



Joint Handbook for Safeguarding Missing Children

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1. Introduction

Children who go missing from home or care place themselves, and sometimes others, at increased risk of being harmed. The reasons why children go missing are complex and frequently involve a number of push and pull factors which should not be viewed in isolation from a child's home circumstances or experience in care. Every missing episode warrants professional attention, and practitioners need to offer a consistent and coherent response to ensure the child is protected from harm.

This multi-agency handbook is designed to support an effective and collaborative safeguarding response from all agencies involved when a child goes missing from home or care. It provides guidance for assessing both the risk of the child going missing and the risk to the child when he or she is missing. The handbook describes the appropriate actions that agencies should take to locate the child, support his or her return to home or care, and to identify issues which caused, and may continue to cause, the child to go missing. The handbook applies to all children that are absent or go missing, including:

- All children aged under 18 who go missing from their family home
- All children looked-after by the local authority placed within and beyond the local area
- All young people for whom the local authority has continuing responsibility as care leavers.

Although there are particular vulnerabilities associated with looked-after children who go missing, the majority of children who go missing do so from their family homes. Often the same measures are required to protect both groups of children, given that all children who go missing can experience the same risks. This handbook relates to protecting all children who go missing whether they go missing from home or care; however, the protocol contains additional guidance covering the specific actions which need to be taken when children go missing from a care setting.

2. Status of this handbook

This handbook has been approved by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) in Kingston upon Thames and Richmond upon Thames. It has been written to comply with the statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home and care (2014) and reflects the national Police guidance on the management, investigation and recording of missing persons (2016). It should be read and implemented by all practitioners and managers working with children who are at risk of going missing from home and care.

It is intended that this handbook will assist in the development of preventative services for children who are at risk of going missing, as well as the development of effective responses to missing children. An annual review of the effectiveness of this handbook will be commissioned by the LSCB.

The handbook should be read in conjunction with the following statutory guidance and procedures:

- Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care (2014)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015) and related guidance
- Children Act 1989 and related guidance
- Children Act 2004 and related guidance
- London Child Protection Procedures and Practice Guidance (2015)
- ACPO guidance on management, recording and investigation of missing persons (2010)
- ACPO interim guidance on the management of missing persons (2013)
- Metropolitan Police Missing Persons Standard Operating Procedure (2016)
- Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked (2011)
- The national minimum standards for residential and fostering agencies (2011)

Professionals should be aware that going missing may be an indicator that a child is at risk of, or experiencing, sexual exploitation. All professionals should therefore be aware of the indicators of child sexual exploitation and access the LSCB Child Sexual Exploitation procedures for information and guidance – www.kingstonandrichmondscb.org.uk/news-resources/policies-and-procedures.

Going missing from home or care may also be an indicator of other specific risk factors including a child being trafficked or subject to forced marriage. The LSCB procedures for safeguarding children who may have been trafficked or subject to forced marriage should be read in conjunction with this handbook – www.kingstonandrichmondscb.org.uk/news-resources/policies-and-procedures

Children who are missing from education are not necessarily missing from home or care; however, children missing from school or their education placement can be an indicator of other risk factors. Any incidences of children missing education should be appropriately investigated in line with the Children Missing Education Strategy produced by Achieving for Children, which can be found at: www.kingstonandrichmondscb.org.uk/news-resources/policies-and-procedures.

3. Definitions

The following definitions have been used throughout this handbook:

Absent	A child who is not at a place where he or she is expected or required to be – see paragraph 5.2 in this protocol for further information.
Absent from placement without authorization	A looked-after child whose whereabouts are known but who is not at his or her placement or the place he or she is expected to be and the carer has concerns about the child’s safety and wellbeing.
Care leaver	An eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.
Child	Any person who has not yet reached his or her eighteenth birthday; the term child or children therefore represents both children and young people.
Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)	Exploitative situations, contexts or relationships where a child receives something (food, accommodation, alcohol, drugs, affection, gifts, money etc.) as a result of he or she performing sexual activities on other people and/or other people performing sexual activities on them.
Host local authority	The local authority in whose area a looked-after child is accommodated when he or she is placed outside of the responsible local authority’s area.
Looked-after child	A child who is looked-after by a local authority by reason of a Care Order or voluntarily accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
Missing	A child whose whereabouts cannot be established and has been reported to the Police– see paragraph 5.1 in this handbook for further information. Every child for whom there are risks of child sexual exploitation.
Responsible local authority	The local authority that is responsible for a looked-after child’s care and care planning. In Kingston and Richmond this responsibility has been devolved to Achieving for Children, a social enterprise company owned by the two local authorities and commissioned to deliver their children’s services.
Trafficking	Any child transported for exploitative reasons is considered to be a trafficking victim. Children may be trafficked internally within the UK or externally to and from other countries.
Young runaway	A child who has run away from his or her home or care placement, or who feels that he or she has been forced or lured to leave.

4. Guiding principles

This handbook should be read as guidance as it cannot anticipate or reflect every situation. All practitioners working with children in a professional capacity should use their professional judgment to determine the actions necessary to protect and safeguard the wellbeing of a child. The following principles should be adopted by all agencies.

- The safety and wellbeing of the child is paramount. The shared aim of all agencies is to reduce the incidence of all children who go missing. Children who go missing place themselves at risk and each missing episode is potentially serious. The reasons for their absence are often complex and cannot be viewed in isolation from the child's home circumstances or their experience in care. Every missing episode should receive appropriate attention from the professionals involved with the child who should work together to ensure a consistent and coherent response is given to the child on his or her return.
- When a child goes missing from home or care the shared aim of all agencies is to prevent that child suffering harm by locating and returning the child to safety as soon as possible. The Police will act on any report of a missing or absent child where there is an assessed risk to the child's safety or wellbeing.
- Interventions are important in attempting to address repeat missing episodes. Child protection procedures will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child may be at risk of significant harm. Interventions for looked-after children must be driven by and reflected in the placement information record and in the child's care plan. Interventions must also be informed by effective return interviews.
- Statutory guidance outlines that every missing child who returns to home or care will receive an independent return interview to determine the reasons for their missing behaviour and the associated risks to them. The views expressed by the child in the return interview will be taken seriously by all agencies.
- Agencies will share data, information and intelligence through multi-agency meetings in order to better understand and reduce the risks to children who go missing through strengthened preventative work and interventions.
- The national minimum standards for children's homes and fostering services require all providers to have in place procedures for when a child is missing from their care setting. These procedures must be compatible with this handbook. The reporting of a looked-after child as a missing person should not be used as a sanction against the child.
- Agencies will take responsibility for ensuring their workforce is trained and skilled in working with children who go missing. This will help build professional confidence, improve working practices and enable practitioners to meet their responsibilities to the highest standard.

5. Definitions of absent and missing

This handbook uses the definitions for 'missing children' and 'absent children' set out in the Association of Chief Police Officers' (ACPO) Guidance on the Management, Investigation and Recording of Missing Persons (2010 and 2013). This definition has been adopted by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and informs their policy and standard operating procedures for the investigation of missing persons, which was updated in February 2016.

5.1 Definition of a missing child

A child is considered to be missing if his or her whereabouts cannot be established, whatever the circumstances of his or her disappearance, and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the child may be the subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.

5.2 Definition of an absent child

A child is absent when he or she is not at a place where he or she is expected or required to be. The absent category will include cases where children are not presently where they are supposed to be and where there is no apparent risk of harm. Absent cases will be monitored by the Police with consideration given to escalating the case to the missing category where there is a change in circumstances that has increased the level of risk to the child. Where a child has been identified as at risk of sexual exploitation he or she should not be considered as absent, but as missing. All children under the age of 13 reported to Police, whether "absent" or "missing", will be classified due to risk issues as "missing".

6. Agency roles and responsibilities

Local agencies must work together to identify and assess the risks to children who are missing from home and care, and to analyse data and intelligence for patterns that indicate particular concerns and risks. They should also work collaboratively to ensure appropriate measures are in place to prevent children from going missing.

6.1 Roles and responsibilities of the local authority

The Children Act 2004 (Section 13) requires local authorities and other named statutory partners to make arrangements to ensure that their functions are discharged in order to safeguard and protect the welfare of children. This includes planning to prevent children from going missing and to protect them when they do, most often by meeting with the family and child. Local authorities should name a senior children's services manager as responsible for monitoring policies and performance relating to children who go missing from home and care. The responsible manager should use all available resources to understand the risks and issues facing children missing from home and care and ensure local practice is effective in dealing with the issue. Local authority children's services in Kingston and Richmond upon Thames are delivered by Achieving for Children.

6.2 Roles and responsibilities of the Police

The Police are the lead agency for investigating and finding missing children. The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) is responsible for recording every report of a missing child and for conducting an assessment of the risk to that child and the wider public as a result of their disappearance. The MPS will actively investigate all missing children and will conduct regular reviews of unsolved missing children investigations including an on-going re-assessment of the risks to these children.

6.3 Roles and responsibilities of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The LSCB is responsible for considering the safeguarding risks and issues associated with children going missing from home and care. This requires partner agencies from children's social care, the Police, health, education and other services to work effectively together to prevent children from going missing and to act when they do. The LSCB must ensure that there is an up-to-date and appropriate handbook in place which clearly sets out how agencies will respond to children who run away or go missing in the local area. The LSCB should receive and scrutinise regular reports from the local authority and the Police analysing data on children missing from home and care; this should include an analysis of their return interviews and the effectiveness of their measures to prevent children from going missing. In Richmond and Kingston LSCB, the Quality Assurance Sub-Group is responsible for testing the effectiveness of local arrangements for missing children.

7. Risk Assessment Framework

The MPS are responsible for assessing and classifying the degree of risk when a child goes missing from home or care. The MPS will prioritise all incidents of children missing from home or care as low, medium or high risk in accordance with the risk assessment framework set out below. The Police Duty Officer (Inspector) will agree the initial risk grading of a missing child within 2 hours of the time of origin. This will follow appraisal by the initial investigating officer. Merlin (Police notification) reports will be created in all cases within 4 hours of the time of origin.

7.1 High risk

A missing child incident would be categorised as high risk where the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds to suspect that the child is in danger through their own vulnerability or may have been the victim of a serious crime. The high risk category would also be used where there are substantial grounds to believe that the public is in danger as a result of the child's missing episode. The high risk category requires the immediate deployment of Police resources. The Merlin will be created immediately. MPS guidance makes clear that a member of the senior management team or similar command level must be involved in the examination of the initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels in order to locate and protect the child as soon as possible. A (senior) investigating officer will be appointed who will lead the investigation and agree the media strategy, family support arrangements and liaison with Achieving for Children and other agencies involved with the family. High risk cases will continue to demand a Borough response and will be overseen by the Crime Manager / SLT and be resourced according to merit.

7.2 Medium risk

A child would be prioritised as medium risk where the risk posed is likely to be place the child in danger or they are a threat to themselves and others. This category requires an active and measured response by the Police and other agencies in order to trace the missing child and support the family or carers. The Police will lead a proactive investigation and search to locate and protect the child as soon as possible. Duty Officers will own medium risk missing person investigations for the initial 48 hours. Handovers during this time will ensure the risk grading remains accurate.

7.3 Low Risk

A child should never be classed as a low risk, even if they have returned. Duty Officers will own low risk missing person investigations (adults) for the initial 48 hours. Handovers during this time will ensure the risk grading remains accurate.

7.4 Absent

All absents are subject to a rolling review for the first 24 hours. Review times are based on what the informant tells the Met C Controller and not tied to a set timescale i.e. 3, 6 hours. Absent status only lasts 24 hours and the child will be reclassified as missing at the 24 hour mark.

8. Responding to children missing from home

8.1 Reporting children missing from home

If an agency is informed that a child is missing from their home, they must advise the parent or carer to report the missing episode to the Police. They should also advise the parent or carer of their agency's duty to ensure that the incident is reported to the Police and, if necessary, follow this up by contacting the Police directly to verify that the child has been reported missing.

Parents and carers will be expected to undertake basic measures to try to locate their missing child and ascertain his or her safety. Before a child is reported missing to the Police, the following actions should be taken by all parents or carers:

- Complete a search for the child in their home and immediate locality
- Contact known friends and relatives
- Visit locations that the child is known to frequent

If this immediate action does not result in the child being found, the matter should be reported to the Police.

If the whereabouts of the child are known or suspected, it is the responsibility of the parent or carer to arrange for the child's return home. Anyone who has care of a child without parental knowledge or agreement should do all that is reasonable to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of the child. In these circumstances they should inform the parents, carers, Police and/or Achieving for Children about the whereabouts and safety of the child.

8.2 Multi-agency response

The Police will complete an initial risk assessment for each individual child on every separate occasion he or she is reported missing. A risk level grading of either medium or high will be used.

A Merlin PAC will be created and sent to the Single Point of Access (SPA) in Achieving for Children.

Kingston SPA	020 8547 5008 (020 8770 5000 – out of hours) spa@kingston.gov.uk
Richmond SPA	020 8547 5008 (020 8770 5000 – out of hours) spa@richmond.gov.uk

It is the responsibility of the SPA to ensure that all relevant professionals are alerted to the missing episode. The Merlin PAC will remain open until the child has been located.

The MPS will carry out enquiries aimed at locating the child. Parents, carers, practitioners and all relevant agencies will be expected to help the Police to locate the child and to work cooperatively during the investigation. The MPS, in consultation with the child's parents, will be responsible for agreeing and implementing any media strategy to help locate the child.

8.3 Planning for the child's return

When a child has been missing for a period of **24 hours**, Achieving for Children will initiate a multi-agency meeting with the Police and other relevant agencies. This may be subject to review of timescale if a meeting is needed earlier than 24 hours, due to risk issues. The meeting will bring together a multi-agency chronology of significant events to inform a risk assessment, and either work along the statutory guidance for a Section 47 child protection investigation or support for a child in need provided under Section 17 (Children Act 1989). The meeting will also agree the safety plan for the child and agree the actions that are necessary to facilitate his or her return home. This may involve contingency planning such as identifying suitable alternative short-term accommodation for the child. Further meetings should be held at least every **seven days** or until the child is located. The initial meeting should determine whether the second or any subsequent meetings should be held before the child has been missing for seven days. This decision should be informed by the Police risk assessment and the risk assessment generated from the multi-agency chronologies. The minutes from meetings should be circulated to all agencies attending the meeting and recorded on the ICS or the relevant electronic case management system. Guidance on recording missing episodes on the ICS is attached to this handbook as ANNEX A.

8.4 Child protection concerns identified whilst the child is missing

A Section 47 strategy meeting should be held where the Police risk assessment and/or the discussion with agencies involved with the child indicates that a child is at immediate risk of harm. This would be the case for all children subject to a Child in Need Plan or a Child Protection Plan. The minutes from strategy meetings should be circulated to all agencies attending the meeting and recorded on the ICS or the relevant electronic case management system.

8.5 Return home

It is the responsibility of the parent or carer to notify the Police immediately to confirm that a missing child has been located and/or returned home. If a child has been missing more than once, a meeting should be planned to determine a pathway with parents and carers, and the child to halt missing episodes.

Safe and Well check

The Police will complete a Safe and Well check in person within **one hour** of the child's return home if they are classified as high risk, and will carry out a 'S' Grade response. All other Safe and Well checks will need to be completed within **three hours**. It is common for children to be unwilling to engage in this process. If a child refuses to engage, it is important for the Police to record the child's manner, their physical appearance and any other factors that may be relevant as part of any on-going investigation. The purpose of the Safe and Well check is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm, identify where they have been and with whom, and to give them the opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them. This is not the return interview. The Police must always conduct a Safe and Well check with a child who was categorised as missing when they return or are located, no matter how many times the child has been missing before.

The Police will notify the SPA that the child has returned home and any identified risks using a Merlin PAC. The Merlin PAC will also be used to confirm the missing status of the child: whether the child was missing or absent in line with the definitions set out in this handbook.

If the child has been the victim of a crime during their missing episode then the Police will instigate further enquiries. If the situation indicates that the child has been sexually exploited or has been subject to significant harm (or the risk of harm), a referral must be made to the SPA in accordance with local safeguarding procedures.

Collection of the child

The parent or carer is responsible for collecting the child and returning him or her home. If the child has an allocated social worker, he or she may be able to assist with the child's return. If there are thought to be specific issues of safety or public order difficulties involved in collecting and returning the child, then coordinated action should be agreed with the Police. The parent or carer should only request Police assistance to collect a child if:

- The parent or carer is being prevented from obtaining access to the child
- There is evidence to suggest that the child is at immediate risk of harm
- This is necessary to prevent a public order incident due to a threat of violence or disorder

If the Police locate a child they should not leave them at a location where he or she is likely to be exposed to the risk of harm or from where they are likely to go missing again, prior to the child's parent(s) or carer(s) being able to make arrangements to collect the child. In some circumstances, the Police may need to consider returning a child direct to his or her home or taking the child to a local Police station after confirming a collection time with the parent(s) or carer(s).

Children should not be returned to the place they ran away from until their safety and wellbeing is fully evaluated. If there are concerns that to do so would mean a child is likely to suffer significant harm, a referral must be made to Achieving for Children for the consideration of section 47 child protection enquiries. The Police may consider the use of Police Protection powers to ensure the safety of the child until child protection enquiries are undertaken, including applying for an Emergency Protection Order or applying for a Recovery Order.

An independent return interview should be completed for each missing episode within 72 hours of the child returning home. Completed return interview forms should be sent electronically to the Police and other agencies and should be recorded on the ICS or the relevant case recording system. They should be considered at any subsequent meetings about the child, including missing children meetings and MASE (Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation) meetings. See paragraph 11.1 for further details.

9. Responding to children missing from care

9.1 Care planning

Foster carers and residential care providers must be given a copy of this handbook, which must be followed when a child goes missing from their placement. They should be provided with training, supervision and support in the use of this handbook and develop skills to enable them to divert children from going missing.

Each looked-after child has a care plan based on a full assessment of their current and future needs, including potential risks to themselves and to others. The care plan will therefore take into account any risk that the child may go missing and any factors that may increase risk should they go missing. All risk information should also be included in the child's placement plan. Relevant information about the risks that a child may go missing should be shared with the placement and the Police. If there are grounds to suspect that a child is likely to go missing from his or her placement, a multi-agency preventative meeting should be held to reduce the risks.

The risk assessment should consider:

- The likelihood of the child going missing (push and pull factors)
- The risks the child is likely to face whilst absent
- Control measures to reduce these risks
- The actions that need to be taken if a child goes missing

Should a child go missing then a recent photograph of the child will need to be made available to the Police. Most commonly the photograph will be used by Police officers to help them identify the child when actively looking for the child at relevant locations. In serious cases the Police and Achieving for Children may decide to use this photograph more widely as part of a media strategy to locate the child. A recent photograph bearing a good likeness of a looked-after child must be kept on record by Achieving for Children for every child. When a child becomes looked-after, the consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any missing person investigation. Achieving for Children will also ensure that sufficient knowledge and information about the child is recorded to enable a detailed Police report to be made should a child go missing from care.

9.2 Unauthorised absence from placement

The foster carer or residential unit manager should determine if the child is missing from placement. Not all absences from a care placement will warrant a missing report. A child who is half-an-hour late returning from school would not usually be considered a missing person; neither would a child be missing if they are known to be staying safely with a friend for a short period and are likely to return home. Definitions of absence are set out in paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2 of this handbook.

Factors to consider

In determining whether a child is absent from placement (unauthorised), the foster carer or residential unit manager must consider the circumstances of the absence and the risk to the child. This decision should not be taken in isolation. Residential unit managers should consult with the team manager responsible for looked-after children or Emergency Duty Team (EDT). Foster carers should consult with the child's allocated social worker or EDT. Making this decision will require a consideration of the following factors:

- The circumstances of the child's absence
- The legal status of the child and his or her care plan
- The age and maturity of the child
- Any physical or cognitive disabilities or medical requirements
- Previous behaviour and historical concerns
- The child's tendency to substance misuse
- Any circumstances within the placement relevant to the absence
- The risk of offending
- The influence of peer groups, friends and family members
- The risk of sexual exploitation or predatory influences on the child
- Any known risk of abduction
- The general vulnerability of the child.

A child identified as at risk of sexual exploitation should not be considered absent but as missing. They will be flagged automatically by Police as missing.

Review of absence

The situation should be kept under constant review and changes in circumstances should be taken into account. If the child is receiving support or services from CAMHS professionals or other agencies it would be advisable to discuss the case with them to inform the decision; however, if they are not readily available a decision must be made on the basis of the best available information. A review should be conducted and recorded at a minimum of **six-hourly** intervals except during the night when a review should be conducted and recorded at 2300 hours and again at 0800 hours on the following morning. For a small number of children and young people it may be appropriate to immediately report them as a missing person. This should be part of the child's care plan and will normally be due to his or her vulnerability.

Where the assessment of the foster carer or residential unit manager is that the child is at risk from being absent from his or her placement, the child should be reported as missing to the Police.

Escalation

Where there is a difference of opinion between Achieving for Children and the Police over the appropriate category of absence, the Police will make the final decision about the Police response; however, the Police Officer should refer all such cases of dispute to the Duty Inspector. Where Achieving for Children are not satisfied with the decision of the relevant Inspector, the matter should be reported to senior managers in both agencies for resolution in line with escalation procedures,

Recording

If the assessment of the foster carer or residential unit manager is that there is no apparent risk to the child's immediate safety, he or she should record the absence as absent from placement without authorisation in the child's record, and inform the child's allocated social worker or EDT (Emergency Duty Team). The record should be dated and timed including a log of any contact made or attempted with the child, the child's response (or lack of response) and an indication of the assessed risk. Responsibility for managing this type of absence remains with the carer and the allocated social worker.

If the carer and/or allocated social worker know the child's whereabouts they will need to make a decision about whether to allow the child to temporarily remain at that location or make arrangements to facilitate the child's return.

If the child repeatedly remains away from his or her placement without authorization, the child's individual missing risk assessment and care plan must be reviewed and updated to reflect the issues and risks. For any child who has been missing more than once, there should be a planning meeting with the child, parents and carers (as appropriate) to determine a plan to halt missing episodes. Achieving for Children should keep accurate records of all episodes of children being away from placement without authorization. For individual children this should include the length of time they are away from their placement, whether they return of their own accord or are found, and the locations they are found at, together with any other relevant information. The child's Independent Reviewing Officer must be informed of all instances of a child being absent or away from placement without authorization. The care plan should be reviewed to include details of arrangements required to keep the child safe and minimise the future risk of the child going missing from his or her placement.

9.3 Reporting children missing from care

If a foster carer or residential unit manager assesses that an absent child is at risk, then the child should be reported as missing immediately and the perceived risk(s) reported to the Police. The carer must also immediately inform the child's allocated social worker and/or the relevant team manager. Out of normal working hours contact should be made with the EDT and the allocated social worker or team manager should be contacted on the next working day.

The allocated social worker should inform the child's parent(s) or the adult(s) holding parental responsibility no later than **24 hours** after the child was reported missing, unless indicated otherwise in the child's care plan. The child's Independent Reviewing Officer must also be kept informed of all incidences of a missing child or a child absent from placement without authorisation.

9.4 Multi-agency response

The Police will complete an initial risk assessment for each individual child on every separate occasion he or she is reported missing. A risk level grading of either low, medium or high will be used.

A Merlin PAC will be created and sent to the Single Point of Access (SPA) in Achieving for Children. It is the responsibility of the SPA to ensure that all relevant professionals in Achieving for Children are alerted to the missing episode. This should include the allocated social worker, the team manager and the Independent Reviewing Officer. The Merlin PAC will remain open until the child has been located.

The MPS will carry out enquiries aimed at locating the child. Foster carers, residential unit managers, practitioners and all relevant agencies will be expected to help the Police to locate the child and to work cooperatively during the investigation. Throughout the process the Police, foster carers, residential unit managers and social workers must keep a full record of all the actions taken and the messages received and given. The MPS, in consultation with Achieving for Children, will be responsible for agreeing and implementing any media strategy to help locate the child. Where appropriate the child's parent(s) will be included in this decision-making.

9.5 Planning for the child's return

Normally, when a child has been missing for a period of **24 hours**, Achieving for Children will initiate a multi-agency meeting with the Police and other relevant agencies (this timescale could be shortened depending on risk factors). The meeting will agree the safety plan for the child and agree

the actions that are necessary to locate the child and facilitate his or her return to the placement or to an alternative placement where that is in his or her best interests. Further meetings should be held at least every **seven days** or until the child is located. The initial meeting should determine whether the second or any subsequent meetings should be held before the child has been missing for seven days. This decision should be informed by the Police risk assessment, a multi-agency chronology and the child's care plan. The minutes from meetings should be circulated to all agencies attending the meeting and recorded on ICS.

9.6 Child protection concerns identified whilst the child is missing

A Section 47 strategy meeting should be held where the Police risk assessment and/or the discussion with agencies involved with the child indicates that a child is at immediate risk of harm. The minutes from strategy meetings should be circulated to all agencies attending the meeting and recorded on the ICS or the relevant electronic case management system.

9.7 Return to placement

It is the responsibility of the foster carer or residential unit manager to notify the Police immediately to confirm that a missing child has been located and/or returned to the placement.

Safe and Well check

The Police will complete a Safe and Well check in person within **three hours** of the child's return to placement, if they have been deemed at medium or low risk. If the child has been classified as high risk, the Safe and Well check must take place within **one hour** of return. It is common for children to be unwilling to engage in this process. If a child refuses to engage, it is important for the Police to record the child's manner, their physical appearance and any other factors that may be relevant as part of any ongoing investigation. The purpose of the Safe and Well check is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm, identify where they have been and with whom, and to give them the opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them. This is not the return interview. The Police must always conduct a Safe and Well check with a child who was categorised as missing when they return or are located, no matter how many times the child has been missing before.

The Police will notify the SPA that the child has returned home and any identified risks using a Merlin PAC. The Merlin PAC will also be used to confirm the missing status of the child: whether the child was missing or absent in line with the definitions set out in this handbook.

If the child has been the victim of a crime during their missing episode then the Police will instigate further enquiries. If the situation indicates that the child has been sexually exploited during their missing episode, a CSE risk assessment must be completed in line with the LSCB guidance on child sexual exploitation.

Collection of the child

The foster carer or residential unit manager is responsible for collecting the child and returning him or her to the care setting. The allocated social worker may be able to assist with this. If there are thought to be specific issues of safety or public order difficulties involved in collecting and returning the child, then coordinated action should be agreed with the Police. The foster carer or residential unit manager should request Police assistance to collect a child if:

- The carer is being prevented from obtaining access to the child

- There is evidence to suggest that the child is at immediate risk of harm
- This is necessary to prevent a public order incident due to a threat of violence or disorder

If the Police locate a child they should not leave them at a location where he or she is likely to be exposed to the risk of harm, or from where they are likely to go missing again, prior to the carer(s) being able to make arrangements to collect the child. In some circumstances, the Police may need to consider returning a child direct to his or her care placement or taking the child to a local Police station, after confirming a collection time with the carer(s).

Children should not be returned to the place they ran away from until their safety and wellbeing is fully evaluated. If there are concerns that to do so would mean a child is likely to suffer significant harm, a referral must be made to children's social care services in Achieving for Children for the consideration of section 47 child protection enquiries. The Police may consider the use of Police Protection powers to ensure the safety of the children until child protection enquiries are undertaken, including applying for an Emergency Protection Order, or applying for a Recovery Order.

Achieving for Children is responsible for deciding whether a return interview is completed for each missing episode. Completed return interview forms should be sent electronically to the Police and should be recorded on the ICS or the relevant case recording system.

9.8 Review of the care plan

When a looked-after child who has been missing has been located, the allocated social worker and team manager should decide in consultation with the Independent Reviewing Officer, carers and child whether they should convene an early statutory review of the child's care plan. The statutory review will provide an opportunity to check that the care plan has been appropriately amended to address the reasons for the child's absences and include an intervention strategy to prevent future missing episodes.

9.9 Missing episodes during external activities or outings

If a looked-after child goes missing during an external activity or outing, the responsible adult in charge of the activity, outing or holiday will:

- Arrange a search of the area where the child went missing
- Notify the local Police for that area

The Police for the area where the child went missing and the Police for the area where the child normally resides will decide which Police Force and division will take responsibility for managing the investigation. This will normally be the Police Force and division that covers the area where the majority of enquiries are likely to be conducted. The Police will notify the responsible local authority of their decision. The relevant team manager will be responsible for ensuring the guidance in relation to a missing looked-after child are followed. Ongoing communication must be maintained between the allocated social worker or team manager and the Police Force responsible for managing the missing person enquiry to support the investigation. The child's electronic social care record must reflect all the actions and discussions undertaken. The social worker should inform the child's parents or any other person with parental responsibility within **24 hours** of the child going missing.

9.10 Children subject to Placement with Parents regulations

A child living at home and subject to Placement with Parent regulations is still a looked-after child. It is the responsibility of the parent(s) to inform the allocated social worker or team manager (or the EDT) and the Police when it is evident that the child has gone missing from home. This responsibility should be discussed with the parent(s) before the placement is made and must form part of the placement agreement. The senior manager who approved the placement should be informed of the incident within 24 hours. The social worker must ensure that the child has been reported as missing to the Police and must record the incident on the child's electronic file.

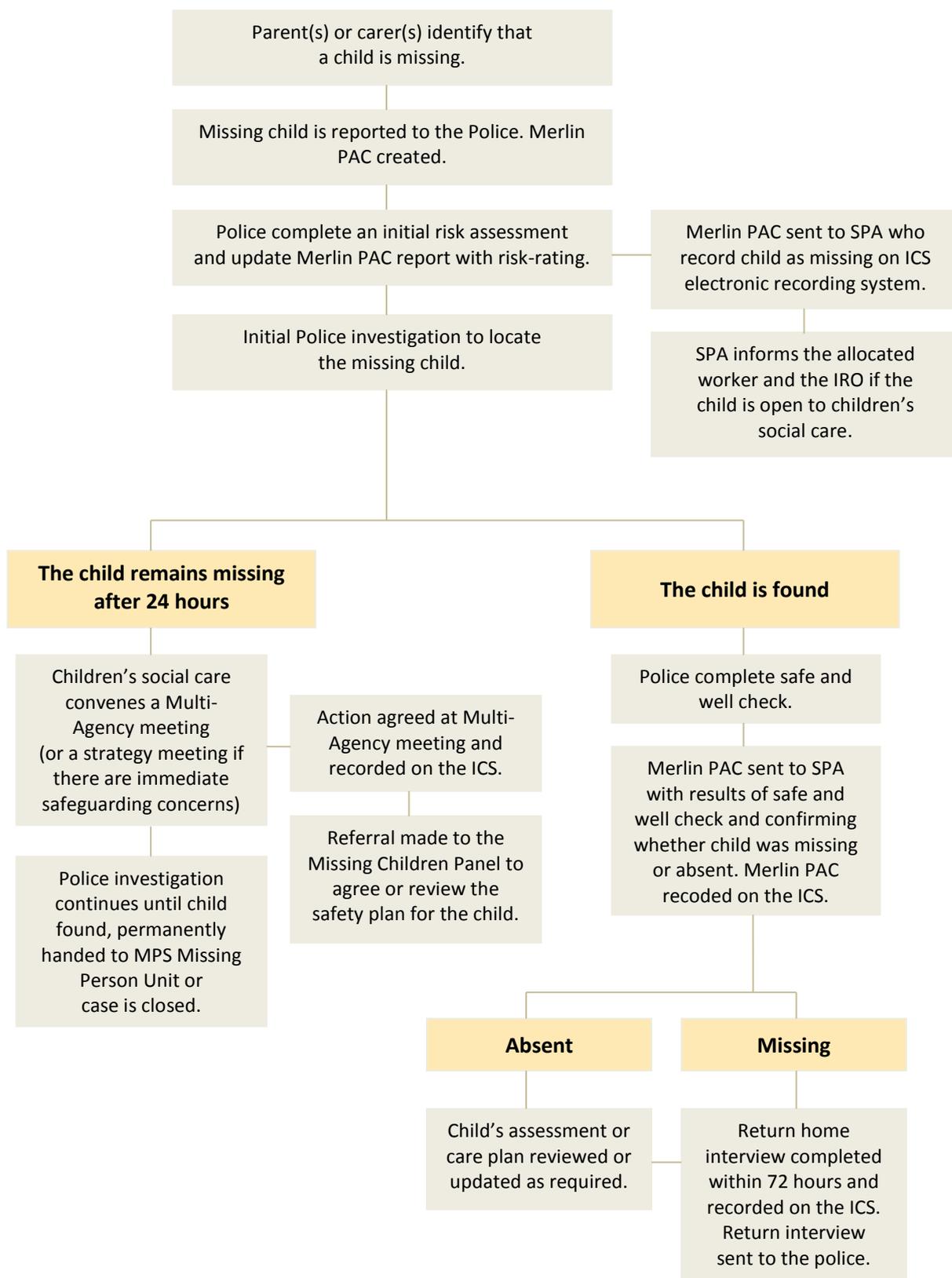
9.11 Out-of-borough placements

An out-of-borough placement is a placement made by the local authority in a residential placement that is located in another local authority area (the host local authority); or is a foster care placement made with foster carers who live in another local authority area.

Before a child is placed in an out-of-borough placement, the social worker for the responsible local authority (Achieving for Children) should check with the residential unit or foster care provider that local protocols are in place that are consistent with this protocol, and if not, that the provider agrees to comply with this handbook. The provider should be fully informed and agree to the actions required to be taken if a child is reported as missing or absent from the placement without authorisation.

Where a looked-after child placed out-of-borough is missing from his or her care placement and is identified as at risk of sexual exploitation, a referral must be made to the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) group or equivalent meeting in the host local authority area. The MASE in the responsible local authority must also have oversight of the actions taken to protect the child by the MASE in the host local authority.

10. Missing children - simplified process chart



11. Independent return interviews

It is the responsibility of Achieving for Children to decide whether an independent return interview is completed for each missing episode. Independent return interviews should be offered to all children, who have been reported as missing.

The return interview is a safety, needs and risk assessment completed when a missing child has returned home or to his or her care placement in order to identify and understand any risks and issues experienced by the child. The interview should be initiated and completed within **72 hours** of the child returning to his or her home or care setting. It should be held in a neutral space where the child feels safe. The return interview is different from the Safe and Well check completed by the Police. The Achieving for Children proforma for the interview should be used.

Appropriate child protection procedures should always be followed where a child has been harmed, or believed to be harmed, whilst they have been missing, and where there is a known or suspected risk of sexual exploitation.

It is the responsibility of the relevant team manager in Achieving for Children to ensure that the return interview is completed to a suitable standard by an appropriate professional. Government guidance states that this must be completed by an independent person who is trained to conduct these interviews and is able to follow up any resulting issues or actions. The child's view on who should conduct the return interview should also be considered.

The purpose of the return interview is to better understand the reasons for the child going missing including exploring the circumstances that led to it and the risks involved in the missing episode. It should be used to inform prevention strategies and future missing person investigations should be child go missing again. The interviewer should discuss with the child:

- The frequency of the child's missing episodes
- Whether the child has been hurt or harmed
- The child's risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking
- Any involvement the child may have had in criminality or substance misuse
- Whether the child has had contact with adults who pose a risk to children
- On-going factors that may influence the child going missing again
- Any risk factors the child may experience in his or her home

During the return interview, the interviewer needs to help the child to feel safe and understand that he or she has options to prevent repeat episodes of running away. It should provide the child with information on how to stay safe if they choose to run away again (including telephone helplines). The interviewer should also undertake an assessment of whether the child might run away again using the template attached at ANNEX B. The return interview should be signed-off by the relevant Team Manager.

A copy of the return interview should be recorded on the ICS and sent immediately to the Police at:

Kingston	missingpersonsinvestigations@met.police.uk
Richmond	missingpersons@met.pnn.police.uk

For every return interview, parents and carers will be given an opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence. Where children refuse to engage in a return interview, parents and carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence in

any case. This could help to prevent further instances of the child running away and identify the support needed for them.

Achieving for Children will be responsible for completing a quarterly review of all completed return interviews to collect intelligence on emerging themes. The report will be presented to the Missing Children Panel. The LSCB, through its Quality Assurance Sub-Group, will also complete an audit of the appropriateness, effectiveness and overall quality of return home interviews. The audit will be completed at least annually.

12. Missing Children Panel

Collecting and analysing data relating to missing children is essential. The Performance Manager in Achieving for Children is responsible for collating child-level information on missing episodes from the Merlin PAC notifications and producing a monthly tracker with information on all missing children incidents. The Panel will consider return interviews and Safe and Well checks.

The tracker will include the risk-rating allocated by the Police to all missing children incidents and will be cross-referenced with information held about children at risk of sexual exploitation, children missing education and youth offending service data. The Performance Manager will validate the completeness and quality of the data in the tracker with the MPS prior to its consideration by the Missing Children Panel.

The Missing Children Panel is chaired by a senior manager in Achieving for Children and has multi-agency representation from Police, education, health services and other relevant partners.

The Missing Children Panel will review the information in the tracker to ensure that:

- Risks and issues (such as sexual exploitation) have been appropriately identified
- Appropriate referrals and responses have been made to individual missing episodes
- Multi agency meetings have been held with appropriate action-planning
- Appropriate consideration has been given to the child's missing history and behaviour
- Effective preventative strategies are in place to reduce the incidences of missing children
- Data and other information are profiled to identify patterns and trends in missing episodes.

13. Information sharing

Whenever there are concerns about a child's safety or wellbeing, it is necessary for agencies to share information with each other in a timely manner. The Data Protection Act 1998 enables sensitive information to be shared if it is necessary to protect a child or detect a crime. In addition, section 11 of the Children Act 2004 sets out the duty of the Police and children's social care services to share information. The handbook is formalised and governed by a multi-agency Information Sharing Agreement – www.kingstonandrichmondscb.org.uk/news-resources/policies-and-procedures.

14. Specialist support organisations



jigsaw4u
www.jigsaw4u.org.uk

A young runaway support organisation in south west London providing one-to-one support advice to young runaways and mediation between young runaways and their parent(s).



Barnardo's
www.barnardos.org.uk

Barnardo's deliver a number of support programmes and interventions for children at risk of sexual exploitation as a result of going missing from home or care. Achieving for Children has a contract in place with Barnardo's to provide this support.



Missing People
www.missingpeople.org.uk/runaways

Missing People provides a free 24-hour confidential helpline to children who have run away and their families (0500 700 700). The runaway helpline also provides 24-hour helpline support to any young person who has run away or been forced to leave home (0808 800 70 70).

ANNEX A: Missing children recording guidelines for Achieving for Children

AfC Liquid Logic ICS Missing Child Recording Process

This handbook has been developed to support the recording of information in the LL ICS system in relation to children who go missing, either from their primary home address or their placement address (if CLA). Once recorded the ICS system will maintain a history that a child or young person has gone missing that will support future care planning (especially for LAC children) and also allow AfC to report statutory information regarding children missing.

The guidance is in support of processes developed within service teams and any questions on action/activity that needs to be taken should be referred to Team or Service Managers.

Child Missing From Home in Kingston or Richmond

Recording a Contact

1. Once the Merlin arrives from the Police, the SPA Team (or if the case is open the Allocated Case Worker) is to record a Contact on the child's record (this may necessitate the creation of a child's record if the child is not known).
2. Contact Reason Code should be Missing from Home (value added to picklist – see screenshot)

Method of Contact	
Time of Contact	<input type="radio"/> Normal working hours <input checked="" type="radio"/> Out of Hours - Evening <input type="radio"/> Out of Hours - Morning
Contact Method	Email
Reason for Contact	Request for service
Further Details	Reported as missing from home

Further Information	
Source Type	Police
Contact Reason Code	Missing from Home
Contact Reason Code 2	
Contact Reason Code 3	

3. Depending on whether the Police identify ongoing concerns/safeguarding issues for the child will depend on how Social Care proceed.
 - a) Concerns Identified – Children's Social Care will progress the case to Referral (or Link to Existing Referral if an open case) and initiate Assessment, Strategy Discussion etc
 - b) No further concerns – Children's Social care will NFA the contact.
4. SPA or Allocated Case Worker then creates the Missing Person Record on ICS.

Personal	Additional	Identity	Risks	Parental Factors	Relationships	Involvements	CIN	CP	CLA	History	Chronology	Forms	Documents
Child	Personal Details												
	Case Number	IS107061	Address		Main Carer(s)/Cares For								
	Surname	Bloggs	Primary Address	31 Woodside Road	No Main Carer(s) or cared children defined								
	Forename	Thomas	from 15-Aug-1997	Kingston Upon Thames	Important Information								
	Gender	Male	Surrey		* This child does not have a valid 903 Ethnicity code								
	Approx. DOB	15-Aug-1997	KT2 5AT		▶ Add Missing Child Record								
	Age	≈ 15 years	▶ Address History / Update Addresses		Contact & Referral								
	Approximate Age	Yes	▶ Add Contact Number										

- Complete the Missing Child Record with details, as appropriate (this can be backdated and status set as found, if we are recording after the fact).

Child Missing From Home in any other Local Authority (National Misper)

- Please follow the missing from home process points 1 to 5 above. The process for in or out of borough children is no different.
- When we receive notification from another LA that a child has gone missing from their area it is very important to record the 'Local Authority'. Please update the notifying authority in the appropriate drop down list from the default authority (which will be Kingston or Richmond). This is important so that Kingston and Richmond can identify all children who go missing from 'Other LAs'.

- ICS will automatically retain a history of any Missing Person records, together with any risk assessments. The system also generates an alert on the child's record, until such a time as the child is recorded as being found.

Child Missing from Care (CLA Placement)

- The child missing from CLA Placement information should be recorded and updated by the Allocated Case Worker.
- Following the below process will create a Contact for the child and once the Contact has been created you can also create a 'Missing Child' record (that will feed through to the demographics 'Additional' tab).

3. Record a contact record, adding a new value in Contact Reason code of Missing from Care (CLA) and record Missing Child as the outcome (NB please do not select 'Link to existing referral').

Method of Contact

Time of Contact: Normal working hours Out of Hours - Evening Out of Hours - Morning

Contact Method:

Reason for Contact:

Further Information

Source Type:

Contact Reason Code:

Contact Reason Code 2:

Contact Reason Code 3:

Further Details:

Further Action

Suggested Outcomes:

<input type="checkbox"/> Progress-to-Referral	<input type="checkbox"/> No Further Action
<input type="checkbox"/> Link to Existing Referral	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Missing Child
<input type="checkbox"/> Enquiry of CP	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment
<input type="checkbox"/> Provision of Information/Advice	<input type="checkbox"/> OLA CP notification
<input type="checkbox"/> Referral to Other Agency	

4. Once approved, ICS will now trigger the Missing from CLA pathway. This opens up the following screen for completion.

Missing Child

Missing Child | Task Details | No Other Children

Create Record | Reset | Cancel

New Missing Person

Missing Person Dates

Started:

Ended:

Missing Person Details

Missing Status:

Local Authority:

Description:

What to do and who to contact

Instructions:

Risks

Risk Factor (contact with person/s posing risk):

Engaged in criminal activities: Yes No

Been hurt or harmed: Yes No

Mental Health Issues: Yes No

Risk of Sexual Exploitation: Yes No

Risk Assessment Completed:

IMPORTANT- YOU MUST FILL THIS IN!

5. Under Missing Person Details and in the field called 'Missing Status', clicking on the drop down box brings up two options and they are as follows:
6. **Missing**- this is to be used if a looked after child is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (eg school) and their whereabouts is **not known**
7. **Away from placement without authorisation**- this is to be used if 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

Either 'Missing' or 'Away from Placement without authorisation' must be chosen as it is a statutory Ofsted and DfE reporting requirement.

ANNEX B: Return interview template

<u>MISSING CHILD: RETURN INTERVIEW</u>
PAC Number (from police report): This form is to be used for children who go missing from home or care.
<u>SECTION 1</u> Date and time of return interview (RI): Location of return interview:
Name of person conducting the return interview: Job title of person conducting RI:
Contact Number:
NB: Do not promise confidentiality, this information may be shared with key agencies, and added to the young person's file. If safeguarding issues are identified a referral may be made to the appropriate agency.

Young Person's Name	Education Setting/ Year Group	Date of Birth	Gender	Ethnicity
			Address	
Contact Details				

Date of contact	Response	Outcome

SECTION 2

This Section should be completed prior to the Return Interview, and form part of the briefing by the manager to the Return Interviewer

Date and time young person reported as missing:	Date and time young person reported as found:
Where was the young person found?	Total Number of missing Episodes: Duration of missing Episodes:
Was the young person missing from home or care?	Home () Richmond LAC () Kingston LAC ()
If care, Residential or Foster placement?	Residential () Foster () Private Foster () Other () Please specify.....
How was the child or young person returned?	Returned of own accord () Other Please State Police returned ()
Details of Missing Episode. Narrative from 'Found Report':	

SECTION 3

Remember to ask open questions to enable you and the young person to share as much information as possible.

1. Tell me what has been happening over the last few weeks before you went missing?
Were you upset or worried about anything?

2. What made you go at this particular time? Why did you go?

Can you identify the most prominent reason why you went missing?
Can you rate each reason 1-5, 1-being the highest reason, 5-not relevant

Reason	1-5 Rating	Comments
Bullying		
Involved in offending behaviour		
Substance Misuse		
Seeking contact with family or friends		
Avoiding contact with family or friends		
Avoiding an abusive situation		
Asylum seeker avoiding deportation		
Other reason		
Reason unknown		

4. What did you do while you were away and where did you stay?
• *Think names of associates/ descriptions/age/ nicknames/ locations/ addresses visited. If provided record details.*

5. Did you feel unhappy at any time, if so why? How did you know that you were safe?
• *Think how they got about- vehicles/ transport method/contacts to arrange transport/ telephone numbers.*

6. Did you make any new friends and how well did they treat you?

- *Think age/names/nicknames/addresses/contact details/how they met/who introduced them/who else knows this new friend(s).*
- *How did it make them feel and why?*
- *How does the friend contact them?*

7. Has anyone been giving you gifts and money? What? Do you know why?

8. Do you remember everything that happened to you?

- *Think alcohol or drugs administration or any method which may have rendered the child incapable*

9. What made you decide to come back and how did you get back?

- *Think was the absence voluntary/ any duress or coercion. Was there any reason why they couldn't return and why did they decide to return now?*

10. How are you getting on now that you are back, e.g. friends, family/school/carers?

- *Think fears, concerns people who may have an influence on the child. What can be done to stop them going missing and putting themselves at risk*

11. What do you want to happen now – short term/ long term?

12. How can we help you make the decision not to go missing again?

13. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being never) how likely are you to do it again?

- *If so why? Do they feel that they have a choice?*

14. Please tell us anything else that you would like us to know?

15. The interviewer should provide the child with information about how they can access further or on-going support services. Record the information here:

SECTION 5

CHECKING WITH PARENT / CARER

1. What are your views about the incident?

2. Are you aware of any family/home issues that are a cause of concern?

3. Have you noticed any changes in the behaviour of (name of young person)?

4. Is there any evidence of unexplained gifts/money/new friends/self harm?

5. Can you describe the young person's state when they returned?
Dishevelled, high, unkempt, hungry?

6. Is there any pattern to their missing behaviour ie particular times of day or days of the week?

SECTION 6

Risk assessment/analysis - Remember the SAFEGUARD guidance

SECTION 7

Please indicate whether in your professional judgement, you feel the young person may be vulnerable to one or more of the following:

Sexual Exploitation	()	Risky Sexual Behaviour	()
Self-Harm	()	Misuse of Substances	()
Offending Behaviour	()	Trafficking/Modern Slavery	()
Other, Please state:			

SECTION 8

ACTIONS:

Please record if any criminal activities have been identified. If so you MUST refer these to the police by calling 101.

Date referred to Police (101):.....

Are there any issues identified that you should escalate?

RECOMMENDATIONS:

What recommendations do you make to address and support the young person’s needs?

Action	Agency	Due Date

SECTION 8

Please ensure one of the following consent is provided before sharing information and circle/tick as appropriate

- Consent provided by Parent (with Parental Responsibility) to
 - Share information with police YES/NO
 - To send form to the police when completed YES/NO.
- Consent provided by young person over 16 years old to
 - Share information with police YES/NO
 - To send form to the police when completed YES/NO.
- Looked after child consent provided by Local Authority ()

Please ensure this form is uploaded to ICS system, and return to SW/lead professional and team manager, MASE Chair(s) & if consent is provided, relevant Police email address.

Richmond – return interview document to be emailed to Police:

missingpersons@met.pnn.police.uk

Kingston - return interview document to be emailed to Police:

missingpersonsinvestigations@met.police.uk

Signed:	
	Role :
Dated:	

CSE referral pathway

