

**PAN Merseyside - Safeguarding Children
Partnerships Missing Children Procedure**

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SECTION 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

A child or young person who goes missing just once faces the same immediate risks as those faced by a child or young person who regularly goes missing. However, children who go missing when they are young, and/or more frequently are more likely to face longer-term problems.

When missing, children are either running *from* a problem such as neglect or abuse at home, or *to* somewhere they want to be. They may have been coerced to run away by someone else. Whatever the reason, *all* children who go missing are at risk of harm. There are particular concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of CSE, CE, violent crime, gang exploitation and misuse of alcohol and drugs.

Unfortunately, repeat missing episodes by a child can often lead to a misguided view that there is little risk because they are “streetwise and able to look after themselves”.
<https://safeguardinghub.co.uk/wise-up-dont-use-streetwise/>.

This protocol has been designed to provide a framework for a coordinated, standardised and effective multi-agency response to reports of children who go missing, and to support staff working with missing children, who are:

- Living in Merseyside.
- Under the care of a Local Authority and live within the Merseyside area.

The immediate risks associated with going missing include:

- No means of support or legitimate income which could lead to high risk activities;
- Targeted to be involved in criminal activities including gang crime;
- Victim of Abuse;
- Victim of crime, e.g. sexual assault /exploitation or through gang activities;
- Risk of trafficking;
- Alcohol/substance misuse;
- Deterioration of physical and mental health;
- Missing out on schooling and education;
- Increased vulnerability.

Longer-term risks include:

- Long-term drug dependency/alcohol dependency;
- Crime;
- Homelessness;
- Disengagement from education;
- Child sexual exploitation; Child Criminal Exploitation
- Poor physical and/or mental health.

It is important that all professionals are familiar with the guidance set out for ‘working together’ in the broader context of safeguarding children.

[Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/424242/Working-Together-to-Safeguard-Children-2018.pdf)

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1.2 LOCAL PICTURE

As Looked After Children are a particularly vulnerable group of young people who go missing, the local protocol needs to take account of the responsibilities of the local authority and its' partner agencies as Corporate Parents.

Based on a 3 year average, 1,131 children go missing each year in Merseyside (2018-2020).

Any missing episode is potentially serious. Therefore, prevention work relating to children going missing is of paramount importance and requires an integrated multi-agency approach, with prevention strategies to include:

- Awareness and training for all professionals;
- Awareness and safety sessions for young people via curriculum opportunities;
- Multi agency assessment procedures, including Early Help, to include the risk indicators for running away;
- Consistent implementation of this protocol across all agencies;
- Monitoring and reporting of missing from home, care and education incidents;
- Support to parents;
- Every individual has a duty to inform the authorities if a child is missing.
- Effective interventions are best achieved by partnership working, information sharing, problem-solving and performance management.

There are a number of tactics which can be used in order to help keep the young person safe which should be considered. [Child exploitation disruption toolkit \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

1.3 NATIONAL GUIDANCE

This protocol should be read alongside the *statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care 2014*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-gomissing-from-home-or-care>.

With regard to children and young people who are 'looked after' by another Local Authority and who are placed within the Merseyside boundary, they remain the responsibility of the placing Local Authority.

In addition, the document from Missing People charity re Children's Views on Being Reported Missing from Care should be consulted:

[Children's views on being reported missing from care - Missing People](#)

SECTION 2

2.1 DEFINITION OF CHILDREN MISSING

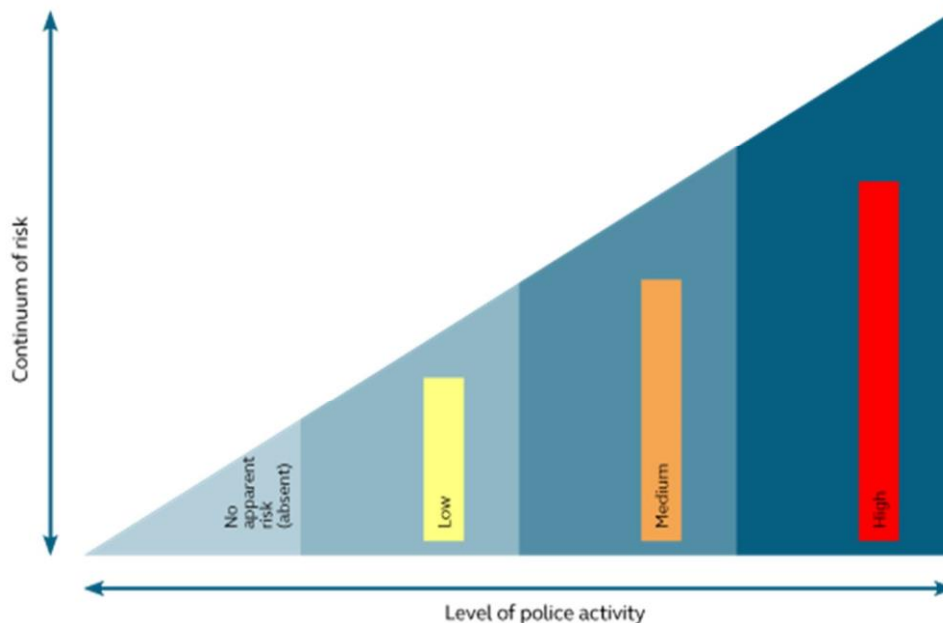
Definition of 'missing'

'Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.'

All reports of missing children sit within a continuum of risk from 'no apparent risk' through to high-risk cases that require immediate, intensive action.

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Missing definition



All missing person reports are assessed on a case by case basis dependent on Threat, Harm and Risk.

Merseyside Police Missing Persons Policy states that **ALL CHILDREN AGED 13 YEARS AND UNDER WILL BE CATEGORISED AS 'MISSING' AND NOT CATEGORISED AS 'NO APPARENT RISK' UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.**

**** A child who has failed to return home but their whereabouts are known and there is no identified risk, would not be treated as missing under police definitions. ****

“Known” could be that they have physically been seen or other confirmation of their whereabouts.

If Merseyside Police have a CSE or CE flag recorded on their systems, or have any intelligence that a child is at risk of such, then ordinarily they should be recorded as High Risk following receipt of the missing report, unless the Inspector documents a case for management at a lower risk level. In all cases, the appropriate referral form must be completed and submitted to the local MASH. In such cases, also refer to the PAN Merseyside Child Exploitation Protocol 2020 https://liverpoolscp.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/pan_merseyside_exploit.pdf

If a child or young person is thought to have been trafficked **also** refer to the National Home Office Guidance:

[Safeguarding Children and Young People who may have been trafficked.](#)

Also, consider the National Referral Mechanism guidance:

[National referral mechanism guidance: adult \(England and Wales\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

It should be noted that 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 exploitation.

If a child with CSE/ CCE flags are in a place of risk then this may be reported as a “Concern for Safety”, rather than missing, if their whereabouts are known to the informant.

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2.2 RISK ASSESSMENT

Merseyside Police will ask the following standard set of questions whenever an individual is reported missing:

- Child's full name
- Full description of individual (Inc clothing and distinctive marks)
- Who are their known associates?
- Has the individual been reported missing before?
- Has the child made any preparations for being missing?
- Is their behaviour out of character?
- Do they have access to a mobile phone?
- Do they use social network sites? (Facebook etc.).
- Do they have access to a vehicle?
- Do they have cash/access to cash?
- Is the Philomena Protocol available to officers (for children in regulated care homes, see Appendix 2)?

The following questions are used as Critical Questions, to assist the Police in determining the risk level of the child.

- Is the child on any essential medication, either prescribed or non-prescribed.
- Does the child suffer from any physical (disabilities) or mental health issues?
- Has the child previously self-harmed or made threats to self-harm or injure another person?
- Would you consider the child is being sexually or criminally exploited?
- Are there any additional vulnerabilities, learning difficulties, disabilities, SEND/ EHCP (creating a risk to the child or the public)?

No apparent risk	
There is no apparent risk of harm to either the subject or the public.	Actions to locate the subject and/or gather further information should be agreed with the informant and a latest review time set to reassess the risk.
Low risk (missing)	
The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but minimal.	Proportionate enquiries should be carried out to ensure that the individual has not come to harm.
Medium risk (missing)	
The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.	This category requires an active and measured response by the police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.
High risk (missing)	
The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.	This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of police resources. There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place where appropriate. Children's services must also be notified immediately if the person is under 18.

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Consideration is to be given as to whether the child is missing as per the above definitions, or whether they are away from placement without authorisation, as per [Children looked after return 2020 to 2021: guide - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care_3_.pdf) and

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care_3_.pdf and

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271820/Flowchart_when_a_child_goes_missing_from_care.pdf

The remainder of this protocol outlines actions the partnership should undertake regarding specific situations when a child is reported missing, according to the levels of needs of the child and presenting risks.

2.3 RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS / CARERS / GUARDIANS

Parents, family members, carers or guardians are expected to make all reasonable attempts to find the child and return them to their home address or placement, and are expected to undertake the following basic measures to try and locate the child if considered safe to do so:

- Search bedroom / house / outbuildings / vehicles;
- Contact the missing person via mobile or social media
- Contact known friends and relatives where the child/ young person may be;
- Visit locations that the child is known to frequent, if it is safe to do so.
- Check social network sites
- Contact local hospitals
- Report the child as missing to Merseyside Police via telephoning 101, or in cases of an emergency 999.

Parent / carers / guardians are to inform the police of the following:

- When the child was last seen and with whom;
- Details of all actions already undertaken to locate the child;
- A recent photograph (including the date of the photo and confirmation that it is a true likeness of the missing person);
- Family addresses;
- The names and address of the child's GP, school and dentist;
- Circumstances which increase the risk to a child should be drawn to the attention of the Police and any health concerns and details of any medication e.g. the need for any time-based treatments such as diabetes.
- Immediate circumstances prior to disappearance (i.e. phone call received, visitor etc).
- Missing person's demeanour immediately prior to disappearance (e.g. excited, anxious etc).

For children looked after by the LA, the informant should also advise:

- Legal status of the child or young person;
- Length of time in current placement if applicable;
- Overall length of time the child has been in the care of the local authority;
- Reason for the missing person being in the care of the local authority.
- The actions taken to establish their whereabouts, and update the police with any new information for possible location(s) of the child.

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2.4 RESPONSIBILITY OF CHILDRENS SOCIAL CARE

A child may be 'accommodated' (s.20 Children Act 1989), or 'looked after' as subject of a Care Order (s.31 Children Act 1989). Where a child is 'accommodated', the local authority does not have parental responsibility and are caring for the child or young person on behalf of a person with parental responsibility. Where a child is subject of a Care Order (including Interim Care Orders s. 38 Children Act 1989) the Local Authority shares parental responsibility with the parent or others who hold it. The response from the Local Authority must be the same for any child who is missing from their care with cause for concern, regardless of whether they are 'accommodated' or 'looked after' and must be treated seriously. The concern may relate to a variety of factors, e.g. where the child may have gone, who they may be associating with, disability, special needs, potential for self-harm etc.

Children can be placed inside the geographical boundary of the Local Authority who are looking after them, or outside of the Authority. Regardless of where they are placed, the response to them going missing must be the same.

Upon placing a child out of the Borough, the child's social worker should ensure they are aware of the Independent Return Interview arrangements in the area they are placing the child in. Arrangements for who will undertake the Independent Return Interview should be detailed in the child's placement contract and Care Plan. All Independent Return Interviews undertaken must be returned to the child's allocated Social Worker and lead practitioner, to inform the child's placement, Care Plan and Looked after Children Reviews.

All children upon entering the care of the Local Authority should have a Care Plan and a completed Philomena Protocol prepared by the Placement (see Appendix 2). All Care Plans should consider the risk of a child running away from their placement or any such behaviour already known. Upon a child going missing, their Care Plan should be referred to and appropriate action should be taken according to the individual child, their needs, behaviour and risks. In the cases of a child who already has a pattern of missing behaviour, a full Risk Assessment should have been completed and should include:

- What is the risk that the child or young person might go missing?
- What risks might the child or young person or public face if they do go missing?
- With whom is it permissible for them to stay overnight and in what circumstances?
- Making decisions based on what is appropriate given the cultural circumstances.

This should be stored in a safe place which is accessible for all members of staff.

If a child or young person has been assessed as at risk of and/or experiencing CSE and/or CE and is subject of a Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Plan, the carers must be provided with a trigger plan for the missing aspect of the MACE Plan by the child's allocated Social Worker. A trigger plan is a bespoke clear set of actions and activity that identified people should carry out if a young person is thought to be missing. The Lead Practitioner and the Placement, along with other relevant agencies should work together to address all safeguarding concerns.

2.5 JOINT RESPONSIBILITY

It is expected that all reasonable steps should be taken by care providers to locate the child prior to making a report to the police. If the individual is located without having made contact with the police, this absence should be recorded by the care provider in order to inform safeguarding plans. The care provider should record any information gained regarding the whereabouts of the individual whilst away from placement without authorisation, and this should be shared as appropriate with the police. Where the person remains away from placement without authorisation, and the care provider feels the individual may be at risk of

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harm then a report should be made to the police. Care Providers should liaise with their own Local Authority area for Away from Placement reporting and recording arrangements.

2.6 DESIGNATED RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE GOING MISSING & MULTI-AGENCY MONITORING

Each area should have a designated 'Missing from Home' Strategic Partnership lead who should ensure that Missing Children remains a priority by having an oversight of the following:

- Implementation of "missing from home and care" protocols and procedures.
- Reporting information about patterns of absence among looked after children to the Director of Children's Services and to councillors responsible for "Corporate Parenting".
- Providing data monitoring information to the LSCB/LSCP/MASA and themes to inform the partnership agencies actions to address these, to aim to reduce future missing episodes for children and young people and to ensure they are safeguarded from exploitation.

The LSCB / LSCP / MASA, along with the Pan Merseyside Care Home Governance Meeting and Strategic MACE should monitor agencies compliance with this Protocol and ensure that children and young people going missing or away from placement without authorisation are effectively safeguarded by individual agency action and the partnership working effectively together.

SECTION 3

3.1 PROCEDURES FOR A MISSING CHILD

If it is identified that a child is missing, the correct reporting procedures need to be adhered to, irrespective of the child's status.

3.1.1 MISSING FROM HOME

If children are living at home with a parent or carer and a professional becomes aware that a child is, or has been, missing, they should advise the parent or carer to complete the above initial responsibilities and notify the Police immediately, if parent has not already done so. If there is any concern the parent has not, and will not, report the child missing, the professional should notify the Police via 101 or 999 in a case of emergency. They must not wait to notify the Out of Hours Social Care Emergency Duty Team or allocated Social Worker, as this can cause a delay in ascertaining the child's whereabouts. Merseyside Police will ensure that the professionals missing report is recorded as a missing episode. In any agency assessments of risk and safeguarding concerns, consideration should be given to the fact that the parent / carer has not reported their child as being missing and the risk this has placed the child in.

If any assessment identifies any safeguarding concerns, a professional safeguarding referral is to be made to the MASH. If the child continues to be missing, the partnership investigation ascertaining their whereabouts will ensure contact is made with the child or young person's educational setting and inform the Designated Safeguarding Lead within the educational setting that the child or young person has been reported as being missing.

If a parent refuses the offer of an Early Help Plan (where appropriate) or a return interview, and there are other causes for concern, a further discussion must take place in the MASH.

All Police missing notifications communicated to the MASH should be screened as a priority, and either forwarded to the allocated Social Worker / Children Services Worker within Children's Social Care (where relevant) or consideration of a Social Worker being allocated to

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the child. The allocated Social Worker / children Services Worker must immediately consider informing all the agencies involved with the child, and consideration given to the need to inform the Attendance and Welfare Service, where appropriate.

3.2 CASES WHERE A CHILD CONTINUES TO BE MISSING

This section should be followed in all cases where any child continues to be missing.

The National Charity “Missing People” are informed by Merseyside Police as soon as the Risk Assessment is completed of a missing child. If a child has been missing for 72 hours, the National Crime Agency (NCA) are automatically notified via the Police system. If there is a need for either organisation to be involved, the Police will request their assistance and the MASH will be informed. Close liaison should be ongoing between all partners and other relevant agencies by the key worker.

Merseyside Police use the Missing People TextSafe facility. i.e. The name and contact details of any missing child is sent over to Missing People, who then send an automated text message to the child giving their helpline number for confidential 24/7 support if the child needs it. This information is not stored on the case management system and cannot be retrieved by Missing People once the text has been sent. Details are: <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/police-services/request-a-textsafe> The TextSafe is for support whilst missing as opposed to support on return. Further information can be obtained by contacting 116000@missingpeople.org.uk.

A multi-agency Strategy Meeting must be convened by Children’s Social Care, including the Police, Education, Health and any other relevant agencies **when a child has been missing for 72 hours** (from time reported to police, however individual circumstances may require meeting to be held sooner). In the Strategy Meeting, notifying Press Communications and escalation to the Director of Children’s Services (DCS) should be considered. At this Initial Strategy Meeting, consideration must be given as to who is best placed to maintain contact with parents/carers ensuring that all those with responsibility are considered, despite whether the child is living within the family unit or not.

This meeting should try to identify any ‘push’ or ‘pull’ factors as well as any other agencies that could provide support. In the case of ‘pull factors’ it may be necessary to target those in the community who may be ‘harbouring’ the missing person, or exploiting them with regards to crime, sex or drugs. The meeting should also establish which other agencies are already involved in working with the child/young person. Early and effective sharing of information is essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour.

If there are concerns that a child has been trafficked the LSCB / LSCP / MASA, Trafficking Children Procedure should be followed, as per Section 2.1.

Following the multi-agency Strategy Meeting, if a child continues to be missing after 72 hours, weekly multi-agency review meetings should be convened and chaired by a representative of Children’s Social Care. The review meetings must take place at least weekly, following the initial meeting, until either the child has been found or has returned. Consideration should be given to holding a Care Planning meeting when a child has been found. This only applies to children looked after, and the care plan should be reviewed within a reasonable timescale to reduce the likelihood of further missing episodes.

Consideration must be given as to whether to convene an early statutory ‘looked after review meeting’, depending on the circumstances and history relating to the child. The child or young person’s parents and family must be updated appropriately and involved to try and communicate with the child/young person to support them to return to their placement.

If a child is missing for 5 days, a Command Team Review, delegated to an Inspector from the Missing Person Unit should be completed by the Police. Children’s Services to consider informing the Head of Service.

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At 28 days the Police will refer the investigation to the relevant Area Detective Inspector to review the progress of the investigation.

If a child or young person has been missing **3 occasions within a 30 day period**, and any safeguarding concerns identified, a multi-agency missing meeting should be considered and recorded on the child's electronic record. If the child is subject of an Early Help Plan, the agencies involved in the Plan should consider the issues raised during the missing episodes and whether the current Early Help Plan addressed such needs / risks.

If the child has been reported missing **on 9 occasions in a 90 day period**, a further multi-agency meeting is required chaired by a Senior Manager or Independent Reviewing Officer. Police will not automatically refer all 9 in 90 escalations to the DCS but will be by exception if it appears the care planning process or for non-Looked After Children the local safeguarding arrangements responses are not meeting the requirements of the child. Lead Practitioner should co-ordinate a multi-agency meeting to review the Early Help Plan in place to ensure this addresses any needs / risks identified.

3.3 AWAY FROM PLACEMENT WITHOUT AUTHORISATION

Away from placement without authorisation:

- A looked-after child whose whereabouts are known - but,
- who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be, and,
- the carer has concerns, or,
- the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police

Sometimes a looked after child may be away from their placement without authorisation. While they are not missing, there may still be a risk posed to the young person because of where they are, e.g. at a friend's house where the carer has concerns about the risk of CSE or misusing substances, or they may be staying with family members from whose care they have previously been removed. A concern for welfare report to police should be considered if there are known concerns around a location.

The police will not consider this child as missing, but the RMFHC protocol recognises the relationship between 'away from placement' and missing young people; Young people who are 'away' from placement may be at more risk; or their whereabouts can change quickly – resulting in them being a 'missing' young person. As such this protocol provides considerations for local authorities and safeguarding partnerships who are managing 'away' episodes.

[Statutory guidance on children who runaway or go missing from home or care \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Discussions need to take place with agencies involved in the child's Care Plan to analyse risks involved. If there are concerns that a young person is being sexually or criminally exploited, the Local safeguarding procedures/Pan Mersey CE Protocol Procedures should be followed. The 'away from placement' behaviour needs to be reviewed at regular agreed periods set out in the care/trigger plan, throughout the period of unauthorised absence by the Care Home Manager / Foster Carer.

If a child has been classed as away from placement without authorisation for 72 hours, the social worker must discuss with their manager what action is required and consider whether a review care planning meeting is needed or a strategy meeting if the risks are unknown. The lead professional should keep the 'away' episode under review in light of the statutory guidance

If the child does not return and their whereabouts are unknown or risks are identified at any stage, the police are to be contacted.

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If a child keeps going away from placement, a Care Planning Meeting must be convened by their allocated Social Worker and Team manager, to consider if the child's Care Plan and Placement Plan are safeguarding the child.

3.4 FOREIGN NATIONALS AND UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN

Some of the children who are looked after by the Local Authority may be Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers or other migrant children, and there is a possibility that some may have been trafficked from abroad. In such cases, those professionals involved should be aware that such children are likely to remain under the influence of their traffickers. Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours. A photograph must be taken of the child. The Care Plan is of critical importance in these cases, and should be based upon a thorough assessment that addresses:

- The child's background before coming to the UK.
- The reasons the child came to the UK.
- An analysis of the child's vulnerability to remaining under the influence of their traffickers.

In conducting such assessments, the Local Authority should work in cooperation with the UK Human Trafficking Centre who may be familiar with patterns of trafficking into the UK. Immigration staff who specialise in trafficking issues should be able to advise on whether information about the individual child suggests that they fit the profile of a potentially trafficked child. Statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children should be followed. [Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery: Statutory guidance for local authorities \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/421212/care-of-unaccompanied-migrant-children-and-child-victims-of-modern-slavery-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities.pdf)

A review of Merseyside's response to the safeguarding by police, immigration enforcement and Social Services for unaccompanied migrant children into the UK and how to improve processes to prevent them going missing and being further exploited or re-trafficked is ongoing, under the Operational name Innerste. Barnardo's are the Independent Child Trafficking Guardians.

It is also essential that the police and immigration staff are fully involved in discussions about any crimes that may have been perpetrated against the child. The Local Authority should also share information with the police and immigration authorities concerning risk to other children or other relevant immigration matters that may arise.

The publication 'Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked' contains practical guidance for agencies likely to encounter, or have referred to them, children and young people who may have been trafficked. Where it is suspected that a child has been trafficked, the local authority should refer them to the UK's victim identification framework, the National Referral Mechanism. The Trafficked Children Toolkit, developed by the London Safeguarding Children Board, has been made available to all local authorities to help professionals assess the needs of these children and to refer them to the National Referral Mechanism.

The [NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-we-do/our-services/child-trafficking-advice-centre/) provides specialist advice and information to professionals who have concerns that a child may have been trafficked. Phone 0808 800 5000 Monday to Friday 09-30AM to 04-30PM. Alternatively, email help@nspcc.org.uk.

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3.5 PHOTOGRAPHS

Should a child/young person go missing, it is vital to the safe recovery of the child that a recent photograph of the child is made available. The photograph must be a good likeness of the child/young person, and the date the photograph was taken should be endorsed on the back of it to identify its' relevance to the enquiry. All unaccompanied asylum seekers must have their photograph taken as part of the assessment process.

The photograph will be used by the police to help them identify the child/young person whilst conducting enquiries. The police and local authority may decide to use the photograph more widely, including publishing the photograph to national or local media, and circulation on the Police / Missing Persons National website and in very serious cases, where the child is believed to be at severe risk, Child Rescue Alert and to the National Crime Agency.

When the child becomes looked after by the local authority, the consent of a person with Parental Responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any subsequent missing person investigation. If possible the consent of the child/young person should also be gained.

For most parents or carers, this would be something that would normally be available immediately. However, for some care experienced children looked after there may not be a recent or any photograph of the child or young person. The parent or last carer may be able to provide a photograph, but this may not always be possible. In order to ensure that a photograph is available of all looked after children, a recent photograph should be requested from the parent or carer to be included with the child's looked after information. Consent must be sought from the person(s) with parental responsibility and the child must be notified that the photograph is being kept. The photograph will be returned if the child returns home or moves to another carer and is no longer under the care of the local authority.

3.6 CARE LEAVERS & CHILDREN IN SEMI-INDEPENDENT LIVING

Most Looked After Children remain in care until they are 18 years old. However some, particularly those who were accommodated subject to S.20 of the Children Act, do exercise their right to leave care between 16 and 18 years old. The Local Authority discourages young people from leaving care before they are 18 but if they do, attempts are made to find accommodation that will provide the maximum support for the young person – for example supported lodgings or semi-independent accommodation.

The local authority must ensure that care leavers live in 'suitable accommodation' as defined in regulation 9(2) of the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010.

The Local authority should ensure that pathway plans set out where a young person may be vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking or going missing, and put in place support services to minimise this risk. The Local Authority continues to have responsibility to support the young person and to address any risks that may impede or prevent their smooth transition to adulthood.

In a few cases a young person may live independently before they are 18. Their history of going missing should be taken into account when considering how likely they are to manage independent living successfully before 18. Where risks are identified, ways to manage these should be written into the pathway plan, for example support from a vulnerable tenants worker, or increased level of visiting from the Personal Advisor.

It is more usual for care leavers who are 17 yrs of age to live in some form of semi-independent accommodation, either with visiting support, or, staff living on the premises but not caring for the young person. In these circumstances if a young person goes missing, there is an expectation by police that reasonable enquiries are conducted to locate the child before reporting the child missing. This is the responsibility of the Local Authority in their capacity as

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the corporate parent. Placements should contact the social worker or the emergency duty team out of hours to undertake enquiries. Police will only take responsibility at the point when either the accommodation provider or the local authority has conducted reasonable actions to locate the young person themselves and have not been able to locate them. I.e. the same expectation if it was a young person being reported missing by responsible parents. The exception to this, is if there is an immediate risk of harm or danger to the child or others. Ofsted have been consulted about this stance, in relation to Annex A (See Appendix 3), and are unable to provide a definitive answer regarding whether a provider checking places to look for children is providing care, as each case can be different. However, they state that if the staff of the semi-independent or supported accommodation setting are completing these checks as a safeguarding act, so just to check that the child is actually missing, or just not where they should be and /or alive and well, then Ofsted would consider this as support rather than care. However, if they are reported missing as the child has missed their curfew which was set by staff, then this would start to indicate care. Care planning meetings should consider whose responsibility it is to make enquiries when a child goes missing, prior to making the report to the police.

As young people approach 18yrs of age they often develop relationships and behaviours that mirror those of adults, but these can also put them at risk of sexual exploitation, substance misuse, and criminal behaviour. As up to a third of young people return to their families once they leave care before their 18th birthday, this is also the time when many go missing from their accommodation and stay with family members. Recognising this to be a potentially vulnerable age group of young people it is good practice to visit these young people within 48 hours, and offer them the opportunity for an independent return interview.

3.7 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PLACED WITHIN MERSEYSIDE BY ANOTHER LOCAL AUTHORITY

When another Local Authority places a child in the Merseyside area, they are required to notify Children's Services in the area the child is being placed of the placement (See Notification of a child in the care of another Local Authority) (CICOLA) being placed within the Local Authority boundary & Notification of a child being placed out of the Borough in a neighbouring / Distant Local Authority Procedure).

All looked after children placed within the Merseyside area by another Local Authority should be recorded on the Local Authority where they are residing ICS (Liquid Logic) system, as an Out Of Borough Placed Child. If the Notification form identifies that the child has a history or is at risk of going missing or being away from placement, the Notification should be communicated by the host Local Authority to the local Merseyside Police Missing Person Co-ordinator, so they are aware that a child or young person who is at risk of being reported missing is living as a looked after child within the Merseyside area and can make contact with the Placement and allocated Social Worker to ascertain what actions are required to be undertaken if the child is reported as missing.

The placing Local Authority Social Worker has responsibilities to their looked after child to follow the guidance as stated by the host Authority Local Safeguarding Partnership Missing Children procedures.

The MASH should record all missing notifications on the Other Local Authority (OLA) placed looked after child records on their Liquid Logic data system.

If there are any concerns related to child sexual and / or criminal exploitation or that the child may have been trafficked, the PAN Merseyside Child Exploitation Protocol local area LSCP Pathway should be followed.

If a child has been **missing for 3 occasions in a 30 day period**, the placing Local Authority must be contacted by the MASH or Missing Person Co-ordinator and ask them to consider if

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the Care Plan and/or placement is meeting the child/young person's needs and addressing any safeguarding concerns/risks.

Consideration should be given to establish if there are safeguarding concerns. If safeguarding concerns are identified, the placing Social Care Team Manager should be requested to chair a Strategy Meeting, involving Merseyside Police. If the placing authority do not agree to undertake a Strategy Meeting and agencies located in the area the child is placed in have evidence of safeguarding concerns, this should be escalated to the placing Local Authority Looked after Children's Service Senior Manager.

If the child has been reported missing on **9 occasions in a 90 day** period the Safeguarding Lead for the Local Authority the child is placed in must escalate their concern to the placing Local Authority Looked after Children's Service Senior Manager, asking them to consider if the placement is meeting the child's needs and can safeguard them. If there is any concern the placing Local Authority is not addressing this concern this should be escalated to the Director of Children's Services (DCS), for them to make contact with the DCS of the placing Local Authority.

There may be occasions where additional meetings are required, based on extraordinary circumstances, where multi-agencies can discuss and work together.

Whilst the 3/30 and 9/90 provide a framework around which to structure our approach to repeated missing episodes, professionals should be conscious of patterns and frequency of missing children; and their individual risks and vulnerabilities. The 3/30 and 9/90 framework should not be a bar to professional judgement and consideration of appropriate responses as per Working Together 2018 (or updated version). Partnership coordination can be considered at earlier stages on a case by case basis.

Merseyside Police will consider whether the child needs to be placed on a Missing OSARA. This is mandatory for all children aged 13 and under if they have been missing 3 times in 90 days, and professional judgement used for children over 13. The police work with partner agencies to reduce repeat missing episodes and consequently the potential risks associated during a missing episode through effective use of the Missing OSARA.

3.8 RETURN OF THE CHILD

Regardless of how long a child has been missing, upon their return an Independent Return Interview should be offered to all children and young people who have been missing. See Appendix 4.

When a child returns home, they should be seen by a police officer or PCSO and a prevention interview carried out to establish their whereabouts when missing and obtain any intelligence from this.

The Commissioned Service, or Local Authority, who undertake Missing Children Independent Return Interviews in the local area should be informed of the missing incident and contact the family/carer to offer the Independent Return Interview. The role of the Missing Caseworker is to work with children and young people who have been reported missing with a view to conducting a return home interview within 72hrs of them returning. To determine appropriate support plans and pathways for all young people, including the provision of interventions and direct work. To work in partnership with Children's Social Care to facilitate support where child exploitation is highlighted as a risk and to work in association with and support the Pan Merseyside Missing and Child Exploitation protocols.

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The Record of the Return Interview should be recorded on the child's records. The completed Independent Return Interview form should also be provided to Merseyside Police local area Missing Persons Co-ordinator, so this can be recorded on Police electronic systems, to any future missing occasions or investigations. If safeguarding concerns are raised during the interview a referral should be made to the MASH and if an Early Help Lead Practitioner is currently involved they should be informed of the referral to the MASH urgently. If any concerns regarding child criminal and/or sexual exploitation are identified, then the PAN Merseyside Child Exploitation Procedure should be followed and a referral should be made to the MASH. If concerns are raised that a child or young person has been trafficked, the Pan Merseyside CE protocol and Home Office guidance on Trafficking / NRM should be followed and a referral should be made to the MASH. Direct work may then be carried with the young person and agencies. Consider Operation Innerste.

Local Authorities that are placing children in an area are to ensure that they are aware of the local return home interview procedures.

In the majority of cases, police have no legal authority to return missing children to their home or the place they were reported from. There are some circumstances where police do have legal options to deal with missing children, and this is under Section 46(1) of the Children Act which enables police to remove a child into police protection if they are a risk of significant harm. If the young person appears to be suffering a mental health crisis, police may have the option to use emergency powers to protect and ensure the safety of the young person aged 16 and 17 years under the Mental Health Act 1983 or the Mental Capacity Act. The use of these powers will be very rare.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – Definitions

NPCC	National Police Chiefs Council
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
OSARA	Objective, Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CIN	Child in Need
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
CCE	Criminal Exploitation
DfE	Department for Education
EDT	Emergency Duty Team
LSCP	Local Safeguarding Children Partnership
LAC	Looked After Child
MACE	Multi Agency Child Exploitation
Missing	See Definitions
MFH	'Missing From Home'
PACE	Police and Criminal Evidence (Act 1984)
SPOC	Single Point of Contact
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
UASC	Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
AFP or (‘Away)	Away from Placement without Authorisation
ICTG	Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (Barnardo’s).

APPENDIX 2 – Philomena Protocol



DO YOU CARE FOR A YOUNG PERSON AND WORRY THAT THEY MAY GO MISSING OR NOT RETURN HOME WHEN EXPECTED

The Philomena Protocol is an initiative which has been adopted by Merseyside Police to help locate and safely return a young person as quickly as possible when they are missing. The basis of the scheme is for vital information about the young person to be recorded on a form which can be used to locate them safely and quickly.

The form should then be stored safely—either in electronic format on a computer, or a printed version. It may need to be located quickly, at any time of day or night, by the person who needs the information to begin the initial searches. When the form is complete, it will contain confidential information about a person so it should be stored securely.

When should I complete the form? *As soon as possible*

What should I do with the form when it is complete? *Keep it safe where you can find it quickly. The police will only ask for a copy of it if the person it refers to has been reported missing.*

What should I do if the young person goes missing? *Make enquiries straight away to try and locate them. If you cannot locate them then you should call 101. Have your Philomena Protocol Forms to hand. In an emergency, dial 999.*

I don't understand some of the terms on the form, what should I do? *Don't worry, just complete as much as you can.*

What will the police do with the information? *We will use this along with the carer to help find the young person.*

What should I do to help the police locate the young person? *Keep making enquiries yourself during their missing episode. Work in partnership with the police to trace the young person as quickly as possible.*

How will I know where to look for the young person? *As a carer, you should have completed a list of known locations and associates where the young person may go, as well as contact details. This should be completed on the additional Philomena form and securely kept.*

How will the police know how I am going to help them to locate the young person quickly? *Discuss with the officer what enquiries you are going to do, how often you will contact people and how you will update the police that you have done this.*

How will the police record the enquiries I have completed? *The police will record this on the missing persons report along with who has completed the enquiry and the time that it was completed.*

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APPENDIX 3 – Supported Living Accommodation guidelines set out by Ofsted.

Supported living accommodation does not need to be regulated by Ofsted as they do not provide care to young people. The below sets out criteria for providers of accommodation to young people 16 and over, to help identify whether the service is 'supported accommodation' and therefore not required to be registered under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Where care is provided, this service meets the definition of a children's home and will usually need to register. Criteria:	Supported Living	Care
Can young people go out of the establishment without staff permission?		
Do young people have full control of their own finances?		
Do young people have control over what they wear and of the resources to buy clothes?		
Are young people in charge of meeting all of their health needs, including such things as arranging GP or specialist health care appointments? Are young people in full control of their medication?		
Do staff have any access to any medical records?		
Can young people choose to stay away overnight without needing to ask permission? (<i>being expected to tell someone if they are going to be away overnight does not indicate providing care, but needing to ask someone's permission does</i>)		
Is there a sanctions policy that goes beyond house rules and legal sanctions?		
Does the YP have a curfew imposed by the placement?		
Does the YP have a tenancy agreement imposed by the placement?		

As per the Ofsted guidelines, care is not defined in law but general indications of support versus care can be:

- The young person does not need constant supervision
- The young person has independence and can come and go as they please
- They are in control of their own finances
- The young person is aged 16 or over

If children are accommodated in unregulated provision and the accommodation provider provides care out of necessity, the accommodation provider is actually operating as an unregistered children's home and will need to seek registration.

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Generally speaking a Young Person **should** notify the staff at the supported living accommodation of their intention to stay out and provide an address as to where they will be staying. However, just because the accommodation provider is not aware of their whereabouts, they generally would not need to be reported as missing as they are progressing towards independent living. They should not be reported missing if they miss any curfew (as this constitutes care) or tenancy agreement. However, if the child has been missing for some time, their whereabouts are unknown and there has been no contact with staff or professionals, at this point it would be appropriate to consider the young person as a missing person and normal reporting would apply.

APPENDIX 4 – Example of a Return Home Interview Template

1 – Tell us what happened to make you run away?
2 – What happened whilst you were away?
3 – Did you feel safe whilst away?
4 – Can you think of anything that could have prevented you from running away?
5 – Hopes, Dreams and Future
6 – Strengths & Protective Factors

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Signatories to the Protocol

This protocol is provided to meet the needs of and the management of associated intelligence and information. It is intended that signatories will use the protocol for this purpose.

Liverpool Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership

Signed

Name

Title: Safeguarding Strategic Partners, Liverpool LSCB

Wirral Local Safeguarding Children's Board

Signed

Name

Title: Safeguarding Strategic Partners, Wirral LSCB

St Helens Local Safeguarding Children's Board

Signed

Name

Title: Safeguarding Strategic Partners, St Helens LSCB

Knowsley Local Safeguarding Children's Board

Signed

Name

Title: Safeguarding Strategic Partners, Knowsley LSCB

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Sefton Local Safeguarding Children's Board

Signed

Name

Title: Safeguarding Strategic Partners, Sefton LSCB

Merseyside Police Assistant Chief Constable

Signed

Name

Title: Merseyside Police Assistant Chief Constable