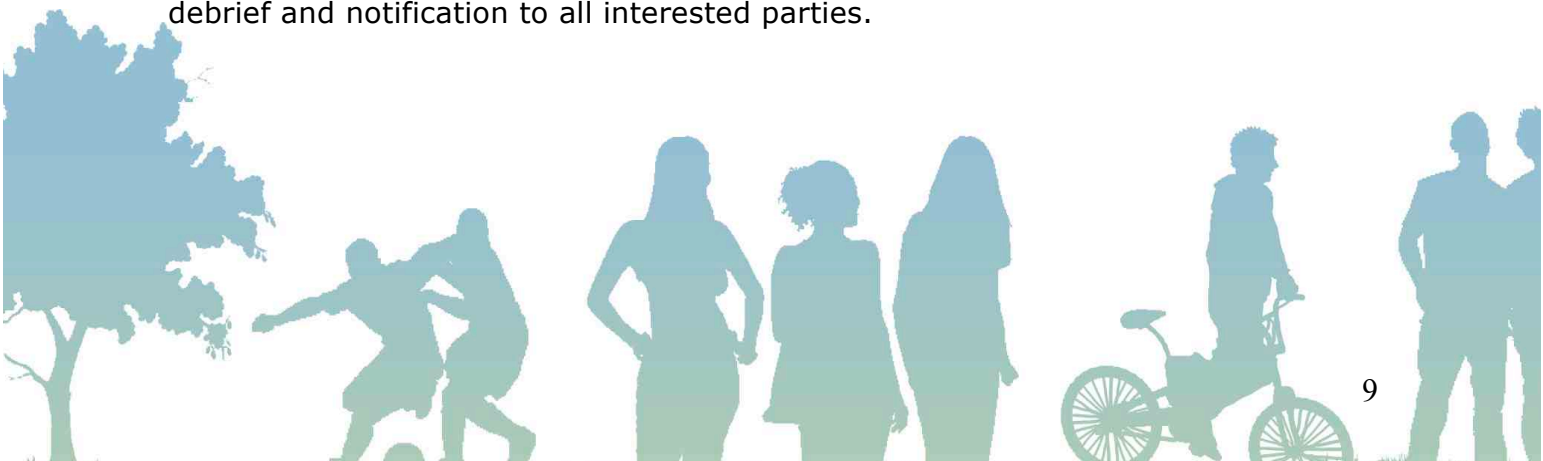
Caution must be exercised when making these arrangements and if it is felt that there is any risk associated with the strategy then police assistance should be requested.

Whether the child/young person returns of their own volition or is brought back home, they should receive a positive and warm welcome. Staff should express relief that the child/young person has returned safely and should attend to any immediate needs (food/drink, medical attention, etc) and be aware of any particular causes for concern (the child/young person being dropped off by someone, returning home with different clothing, or items not previously in their possession, bruising, change of mood etc). The member of staff must immediately inform the police of the child/young person's return (if they do not already know) and anyone else (Manager, Social Worker) who has been involved in the incident. Depending upon the time of day and arrangements agreed in the child/young person's placement plan/behaviour plan/risk assessment, the member of staff should inform the child/young person's parents.

Arrangements should be made within 24 hours of the child/young person's return for them to be seen by an independent person (usually their Social Worker, parent, advocate, independent visitor) to discuss the reasons for going missing and to address any concerns that emerge. The police may also wish to interview the child/young person.

The child/young person must have a debrief with staff following their return. The interview should be conducted in a facilitative, non-confrontational way with the purpose of understanding the reasons for the child/young person going missing and developing a strategy to prevent further incidents and cover the risks associated with the child/young person going missing as well as what the home can offer the child/young person (activities/incentives) to not go missing. Staff should be persistent in pursuing this discussion and not accept a child/young person's initial reluctance to talk.

Following the incident it must be fully recorded and an entry made in the home's Missing from Home log. Staff must ensure there is a clear audit trail which covers all actions, from the point the child/young person's absence is discovered, through informing all the relevant people to the child/young person's return, debrief and notification to all interested parties.





A Stepping Stone to a Brighter Future

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

The Manager must complete an online Notification if there are any CSE concerns.

Any information which emerges from the incident management process or the child/young person's interview with the independent person (including names and addresses of friends or associates or locations which the child/young person had visited) should be included in the child/young person's placement and behaviour management plans and risk assessment plans to help in the management of further incidents.

If a child/young person is missing from care for a period of time identified in the local missing from care protocol, the homes manager will ask the child/young person's social worker to convene a strategy meeting to review and agree the control measures contained in the child/young person's risk assessment/behaviour management plan.

Children/young people missing from an External Activity

If a child/young person goes missing during an external activity, the person in charge of the event should:

- Search the immediate vicinity.
- Inform the Home Manager or Duty Manager (if out of hours).
- Notify the local police – providing as much information about the child/young person as possible (see above).

The Home Manager will be responsible for ensuring that the usual procedures in relation to missing children/young people are followed. The Home Manager and the person in charge of the event will decide at what point the party will return home if the child/young person remains missing.

The Manager will continue to liaise with local police where the missing occurred and make arrangements for the child/young person's return when he/she is found.

Cross Reference

Child Protection Policy (Scotland)





A Stepping Stone to a Brighter Future

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Child Sexual Exploitation Policy (Scotland)
Absent Without Authority Form
Working with Parents & Carers Policy
Absent Without Authority Pack / Folder
Searches Policy
Police Involvement Policy

Updated: July 2015

