
**Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire
Safeguarding Children Boards**

**Safeguarding Children and Young
People who Run Away and go Missing
from Home and Care**

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This document is available at www.bedfordshirelscb.gov.uk

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Section 1

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This protocol provides guidance to professionals and volunteers to ensure a collaborative response when working with a child at risk of running away and / or a child / young person who runs away and is missing from home or care.
- 1.2 The purpose of the protocol is to provide:
- an agreed definition of a missing or runaway child or young person;
 - an agreed inter-agency framework for assessing the degree of risk when a child/young person goes missing from home or when a missing child /young person comes to agency notice;
 - guidance on the threshold for referrals to Children's Social Care;
 - the basis on which agencies offer 'Return Interviews' for children who have run away from home;
 - details of preventative approaches, including details of who should carry out a Common Assessment (CAF) and how this information should be shared.
- 1.3 The Children's Society 'Still Running' Survey 2005 estimates that around 100,000 young people under 16 run away from home or care each year across the UK. Many of these young people stay with friends or family members but there are some who end up in harmful situations such as sleeping rough. Running away is a dangerous activity that might place children and young people at risk. Young people who run away may be at risk of significant harm whilst away from home or care and practitioners should be mindful of the reasons which have led to the child/young person running away.
- 1.4 This protocol is based on:-
- Statutory Guidance on children who run away and go missing from home and care July 2009;
 - Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010;
 - Children Act 1989;
 - Children's Homes Regulations 1991 Regulation 20, Volume 4 Guidance, Residential Care.

2.0 Definitions

- 2.1 The terms 'young runaway' and 'missing' in this context refer to children and young people up to the age of 18 who have run away from their home or care placement, have been forced to leave, or whose whereabouts is unknown. The term missing within this procedure will be used as the generic term to include all children and young people who go missing or have runaway.
- 2.2 Unauthorised absence - Where a looked-after child's whereabouts is known or thought to be known but unconfirmed, they are not missing and may instead be
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considered as absent without authorisation from their placement. Any unauthorised absence must be carefully monitored as the child may subsequently become a missing child. Those reporting a child missing must be clear whether the absence is unauthorised.

- 2.3 Child abduction - Where a child has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence, this is a 'crime in action' and should be reported to the police immediately.

3.0 The Legal Framework

- 3.1 The law does not generally regard young people under the age of 16 as being able to live independently away from home.
- 3.2 Where a child / young person under 16 (or 18 if disabled) stays with a person (other than a person with parental responsibility or a close relative), for 28 days or more, the person caring for them is acting as a 'private foster carer' within the meaning of s66 of the Children Act 1989 and therefore they must notify the local authority that they are privately fostering the child / young person; 'Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. Failure to notify the local authority may be an offence.
- 3.3 Anyone who has care of a child without parental responsibility may do what is reasonable in all the circumstances to safeguard and promote the child's welfare (Children Act 1989 s3 (5)). It is likely to be 'reasonable' to inform the police, or children's services departments, and, if appropriate, their parents, of the child/young person's safety and whereabouts.
- 3.4 Anyone who 'takes or detains' a runaway under 16 without lawful authority may be prosecuted under s2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984.

4.0 Causes of Running Away

- 4.1 Research shows that the main causes of running away are family conflicts and problems at home, abuse or neglect, mental health problems, substance misuse, bullying racial harassment and homophobia, teenage pregnancy, forced marriage and sexual exploitation/trafficking.
- 4.2 Forced marriage - Some young people run away because they are at risk of abuse. Forced marriage in particular can lead to young women running away from home. Further guidance and information can be found at: www.fco.gov.uk/en/fcoin-action/nationals/forced-marriage-unit/
- 4.3 Grooming for potential sexual exploitation - in some cases, young people may run away or go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them sexually. Evidence suggests that 90 per cent of children subjected to sexual grooming go missing at some point. The supply of drugs and alcohol or the offering of gifts may be used to entice and coerce young people into associations with inappropriate adults. Both girls and boys are at risk of sexual exploitation. Looked-after children may also be targeted by those wishing to abuse and sexually exploit them, and encouraging these children to run in order to disrupt their placement is often part of this abuse. Young people living within residential care units are
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particularly vulnerable to being directly targeted in this way. Guidance has been produced to help agencies identify children and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation and take action to safeguard and promote their welfare.

5.0 *Children Missing from Education*

- 5.1 Evidence suggests young runaways face more challenges to accessing universal services and are likely to be missing from education. Separate procedures govern arrangements for monitoring and reviewing Children Missing Education which can be accessed from each local authority either on their website or the person with designated responsibility for Children Missing Education in each local authority area.

Section 2

6.0 *Procedures for responding to children and young people who go missing from home*

- 6.1 Clearly, some children and young people absent themselves from home for short periods of time and then return; often their whereabouts are known. These children and young people are not usually considered at high risk and usually they are testing boundaries. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed either on purpose or unwittingly. This kind of boundary testing activity is well within the range of normal teenage behaviour and may not come within the category of 'missing' from this protocol. However for each child consideration should be given to their individual circumstances and level of vulnerability according to the guidance set out in Appendix 1.
- 6.2 In considering a child or young person who is deemed to be missing from home by their parent, carer or guardian, parents / carers will apply their own judgement with regard to the overall circumstances of the child or young person and the circumstances in which they have gone missing. If, in their opinion, the absence of the child or young person is more than 'boundary testing' activity, then they should in normal circumstances, alert the police who will make a judgement based on the information available and respond accordingly. This judgement will be subject to re-assessment as the incident develops.
- 6.3 If a child or young person is identified by a professional including school staff or a volunteer as being missing from home and there is concern about the safety and well-being of the young person concerned, the matter should in the first instance be raised with the parent/carer and then when or if appropriate a report made to the Police. If there are concerns that a child/young person is at risk of harm and a parent / carer is unavailable or unwilling to report the incident, a report should be made to the Police without unnecessary delay.
- 6.4 When a child is missing from a residential establishment or other setting, it is the responsibility of the staff or volunteers to report the matter to the parent / carer, assist the parent / carer as appropriate in attempting to locate the child and agree with them whether a report to the Police is necessary based on their judgement with regard to the overall circumstances of the child or young person and the circumstances in which they have gone missing.
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Police response to missing children / young people reports

- 6.5 Reports of missing people should be made to the Bedfordshire Police Contact Management Centre by calling 01234 841212. If the matter is an emergency then call 999

Bedfordshire Police Missing Persons Unit

- 6.6 Bedfordshire Police has a dedicated missing persons unit. The unit works from 0800 – 2200 Monday to Friday and 0800-1800 Saturday and Sunday.

Contact details

Tel 01234 - 846972 / 842643 / 842818 / 842642

E-mail missingpersons@bedfordshire.pnn.police.uk

- 6.7 The team deal with all instances of missing persons during the above hours and are a point of reference for all Bedfordshire Police. The team are also the point of contact for all partner agencies. They can be contacted for advice and assistance in all matters relating to missing children and young persons.

The team proactively investigate missing person cases, are responsible for multi agency working and will represent the Police at all types of multi agency meetings.

- 6.8 When the Police receive a report that a child/young person has gone missing the following action is taken:-

- Bedfordshire Police will create an incident and on request will supply a unique reference number (URN). A risk assessment will be conducted on the basis of the information supplied and the prevailing circumstances. This risk assessment will decide the risk level being applied by the Police and the level of response. In some cases the Police will also complete a full missing person report on the Police Missing Person system (COMPACT) and again will supply on request the report number.

- 6.9 Police Classification of Risk

High Risk

The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability; or may have been the victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.

Medium Risk

The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.

Low Risk

There is no apparent threat of danger to either the subject or the public. Children and young people under 18 years of age should not be included in this classification.

- 6.10 If the subject is graded as high risk the Police Contact Management Centre Inspector will liaise with the Inspector of the Police Division to decide an appropriate response.
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Partner agencies will work jointly with the Police to assist them in their investigation and to make any other plans deemed appropriate to safeguard the health and well-being of the child/young person.

- 6.11 If the subject is graded as a medium risk the Police Contact Management Centre Inspector and/or the Missing Person's Unit will review the incident to ensure an active and measured response by the Police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.

Actions when a Missing young person is located

- 6.12 When located the young person will as far as possible be seen by a police officer to establish if they have been the victim of crime, have committed a crime or if they wish to disclose any information in respect of the incident. It may in certain circumstances by agreement be appropriate for a professional, from a partner agency, such as a social worker to confirm that the person has returned safe and well and that a Police visit is not necessary.
- 6.13 The officer dealing with the case will make a decision as to what is to happen with the child or young person. They will if applicable refer to appropriate others such as Children's Social Care, parents, schools etc.
- 6.14 Police will consider the circumstances of the child or young person and establish if it is necessary to take them to a place of safety or instigate the powers of Police Protection.
- 6.15 Once the matter is resolved the Police will close their incident logs. The Police Missing Person Unit will review the incident and will log the incident on a Police database. Where Children's Social Care has not already been informed, the Police will ensure that a referral is made.
- 6.16 It is important to remember that going missing is not a crime and therefore police powers to deal with it are limited. Police will work together with partner agencies to manage children and young people whose behaviour gives cause for concern. Family and partner agencies will need to take responsibility for transporting / returning children/young people home or to an alternative safe location except in exceptional circumstances where the Police have agreed to undertake this role. In many cases there will be no power to compel children / young people to go with the Police.

Children's Services response to referrals received in respect of children / young people missing from home.

- 6.17 In the vast majority of cases the child / young person is located and returned to their home address. A referral will be made to Children's Social Care where the police have identified concerns and / or risks to the child / young person in accordance with local Child in Need and Safeguarding procedures and where the child / young person has not been located or returned within 24 hours. All referrals to Children's Social Care will be taken as a contact and logged the Children's Social Care database check if the young person is known and liaise with the referrer to ensure that all available information is recorded.
- 6.18 If the child has been located a decision by Children's Social Care will be taken on the basis of any background information and / or the circumstances of the missing episode as to whether a referral and further assessment should be undertaken.
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- 6.19 On receipt of a referral from the Police where a child / young person remains missing at the time of the referral, Children's Services Intake and Assessment team will log the referral information on ICS. If there are concerns regarding the child / young person on the basis of known information consideration will be given by Children's Social Care to convene an information sharing / strategy meeting with the Police to plan immediate actions to locate the child / young person and planned actions on the child / young persons return. Where the child is looked after by the local authority or the child / young person is an open case, details of the referral should be passed to the appropriate team/ worker and a contact logged.
- 6.20 Once located the child / young person will be subject to an initial / core assessment and a return Interview as appropriate and as a result of this assessment support services will be offered. Where a child / young person has suffered abuse during an absence or there is an identified risk of continued or potential harm, a strategy meeting will be convened and section 47 and child protection procedures invoked as required.
- 6.21 Children's Social Care together with the Police will be responsible for providing a record of children who go missing for the purpose of service planning and delivery and to identify any trends or themes emerging as a result of this information which might facilitate preventative measures to reduce the number of children and young people who go missing.
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7.0 Young People Missing from Home Process Flowchart

Identify child/young person is missing

Parents / carers / responsible adult identify time by which the child should be at the address.

Parents / carers / responsible adult should make enquiries to locate the missing young person with relatives / friends.

This should include searches of the residence and local area if the child or young person is not located.



Report to police

Parents / carer / responsible adult should telephone police with details of the missing person.

Details required: name/DOB/where, when and who missing with?/what child was last wearing / description of young person/recent photo/medical history/time and location last seen / circumstances of going missing / details of friends and associates.



Officers conduct a risk assessment forming the basis for resulting proportionate actions

Enquiries are then ongoing.

Sharing of information between the police, parents and other agencies as appropriate.



Young person is located or returns to home address

When a missing child is located by family or friends etc, it is their responsibility to return the child to the home address.

Where a risk is present, a police officer may accompany the family or the police may be requested to collect and return the child/young person to the place of residence only if it is safe to do so. Parents must inform the police when a child returns of their own accord.



The police should conduct an interview known as Safe and Well Check to establish the young person's well-being and safety, and to establish whether they were the victim of crime or abuse whilst missing.

If warranted, police will refer child or young person to Children's Social Care.



Where appropriate Children's Social Care will undertake an initial/core assessment to determine the level of need. Young person offered relevant support by either statutory or voluntary services

8.0 Children who are considered at risk as a result of one or more episode of running away or missing from home

- 8.1 For those young people who repeatedly go missing and place themselves at risk of harm consideration must be given to convening a strategy meeting and undertaking section 47 enquiries.
- 8.2 In addition children and young people who are considered at high risk to themselves or others and /or persistently run away from home and / or are missing should be reviewed regularly by the Multi Agency Missing Children's Operational Group. (MAMCOG). Referrals to MAMCOG can be made by any agency.
- 8.3 Members may refer a child/young person to the MAMCOG where they have identified concerns and/or risks to the child or young person and it is considered that the assistance of the group may provide a resolution beyond that offered by other multi-agency forums.

Factors influencing the decision to refer a case to the MAMCOG include:-

- The circumstances of the incident
 - The duration of the incident
 - The frequency or number of incidents
 - Information obtained during the course of an incident or management of a case
 - Any other factors that cause a member agency to believe that referral is appropriate and may provide a resolution to a concern or risk
- 8.4 Referral to the MAMCOG should be considered an additional step when other more established procedures have already been followed and have not resolved the concern or risk.
- 8.5 Terms of reference for the MAMCOG are included in Appendix 4.

9.0 Action Planning and Review

- 9.1 When Children's Social Care become involved with a child / young person who goes missing from home and whom they consider to be a child in need of services or to be at risk, it is essential that an assessment of need and /or a strategy meeting under s47 should take place. As a result of this a CIN plan should be drawn up by the agencies involved to address any needs/ risks identified during the assessment / section 47 enquiries.
- 9.2 The Plan should outline the actions to be undertaken in order to locate the child or young person, who is responsible for each action and, where appropriate, timescales for completion of tasks. The plan should also identify a time when the plan will be reviewed.
- 9.3 The Plan should also include an outline of actions should the child or young person be located.
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- 9.4 A review date of the Plan should be set and adhered to so that the outcome of actions can be reviewed and new actions set. It is likely that a plan will be reviewed frequently at the beginning of a period of a child or young person becoming missing and what actions will be required if any when the child is returned.
- 9.5 The lead social worker will ensure that the CIN Plan/ strategy meeting minutes are circulated and reviewed and will act as a main contact point for any further information sharing.

10.0 Family Liaison and Support

- 10.1 An important consideration that professionals may have to address during the process is how to provide support to the family and carers of the child / young person who is missing and who would be the most appropriate person / agency to provide this.
- 10.2 Contact with family/ carers will be necessary at an early stage to:-
- Support and identify any potential/actual risk of harm to the child/young person;
 - Obtain further information about the missing child/young person;
 - Ensure that the agencies / organisations are informed when the child or young person returns;
 - To keep them informed and to work in partnership with parents/ carers.
- 10.3 In all cases arrangements should be made to ensure the family or other appropriate parties are provided with the name of the lead professional who must be capable of co-ordinating a response. The nature of this response should be identified in the action plan.
- 10.4 If a young person is found who is Fraser competent and does not want their whereabouts disclosed to parents / carers / Police / Children's Social Care, then this request will be considered alongside the Information Sharing Policy of the organisation / agency to whom the information has been disclosed and where necessary subject to legal advice. Young People will be encouraged to allow disclosure of some information, even if it is just that they are alive, well and receiving services.

11.0 Follow up for found children and young people

- 11.1 In most cases children and young people who go missing from home are located by their parents / carers and / or the Police and returned to their parents / carers care. However, the purpose of these procedures is not just to return the child / young person to a safe environment and discover what happened to them whilst they were missing but to ascertain the reason for their leaving in the first place. This may not always be apparent nor may the true reason immediately be disclosed by the child/young person. It may take some time to ascertain and requires professionals to continue to work closely together.
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- 11.2 When a child or young person is found the priority should be to meet any health or welfare needs they have, such as providing them with medical attention, food and drink, clean clothes as necessary.
- 11.3 On returning a child / young person to their home address all those recorded as missing by the Police will receive a Safe and Well Check by a police officer to establish the young persons well being and safety and to establish whether they were a victim of crime or abuse whilst missing. All cases will be reviewed by the MPU and where appropriate a referral to Children's Social care will be made. This should take into account the guidance contained in paragraph 10.6.
- 11.4 Where a child or young person returning makes an allegation or it is suspected / evident that they have experienced abuse, Safeguarding Procedures must be implemented.

Return Interviews

- 11.5 The child / young person should be given the opportunity to talk to someone independent about their absence. It may be that the child or young person would prefer to speak to a social worker however it is preferable that the young person is offered contact with a trained practitioner from an independent agency. Their preference should be taken into account, recorded and agreement reached.
- 11.6 Return interviews should be offered and if accepted undertaken within 72 hours to all young people who fall into the following categories and should always take place when a child / young person:-
- has been missing for more than 24 hours;
 - has been missing on two or more occasions;
 - has engaged or is believed to have been engaged in criminal activities during their absence;
 - has been hurt or harmed whilst missing or this is believed to be the case;
 - has known mental health issues;
 - is at known risk of sexual exploitation and / or;
 - has contact with persons posing a risk to children.

The purpose of the return interview is:-

- a) identify and deal with any harm suffered and whether there is a need for any medical attention as a result;
 - b) to determine the reason why the child or young person ran away and in particular, if they have been subject to violence, abuse or bullying;
 - c) to establish whether they have been a victim of crime while away;
 - d) to put in place any support and preventative measures to avoid a recurrence;
 - e) to discover where and with whom they have been staying;
 - f) to obtain information which may lead to their early discovery should they go missing again;
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- g) to establish if they may need legal advice, for example if they have been involved in criminal activity whilst away;
 - h) to discover whether they have been misusing drugs or alcohol whilst away.
- 11.7 Practice guidance for use by practitioners when conducting return interviews is included in Appendix 3.
- 11.8 Where further concerns are identified as a result of the return interview, this information should be shared with Children's Social Care and/or the Police.
- 11.9 When a young person does not want their whereabouts disclosed or they do not wish to return to their home, contact with statutory agencies is essential to ensure that all aspects of the child or young person's welfare are considered and appropriate, planned actions taken, with due regard given to the wishes and feelings of the child or young person.

12.0 *Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities*

- 12.1 This protocol is concerned with individuals up to the age of eighteen. However, there is a requirement to provide differentiated services for some vulnerable young people and young adults up to 24 years of age. Young adults with learning difficulties and / or disabilities need to be assessed in line with vulnerable adult's protocols.
- 12.2 For children and young people with disabilities there needs to be consideration of their individual needs and vulnerabilities and the appropriate agency to provide this information in addition to parents/ carers. In terms of communication and information sharing, an advocate may be required who is familiar with the young person's individual communication needs. This will be essential if they have limited understanding due to learning disabilities, or for example very specific learning difficulties due to Autism.

In terms of vulnerability the young person may have additional or complex health needs, and/or a life-limiting condition, so time will be of the essence in locating them.

13.0 *Information Sharing*

- 13.1 Agencies should be clear with a child / young person at the outset of contact about policies on confidentiality. He or she should be informed that where there are concerns about possible risks to themselves or others, information will be shared with recognised agencies to identify and reduce those risks. He or she should also be told that where there are high levels of risk, safeguarding procedures may be activated.
- 13.2 Sharing information about a child / young person should, as far as possible, be with their permission. However, information can be shared with recognised agencies in the interest of the child/young person's welfare. This is information deemed to be not personally sensitive and does nothing more than identify and allow contact with the child. It should be recognised that a child is by definition not fully independent and responsible for themselves. Their welfare must take precedence over sensitivities concerning information about them. (Refer to the LSCB Information Sharing Protocol)
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14.0 Early Intervention

- 14.1 If it comes to the attention of any agency professional or representative of a voluntary organisation that a child / young person is at risk of running away from home or goes missing from home they should:
- Offer support to the child / young person and advise and guidance
 - Ensure they have available the necessary information to signpost the young person to support services
 - ensure they have procedures in place for recording and sharing the information as required
 - in relevant cases complete a Common Assessment Framework and refer this to the relevant Multi Agency Panel to access support services
 - refer to the Police / Children's Social Care where there is a potential / actual risk of harm

Section 3

15.0 Looked After Children Missing from Care

- 15.1 Children and young people who are looked after by the local authority are far more likely to go missing than the general child and youth population.

Definitions

- 15.2 For the purpose of this policy the following categories of absence can be defined as:-

Missing - A child (i.e. a young person under the age of 18 years) is to be considered "missing" if he/she has run away from their care placement, have been forced to leave or whose whereabouts is unknown.

Unauthorised absences - Where a looked after child/young person's whereabouts is known or thought to be known but unconfirmed, they are not missing and may instead be considered absent without authorisation from their placement

Absences that cause concern are those where, family staff or carers have no indication that a child is likely to return within a short period of time or where there is immediate concern for the child's safety. In these circumstances consideration should be given to responding as for a missing child.

16.0 Principles

- 16.1 The safety of the child is the prime aim. As a corporate parent the local authority has a duty to care for the well being and safety of the child. This involves locating and making decisions concerning the return of the child.
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- 16.2 A referral must be made at an early stage to the police when it is considered that a child/young person has gone missing from care.
- 16.3 In circumstances where children are accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act children's parents or anyone else with parental responsibility should be informed wherever possible and share responsibility at every stage of the process.
- 16.4 Where the local authority has parental responsibility, parents and any other appropriate person should be informed and consulted in the same way with the local authority retaining ultimate responsibility for decisions in cooperation with the Police MPU.
- 16.5 Where a Looked after Child placed in another local authority area goes missing, it is the responsibility of the local police in the other local authority area to work in partnership with the placing authority. Where appropriate the Police Missing Persons Unit should also be kept informed.
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17.0 Procedures

Pre Placement

- 17.1 Prior to placement, some children will need to be placed who already have an established pattern of running away. In these circumstances it is essential that an assessment of the child/young persons needs takes into account the factors that led to their running away and the degree of risk of a child going missing. In addition the care plan should include a strategy to minimise the likelihood of the child/young person going missing in the future, the detail of which should be included in the Keep Safe Plan.
- 17.2 Parents and relevant agencies must be asked if a child has been missing before and the details of these episodes (in particular where the child has gone). The process set out in 16.4 will be followed if there are significant concerns.
- 17.3 Additionally, if the child is an unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC), the social worker should consider whether the child is particularly vulnerable to trafficking and/or other forms of exploitation. Working Together 2010 recommends referring to the Trafficking Toolkit which provides guidance for Children's Services and the Police on dealing with trafficking (useful excerpts from the toolkit are contained within Appendix 2) <http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/tp00.htm>

Keeping Safe

- 17.4 Based on the information supplied the social worker will, in discussion with the child, parents and carers complete a Keep Safe Plan which will record:-
- The level and kind of risk presented if the child is missing;
 - The level of supervision/support to be offered to the child in placement;
 - Any other child or adult who could be involved in this behaviour;
 - The parent / carers advice on what action they feel should be taken if the child goes missing.
- 17.5 A recent photograph should be obtained if possible from the child's family with the child's knowledge and consent.
- 17.6 The child / young person, parents/ carers, those with parental responsibility and other adults involved in the child / family network will be given information concerning the Keep Safe plan and as far as possible should agree the strategy to help prevent them running away and keep safe commensurate with their age and level of understanding and be told what actions will be taken if he / she is missing or absent without permission.
- 17.7 The Keeping Safe Plan will identify and inform the issues and actions which need to be taken by the carers and key professionals in the event of a child going missing.
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18.0 Notification of Missing

- 18.1 Carers and residential staff should carry out reasonable enquiries to determine if a child is missing or absent without authorisation before reporting a child or young person missing to the Police

Residential Units

- 18.2 When a child is missing or absent without authorisation from a residential establishment it is the responsibility of the member of staff to inform the senior manager on duty and the child's social worker (or the Emergency Duty Team if out of hours). If the manager has any reason to believe that a child is at risk as a result of going missing, a referral should be made to the Police and advice sought as to the next steps.

Foster carers

- 18.3 When a child is missing or is absent without permission from foster care, the carer should notify the police and seek advice, inform the child's Social Worker, or in their absence the relevant teams' duty worker or the Emergency Duty Team outside office hours and their fostering social worker. The carer or foster carer should not delay in phoning the police if they believe the child to be at risk.
- 18.4 The risk assessment guidance in Appendix 1 can be used to determine the level of risk/concern and action to be taken.

High Risk

The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability; or may have been the victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger. The level of risk will increase depending on the length of time the young person remains missing.

If the absence is considered to fall within the high-risk category the senior manager or duty officer should inform the following without delay:-

- The Police;
- The parents (and anyone else who has parental responsibility);
- The Social Worker and the Team Manager;
- The responsible Head of Service and the Assistant Director if appropriate;
- Any other relevant professional e.g. Head Teacher or Head of Year Group.

Medium Risk

The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.

All missing looked after children and young people will be considered high or medium risk

19.0 Notification to the Police

19.1 When reporting the matter to the Police the following information should be made available:-

- The Child's Keep Safe Plan;
- A description of the child;
- Legal status of the child / young person;
- When the child was last seen and with whom;
- A recent photograph (to be returned when the child has been safely located);
- Family addresses;
- Previous placement addresses;
- Known acquaintances – names and addresses;
- Any previous history of absconding;
- The name and address of the child's GP and dentist.

19.2 Any circumstances which increase the risk to the child or to the public should be drawn to the attention of the Police.

Missing during an external activity

19.3 If a child goes missing or is 'lost' during an external activity (such as an outing to a theme park) the carer or member of staff in charge of the activity will:-

- Notify the police in that area;
- Notify the relevant Team Manager or Head of Service who in turn will notify the Assistant Director if appropriate;
- Initiate a local search if staffing and circumstances permit;
- The Head of Service after consultation with the responsible staff will decide within 24 hours whether the group should return.

The social worker/ senior manager residential setting will ensure the child's family and all relevant managers are informed and that the provisions of the protocol are activated as appropriate.

Initial Police inquiry procedures

19.4 On referral from the social worker or carer, a police officer will visit the residential or foster placement home to take details as described above as soon as possible depending on the seriousness of the report. The officer will then make inquiries concerning the child with all known family members, acquaintances and with school and hospitals as appropriate. Management remains with the territorial area in which the incident has occurred until such time it is either transferred to another area or to the MPU agree they will take primacy in the investigation. **The point of contact for all partner agencies should be the MPU regardless.**

Joint Action Plan

- 19.5 Whenever a child's absence is considered high risk a joint action plan should be developed between the Social Worker and Team Manager (or EDT) and the MPU based on the level of risk that is now identified, this should include:-
- Further visits to the child's family and any other place the child may be;
 - Information needed to be given to other police units and social service offices;
 - Support to the family/carer of the child;
 - Contact with the school or other agencies;
 - Any publicity needed at this stage;
 - Any legal action to recover or secure the child.
- 19.6 It is the responsibility of the social worker to establish what has happened and uses those resources available to the agency to locate the child. In all cases the social worker in conjunction with the Team Manager and the police where appropriate will assess that all actions which should be taken are being taken to locate the child and decide on any further action.
- 19.7 In any case of a missing child which causes particular concern or difficulty or where circumstances give rise to suspicion should be brought to the notice of the relevant Team Manager and /or Head of Service if necessary and the MPU without delay. They will then assess that all actions which should be taken are being taken and decide on any further action. After 24 hours if a child is not located a strategy meeting will take place. (refer to paragraph 19) All missing reports are overseen by the MPU to ensure appropriate reviews occur.

Communication

- 19.8 Where a child is accommodated within a residential unit, should the child remain missing and after police, social worker and parents have been informed, the senior manager of the home, should inform all children and staff (normally within a 12 hour period) to avoid distressing rumours and to obtain any additional information about the child's whereabouts. Foster carers should have a similar discussion within the family.
- 19.9 During the period a child is missing, the social worker should be in daily contact with the Police, the child's placement and family if possible. Where the child is placed by BBC or CBC in another authority area, the social worker should inform that authority and where possible work with them to recover /locate the child and as far as possible in accordance with these procedures. In addition where the child is reported missing and is placed out of the council area it is the responsibility of the social worker to update the Keep Safe plan and record a risk assessment. A strategy meeting should be convened to review the actions to be taken alongside partner agencies in the area where the child is placed.
- 19.10 Contingency plans should be considered for the child's return (refer paragraph 10.0).
- 19.11 The social worker will contact the child's school and local hospital in case they have, or can obtain information about a child's whereabouts. Local hospitals should be contacted in respect of any admissions. Any such information should be passed on to the Police.
-

20.0 Unauthorised absence over 12 hours

- 20.1 Any unauthorised absence over 12 hours must be reported to the responsible Team Manager and the child's social worker by the senior manager of the home (where a child is placed in a residential unit) or the foster carer to confirm that the absence is on-going). The Team Manager will ensure the Head of Service and Assistant Director are kept informed.
- 20.2 A strategy meeting should be planned within **the first 24 hours** of the absence.

(Refer to the Local Safeguarding Board Procedures on Strategy Meetings)

The strategy meeting should: -

- **Pool all information concerning the child's movements**
- **Assess whether all possible actions are being taken in respect of the absence**
- **Update the Keep Safe Plan if appropriate**
- **Record a risk assessment in relation to the child/ young person**
- **Confirm an action plan**
- **Agree a time to review the plan**
- **Ensure minutes of the meetings are kept which include the latest risk assessment**

Missing child /young person over 24 hours

- 20.3 Where an absence lasts over 24 hours, the Senior Manager responsible for the Record of Children subject to a Child Protection Plan (via the Conference and Review Service) should be notified by the Team Manager and a request considered for an alert to be sent to other local authorities.
- 20.4 The joint action plan should be followed and support offered to the family and carers of the child. Frequent contact should be maintained between the social worker, police and the child's family and placement and the relevant Head of Service in consultation with the Police and Assistant Director may involve the media (refer to paragraph 20.)
- 20.5 If the absence continues past 24 hours, the case should be subject to ongoing strategy meetings, statutory reviews should also continue and Child Protection meetings if the child is subject to a child protection plan. This is particularly important to ensure that plans are in place to facilitate the safe return of the child.
- 20.6 Notification of all outstanding missing persons should be sent to Police National Missing Persons Bureau (PNMPB) within 14 days; however forces will not be precluded from forwarding information to the PNMPB in a shorter time if a particular case appears to warrant more urgent attention. In cases of children who go missing this should be reported within 24 hours of the child going missing.
- 20.7 The cases of all children and young people who remain missing from placement should be subject to continuous review jointly with the Police until their whereabouts and welfare can be established.
-

21.0 Informing the Press

21.1 It is for the police to advise the media regarding a child missing from the care of the Local Authority. A decision to publicise by press and/or television must be made with the responsible Head of Service and the Assistant Director in conjunction with the Communications team in each authority this decision may be taken within 24 hours.

22.0 Recording

22.1 Throughout the process identified in this protocol a full record should be kept of all actions taken. Messages received/given by all parties searching for a missing child will be kept:-

- On the Police missing persons form;
- The home's or carer's logbook with a duplicate (photocopy) entry on the child's file.

22.2 These records will be accessible to both parties who should maintain individual histories of the situation.

23.0 Return of missing child/young person

PLANNING

If a child's absence continues beyond two hours and falls within this protocol should commence contingency planning for when the child is located.

23.1 Plans should be made as to what actions needs to be taken when a child is located. For those children / young people whose absence is unauthorised or the period of absence is short , planning should involve the social worker and team leader in consultation with the setting manager, or family placement worker, parents / carers and police.

23.2 Such plans should include:-

- Whether the child will be placed with the current carers or transfer to another placement;
 - How s/he will be conveyed;
 - Whether the police wish to interview formally the child before s/he is returned to his/her placement;
 - Whether an independent person is engaged to talk to the child after his/her return;
 - The support required by the child / young person to ensure they are settled back in the placement.
-

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- 23.3 The Police will co-operate in the arrangements made by Children's Services to return a child to his / her residence and *where appropriate* may assist in this. Any photograph used in searching for a child will be returned to the placement (or social worker where appropriate).
- 23.4 Police will interview the child / young person on return to obtain information concerning his/her whereabouts, who (s) he was with and any other relevant information.
- 23.5 In the event of a child/young person being in police custody having committed offences while absent, plans will be reviewed depending on Police action.
- 23.6 Occasionally, if a child is over 16 years old and is being looked after by the local authority, the Police may have limited power to enforce a return if the child resists this and is not apparently at any risk. If risk factors are identified, legal advice may be necessary in considering options.
- 23.7 The police could need to speak to staff or carers in connection with the incident and the reasons a child is missing.

24.0 Return to Placement

- 24.1 A professionals meeting should be considered and organised where appropriate within a reasonable timescale following the child's return to agree what support is needed and to ensure that the reasons the child had for going missing are fully considered.
- 24.2 The child should be told:-
- That we would expect him / her to talk to an independent person or an appropriate friend or person the child trusts about the absence;
 - He/she should be advised that the independent person would normally be the social worker (so that appropriate support is offered to ensure that the child settles and does not run away again) but if he / she wishes, it could be another professional, independent, visitor, or an appropriate friend;
 - In addition, it is the responsibility of the social worker to interview a young person within 72 hours of the incident;
 - On return the child's medical condition should be discussed and an offer made to arrange medical attention;
 - Parents, Police, Social Worker and all others informed of the absence should be advised of the child's return without delay.
- 24.3 Where a young person frequently goes missing from a residential setting the social worker in consultation with their line manager should agree how often the child needs to be met to have a discussion. This is the only circumstance under which the meeting may not necessarily take place straight away and the reason must be logged on ICS and on the young person's file.
- 24.4 All unauthorised absences should be recorded and a full report of their circumstances made available for the child's next Looked After Review.
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- 24.5. Regular or persistent absences should be discussed with the Review Manager with a view to an early review being called if necessary.
- 24.6 The Review will consider any initial risk assessment in relation to the report presented and consider how the level of absence can be diminished. The Keep Safe Plan should also be reviewed at this time to include information relating to the absence.
-

Young People Missing from Care Process Flowchart

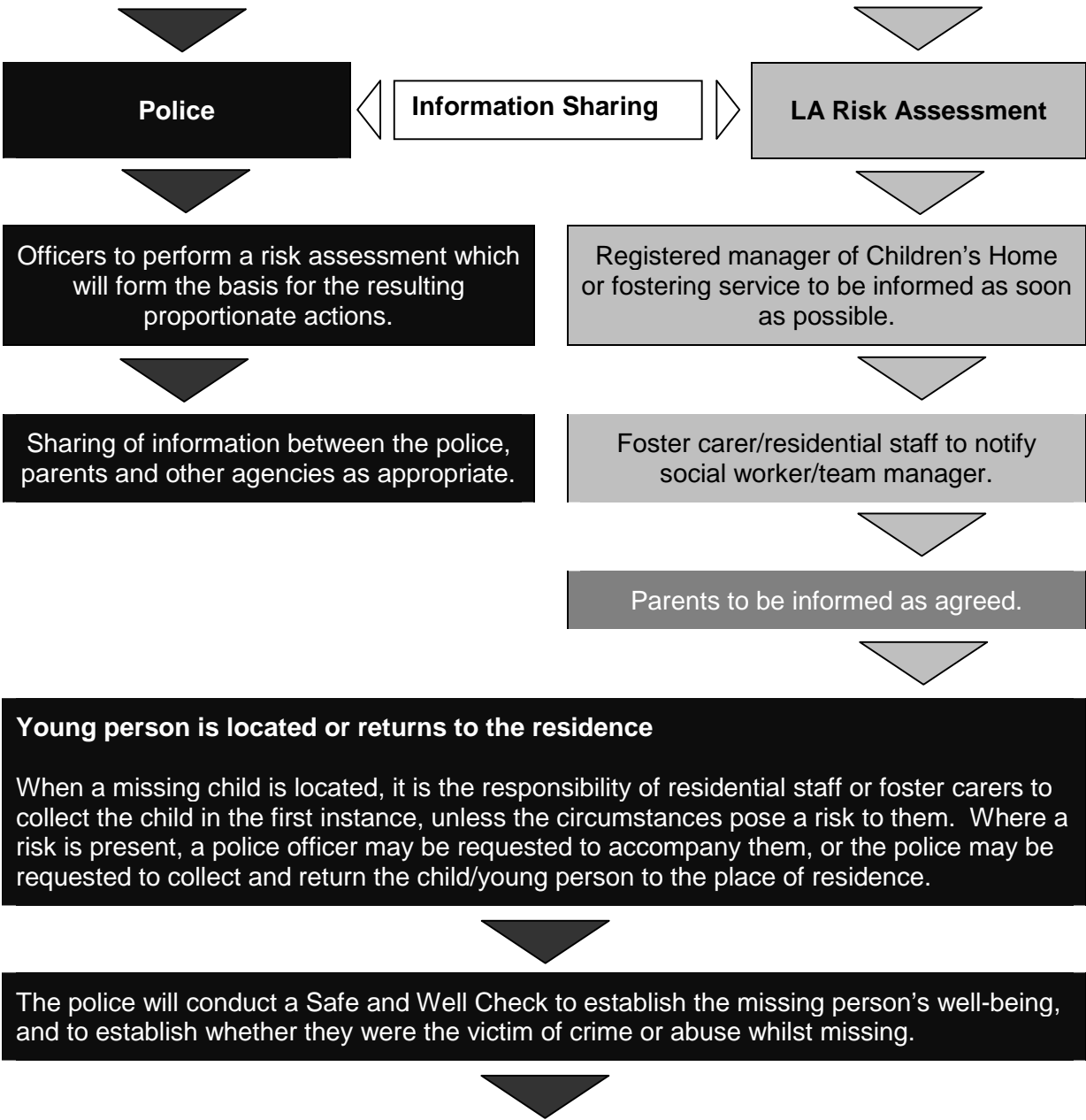
Missing

Residential staff / foster carers should make enquiries to locate the missing person with relatives / friends. This should include searches of the accommodation and local area. Foster carer / residential staff then telephone police with details of the missing persons.

Details required:

- Child's name
- DOB
- Where, when, who missing with?
- What child was last wearing
- Description of young person
- Recent photo
- Medical history
- Legal status

All efforts to locate the child / young person must be recorded and auditable.



Young person is located or returns to the residence

When a missing child is located, it is the responsibility of residential staff or foster carers to collect the child in the first instance, unless the circumstances pose a risk to them. Where a risk is present, a police officer may be requested to accompany them, or the police may be requested to collect and return the child/young person to the place of residence.

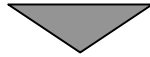
The police will conduct a Safe and Well Check to establish the missing person's well-being, and to establish whether they were the victim of crime or abuse whilst missing.

Foster carer/residential staff to:

- Provide positive non-judgemental return;
- Check young person's medical condition and make necessary arrangements.



Placement staff to inform the social worker and team manager of the young person's return.



Arrangements for Return Interview to be agreed in consultation with the child. Care Plan to be updated.



Consider whether to:

- Convene a multi-agency strategy meeting;
 - Arrange an early looked-after child review;
 - Review any prevention / support work currently being undertaken with the child.
-

25.0 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

- 25.1 Unaccompanied asylum seeking children can be particularly vulnerable when they go missing. This may be due to various forms of exploitation, prostitution, abuse and trafficking combined with sometimes very limited, if any, knowledge of English. If the child that goes missing is UASC, agencies should, **in addition to** these procedures, refer to the trafficking toolkit: (<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/tp00.htm>) and consult the social worker responsible for UASC who will register that the child has gone missing on the National Register for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. This database will be checked on a daily basis to see whether the child has appeared in another authority.
- 25.2 Any UASC who goes missing must be reported immediately to the Home Office. This should be followed up by the social worker responsible for UASC on a regular basis to ensure that the service is informed if the child has been detained or returned to their country of origin.
- 25.3 Where a young unaccompanied asylum seeker has been age assessed as under the age of 18 years old and is looked after, that young person will remain looked after but classified as 'missing' until they reach the age of 18 years old. Once they have reached the age of 18 years old a decision may be taken on a case by case basis with the Assistant Director and the responsible Head of Service to deregister the young person.

26.0 Implementation and Monitoring

- 26.1 The Conference and Review Service will maintain a database of children who are and have been missing from residential and foster care. Information to populate this database will be provided by the social worker by completion of BIC form 835. This will be derived from records of incidents kept by children's homes and foster carers and will be available for local and strategic review meetings as needed. This information will provide a systematic way of monitoring the trends relating to the circumstances of children who go missing from care.
- 26.2 Within Bedfordshire regular meetings take place between Police MPU, representatives of Children's Services and partner agencies to consider all cases of children and young people who persistently go missing or where there are concerns about their whereabouts or activities during a missing episode and all cases where the missing event has been assessed as high risk. The MAMCOG also considers management information in respect of children who go missing from home and care in an effort to identify any actions that may be taken to reduce the incidences of children going missing. Responsibility to monitor information on children who go missing including incidences and patterns of behaviour is subject to reporting to the Joint Steering Group of the Local Safeguarding Children Board
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Appendix 1

Eastern Safeguarding Project

Guidance for assessing vulnerability and risk

Risk factors to inform decision making for children/young people who runaway/go missing
This risk factor framework is to be used by Police, Social Care, Children and Young People Services, Education/Learning and Partner Agencies.

Completion of the framework is to assist any existing risk assessment based on levels of concern and not necessarily the period of time that the person is missing. The framework is to be used flexibly and to gather evidence to support professional judgement and best practice.

Risk factors					
	Factors to be considered	Details and circumstances	High Risk	Medium Risk	Low Risk
1	Is the person vulnerable due to age or disability/medical condition or any other similar factor?				
2	Behaviour that is out of character is often a strong indicator of risk; are the circumstances of going missing different from normal behaviour patterns? Any history of missing?				
3	Is the young person suspected to be subject of a significant crime in progress e.g. abduction?				
4	Is there any indication that the person is likely to commit suicide? History of harm and/or self-harm?				
5	Is there a reason for the person to go missing? Circumstances at the time of disappearance?				
6	Are there any indications that preparations had been made for an absence?				

7	What was the young person intending to do when last seen e.g. going to the shops or catching a bus and did they fail to complete their intentions?				
8	Are there family or relationship problems or recent history of family conflict and/or abuse? History of harm?				
9	Are they the victim or perpetrator of domestic violence? History of harm?				
10	Does the missing person have any physical illness or mental health problems? State of mind/body.				
11	Are they the subject of a Child Protection Plan?				
12	Previously disappeared and suffered or was exposed to harm?				
13	Belief that the person may not have the ability to interact safely with others or in an unknown environment? Resilience of young person to changing circumstances and/or learning disability. Communication and language considerations.				
14	Do they need essential medication that is not likely to be available to them?				
15	Ongoing bullying or harassment e.g. racial, sexual, homophobic or local community concerns or cultural issues etc?				
16	Were they involved in a violent and/or racist/homophobic incident immediately prior to disappearance?				

17	School/college/university/employment or financial problems? Reported as missing from education or home educated?				
18	Drug or alcohol dependency?				
19	Other unlisted factors which the officer/practitioner or supervisor considers should influence risk assessment? – For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ is there reason to believe the child is being trafficked? ▪ is the child from another Local Authority? ▪ They are a Looked After Child/young person? 				

Appendix 2

Trafficking Toolkit

Children

The responsibilities of social services regarding child victims of trafficking may include:-

- providing victims/potential victims with a safe place to stay;
- provision of support services (e.g. counselling, legal advice, schooling);
- identifying victims/potential victims according to agreed profiles or receiving referrals from other agencies who have identified them;
- contributing to joint inter-agency profiling of victims / potential victims;
- undertaking initial interviews, including joint interviews with the local police, to assess risk, harm and agree child protection plans;
- provide advice about who to contact concerning their immigration status;
- assist in the identification of possible traffickers masquerading as ‘relatives’;
- ensure contact with police and provision of information to the police;
- finding of relatives in country of origin, and verification of what would be in the best interests of the child, and whether they should be able to remain in the UK or if it is safe to return home;
- ensure that NGO or other support is available if they are returned to their country of origin;
- monitoring of children in social services for signs that they are meeting the traffickers including monitoring their phone calls;
- providing support and building up a relationship to encourage the child not to leave with the trafficker.

One approach that has been successfully employed in some areas has been to appoint a designated lead officer with responsibility within their child protection procedures for the trafficking of children and young people.

The National Missing Persons Helpline has a Department of Health funded project ‘Missing from Care’. This project receives, from a number of Social Services departments, all details of young people who are missing from care. This includes children and young people who have been victims of trafficking ^[1].

^[1] National Missing Persons Helpline: www.missingpersons.org

<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/tp050301.htm>

Safety issues

A victim who escapes exploitation and receives shelter and assistance represents a 'lost investment asset' in the eyes of the trafficker, and is likely to trigger serious and potentially violent reprisals against the escaped victim. They may do this by taking action on the victim or through threats to the victim's family. If the victim agrees to become a prosecution witness, the risks are likely to change significantly. The threat to traffickers and exploiters is seriously increased and they will be keen to prevent the victim from giving their testimony.

Given that the victim will be receiving support, the risk extends to include those who are providing this support and may come between the trafficker and the victim.

A risk assessment therefore needs to be carried out as soon as possible after a trafficking victim has come to notice and then be regularly reviewed.

Security issues apply to:

- accommodation (including emergency alarms/video cameras/ immediate access to police if needed);
- secure transport to/from services/hearings/airports etc;
- witness protection where indicated.

Special security issues may relate to children, including their security while being provided with education services and the fact that they may have been instructed by their traffickers to make contact. It may be appropriate, for example, to provide dedicated education provision in small groups, with chaperoned travel to and from the teaching centre, rather than open attendance at school or college with no protection.

It needs to be remembered that there are legislative requirements not to restrict the exercise of human rights of victims.

<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/tp0608.htm>

Special issues relating to child victims

All child care agencies – social services, health, education and the police - and LSCB's need to consider what would provide the best protection for children in the specific cases presented. This should include plans for their immediate and their longer term needs.

They must be placed in a trusting and safe environment, with carers who understand their needs, including an understanding of their cultural background and any associated issues, and preferably with those who speak the same languages. Whilst they must be given protection, they must not be made to feel that they are being locked up, as this for some, may be worse than being outside and with their trafficker.

Social services can provide protection to children by carrying out good monitoring to ensure that they are well, safe and happy. The children need to feel safe and secure in the environment where they are being cared for, if they are going to stay.

Specialist counselling will be required, to address the trafficking issue and specialist and sensitive health care is important.

For many, the debt they owe is the main reason they must leave, so understanding of this issue is vital, as is accepting that they may be terrified of ritual curses. In the case of Eastern European children, the level of violence they are likely to have suffered is high, as control is often exerted through repeated raping and beatings.

Should children wish to return home, efforts must be made to ensure appropriate reception arrangements in their country of origin? However, children may be reluctant to return, and in some cases may have been sold by their families. The safety of the child is paramount and if it is deemed that the child would be in danger were they to return, then exceptional leave will be granted either for 4 years or until they reach the age of 18. Children will only be returned to their country of origin if appropriate arrangements can be made for their safe return. It is important that efforts are made to reassure the child on this matter.

The decision on where to accommodate the child will depend on an assessment of need, and of the skills and training of available carers. No young person aged under 18 should be placed in unassisted accommodation, such as bed and breakfast, and they should be provided with an initial period of 24 hour care, and monitoring of their health and welfare needs.

Local protocols should be established between social services, the police and the immigration service on how to best to work with children thought to be at risk of being trafficked.

<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/tp0610.htm>

Appendix 3

Practice Guidance for Return Interview

A return interview might gather the following information:

1. Reason for disappearance
2. Circumstances of return:-
 - Time returned
 - Date returned
 - Returned of own accord
 - Found by police / Arrested
 - Found by family
 - Other
 - Physical Injury
 - Location found
 - Not known / Not disclosed
 - Other

Account of circumstances whilst a runaway:-

- Stayed with friend / family
- Went to place previously lived / frequented
- Hotel/other commercial premises
- Went to location with no previously known connections
- Stayed with person they met while a runaway
- Met up with other runaways
- Slept rough
- Involved in prostitution
- Involved in criminal activity
- Not known / not disclosed

Record:-

- who was the agency worker dealing with the return
 - Action plan agreed and with whom
 - The notification process undertaken
 - The information from the interview
-

Appendix 4

Terms of Reference for the Multi Agency Missing Children's Operational Group (MAMCOG)

- To provide a forum for organisations and individuals within Bedfordshire who deal with children and young people who are, or at risk of being missing.
- To promote multi agency and partnership working.
- To share information, experience and ideas.
- To influence the development of policy and procedure.
- To provide clear information on the level of Missing Incidents in Bedfordshire.
- To provide information on cases of Bedfordshire looked After Children who have gone missing from out of county placements.
- To provide an enhanced Multi Agency response to appropriate cases.

Membership

Membership of the group is open to all groups and individuals in Bedfordshire who deal with children and young people who are, or at risk of going missing. Membership commits members to take an active part in the group and provide regular representation at meetings and participation in activities.
