

Document last updated: August 2021

Document review due: August 2024

Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care:

Practice Guidance



About this document

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| Title | Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care: Practice Guidance |
| Purpose | This guidance is for all staff working with children who run away or go missing from home or care. It should be read in conjunction with the Southend Essex and Thurrock protocol on this subject. |
| Updated by | Sheila Woodward, Service Manager; Shane Thomson, Missing Co-ordinator |
| Approved by | Children and Families Leadership Team |
| Date | August 2021 |
| Version number | 7.0 |
| Status | Final |
| Review  frequency | Three-yearly |
| Next review date | August 2024 |

**Version Control**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date Issued:** | **Version** | **Summary of Changes** | **Created by** |
| March 2015 | 2 | Updated flowcharts – New Process on Mosaic. | Annette Masters 01.06.2016 |
| March 2015 | 2 | Update Section 8 – MACE | Annette Masters  01.06.2016 |
| March 2015 | 2 | Children Missing Education Flowchart | Annette Masters  01.06.2016 |
| March 2015 | 2 | Examples or Missing/Absent added to Appendix 1 | Annette Masters  01.06.2016 |
| March 2016 | 3 | Updated Missing Chat Process | Annette Masters  17.03.2017 |
| February 2018 | 4 | Update Missing Chat Process | Annette Masters 09.02.2018 |
| February 2018 | 4 | Single Missing Prevention Plans | Annette Masters 09.02.2018 |
| August  2018 | 5 | Update Missing Chat Process and flowcharts | Sheila Woodward  28.08.2018 |
| September 2018 | 6 | Included Family Solutions and Youth Offending Service in guidance. Updated hyperlinks | Shane Thomson  14.09.2018 |
| August  2021 | 7 | Updated document in line with 3 yearly review | Shane Thomson, Sheila Woodward |

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|  |  |
|  |  |
| **contents**  Introduction:  Children in Care (Planning and Review) | 5  5 |
| When Children in Care Run Away | 7 |
| Children Living at Home Open to Children and Families Service, Family Solutions and/or Youth Offending Service | 11 |
| Missing from Home – Not Open to Children and Families Service, Family Solutions and/or Youth Offending Service | 13 |
| Missing Chats (Independent Return Interviews) | 14 |
| Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children:  Children and Young People on Part Time Tables, Exclusion or not on a school role. | 16  16 |
| Notification to Senior Managers: | 16 |
| Missing and Child Exploitation (MACE) Meetings: | 17 |
| Appendix 1: Definitions | 19 |
| Appendix 2: Related Documents  Appendix 3: Services for Missing Children | 21  22 |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**Introduction**

* 1. This guidance is intended to support staff in Children and Family Services, Family Solutions and the Youth Offending Service, who are working with children who run away or go missing from home or care. It should be read in conjunction with the statutory guidance and the Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) Protocol on this subject.
  2. Flow charts have been provided within the guidance to help staff take the correct steps, when responding to a child who has run away and gone missing, from home or care; and to help put appropriate safeguarding measures in place such as;
* when to hold a S47 strategy discussion/meeting
* when to inform a DLD of a missing child.

1. **Children in Care (Planning & Review)** 
   1. If a child is missing three or more times in 90 days or if there is a clear risk of harm associated with running away a missing prevention plan with a clear strategy should be written. Any concerns about exploitation need to be linked to a child exploitation risk record. If the child is not missing for 90 days the missing prevention plan can then be closed.
   2. The child’s placement should be supported to prepare for the child going missing, this will include;

* Having a photo of the child
* Having contact numbers for any family members or friends
* Having details of potential addresses that the child may go to
* Discussions within the placement planning meeting regarding the plan and arrangements should the child go missing.
* **N.B. Any placements within the borders of Essex need to comply with the missing from care memorandum of understanding (MOU). Also, the planning for missing form needs to be completed by the allocated Social Worker at the beginning of the placement. There will be similar protocols for children placed outside of Essex, it is important to speak with local Police and the Local Authority to determine what is needed by local services.**
  1. It is important to maintain the frequency of social work visits, and offer independent advocacy as an important part of the support network. The life plan or pathway plan should consider how other professionals working with the child, especially the school, can contribute. The Social Worker is responsible for consulting with relevant agencies during the planning and review of a child who has an established pattern of running away.
  2. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) should be involved in ensuring that there is an appropriate strategy in place to address the risk of the child running away and statutory reviews should be arranged quarterly, until the risk is being effectively managed. The Social Worker must keep the IRO informed of any liaison with the Police and relevant partner-agencies to ensure that there is a joint approach during the review process to manage the risks identified.

**When Children in Care Run Away**

Flowchart for responding to a child who goes missing from their placement

Child goes missing from foster care/residential placement/other placement type

Child found/ returned

Meaningful contact to be made by the SW within 48 hours, SW is to record the contact on the missing episode.

Once the child returns, they will also be offered an Independent Missing Chat. If accepted, the Missing Chat will be completed and uploaded onto Mosaic. The ASW and MPLO’s will also be provided with a synopsis of the Missing Chat. Information from missing chats should be used in the child’s plan to support strategies of preventing missing episodes.

Concerns that this child is at risk of significant harm and likely to go missing again.

Strategy meeting to be held & Missing Prevention Plan to be completed. ASW should notify Service Manager.

Yes

No

Review whether Child is missing or away from placement without authorisation.

No

When the child is returned by the police, the police should conduct a vulnerability (safe and well) check. If returned of own accord; ask for information from carer/staff of their observations when the child returned.

Has the child been missing for five days or longer.

Yes

No

Is the child at risk of significant harm?

Yes

Carer/staff make searches of accommodation and if possible the local area and known locations that the child goes to. Enquiries should be made of family and friends to try and locate the child. (**refer to missing from Care MOU).**

If the child has not been located call the Police to report the child missing. Once the carer/staff member has spoken with the police, they must notify EDS or the Social Worker.

When the whereabouts of the child is known but they will not return to placement this is referred to as ‘’**away from placement without authorisation’’**. In these circumstances there needs ongoing monitoring of the situation. Social Worker or EDS needs to be informed and call Police if there is a cause for concern.

1. ‘ Away from placement without authorisation’; children/young people should have their circumstances constantly under review and may become regarded as missing, later. If there is increased risk to the child call the police highlighting there is a cause for concern’ for the child.  
   * 1. If the child is considered to be missing, the carer is expected to provide the police with a planning for missing form.
     2. The carer should notify the following:   
          
        - the local police  
        - the authority responsible for the child’s placement   
        - the parents and any other person with parental responsibility, unless it is not reasonably practicable or to do so would be inconsistent with the child’s welfare. This will have been previously agreed with the Social Worker.
     3. The Social Worker should ensure that the carer has notified those in 3.1.2 and contact:  
          
        - the IRO;   
        - all those with parental responsibility; and  
        - the host authority, if the child is placed outside of Essex.
     4. A s47 strategy discussion needs to be arranged when a child is missing for more than five days, or if the circumstances indicate that the child is likely to be at risk of significant harm. This meeting will consider the arrangements for the child’s return and the parents must be involved with the plan of this. DLD’s need to be informed at the point that a child has been missing for 5 days, or earlier if there is a risk of significant harm.
     5. Regardless of whether a s.47 investigation is deemed necessary, **a professionals’ meeting with the police must be considered** in order to look at the current circumstances of the child going missing and to put in place measures to prevent future missing episodes, e.g. developing a missing prevention plan, sharing information of addresses/associates etc.
   1. The Social Worker, carer and parents, where appropriate, should plan for the child’s return, including consideration of:  
        
      - discussion of the purpose of a Missing Chatat the earliest opportunity.  
      - whether the child should return to the placement and whether the placement remains appropriate;  
      - who with and how will the child be transported home;  
      - the appropriate support needs of the family, as identified by the Social Worker  
      - any immediate health needs, e.g. emergency contraception;  
      - if the whereabouts of the young person is thought to be known and the Police have no consent to access the property, a Recovery Order should be considered.  
      1. On return, carers are expected to continue to offer warm and consistent care. Running away is not to be seen as a behaviour that should be punished.
      2. The training and support to foster carers, staff working in children’s homes or other arrangements, in relation to children who run away and go missing from care, is covered in the statutory guidance on this subject and the National Minimum Standards for those services.
   2. When the child is found, the Social Worker and carer should notify:  
        
       - the local police;  
       - the IRO;  
       - the ‘host’ authority, if the child is placed outside of Essex;  
       - the school; and  
       - update Mosaic and, where the child was missing, end the missing episode.  
      1. The Social Worker should try to establish meaningful contact with the child within 48 hours of the child’s return, in order to establish the reasons why the child ran away. This should be through a visit to the child. Where this is not possible, telephone contact will be made. The details of this contact with the child is to be recorded in the relevant area of the missing episode form on MOSAIC.
      2. The Social Worker should liaise with the police, where necessary, to ascertain the outcome of the vulnerability (safe and well) check. Where possible, this should be done before the visit to the child, as it may provide information useful for the discussion with the child.
      3. The Social Worker should identify any additional assessed needs arising from the child running away, taking into account the record and action plan from any independent Missing Chat e.g. the provision of advice and information for the child; 1:1 support for the child.
      4. If the child’s placement appears to be or is considered to be unsafe, the Social Worker should seek approval from a Director for Local Delivery or the manager covering the role, to make arrangements for alternative accommodation to be sought for the child where appropriate. The Social Worker should ensure the IRO is kept informed.
2. **Children Living at Home Open to Children and Families, Family Solutions and/or Youth Offending Service**

Flowchart for responding to a child who has gone missing from home and open to C&F, Family Solutions and/or Youth Offending Service

Child open to Children and Families, Family Solutions or YOS goes missing

Child reported missing to the police by parents/carers or teaching staff if child went missing from school. The police notify the C&F Hub that the child is missing. C&F Hub upload this notification onto MOSAIC, which notifies the allocated Worker.

Police work to locate the child.

If there is a Child Protection Plan or CIN plan, the Social Worker should notify the Child Protection Conference Chair or CINRO. Discuss with the chair about whether the next conference needs to be brought forward. YOS will consider breach proceedings for young people who are missing if this is agreed as part of the young person’s plan.

Yes

No

Child found/returned?

If child returned by the police, follow up on vulnerability (safe and well check). If returned of own accord, discussion should be held with family members around how the child returned. Appearance/mood etc.

Has the child been missing for five days or longer

Meaningful contact to be made by the SW within 48 hours, SW is to record the contact on the missing episode.

No

Yes

Is the child at risk of significant harm?

Once the child returns, they will also be offered an Independent Missing Chat. If accepted, the Missing Chat will be completed and uploaded onto Mosaic. The ASW and MPLO’s will also be provided with a synopsis of the Missing Chat. Information from missing chats should be used in the child’s plan to support strategies of preventing missing episodes.

No

Yes

Social Worker continue to review the ongoing risk of the child gong missing.

Strategy meeting to be held & Missing Prevention Plan to be completed. ASW should notify Service Manager and DLD.

Concerns that this child is at risk of significant harm and likely to go missing again.

* + 1. The Social Worker needs to (re-)consider the current assessment and plan for the child in light of the information received.

* + 1. A s47 strategy discussion needs to be arranged when a child is missing for 5 days or more, or if the circumstances indicate that the child is likely to be at risk of significant harm. This meeting will consider the arrangements for the child’s return and the parents must be involved with the plan of this. DLD’s need to be informed at the point that a child has been missing for 5 days, or earlier if there is a risk of significant harm.
    2. If the child is subject of a Child Protection Plan, the Social Worker should inform the Child Protection Conference Chair and the Core Group about the child running away.
    3. The Social Worker will ensure that an updated analysis of risk(s)in the report they provide to the Child Protection Conference to assist in forming any future child protection plans and inform the Missing Prevention Plan
    4. Consideration will need to be given to a media strategy if the child has or is thought likely to be missing for some time. This must always be in discussion with the Director of Local Delivery and anyone with parental responsibility.

**Missing from Home – Not Open to Children and Families, Family Solutions and/or Youth Offending Service**

Flowchart for responding to a child who has gone missing from home not open to C&F, Family Solutions and/or Youth Offending Services

Child goes missing from home and is reported missing to the police.

Police send an automatic notification to the C&F Hub with the circumstances around the child going missing – missing episode uploaded onto Mosaic by C&F Hub BSA’s. Police will respond by trying to find the child.

C&F Hub to consider if the information in the missing episode meets the need for Tier 4 intervention?

Has the child been missing for 5 days?

No

Yes

Yes

No

C&F Hub will consider Family Solutions, signposting to tier 2 interventions

To be followed up by the police and for the risk to continue to be assessed.

Referral to C&F Hub - contact opened and transferred to local Assessment & Intervention team, allocated to a Social Worker to attend a Strategy meeting (if child is missing for 5 or more days).

Child Found?

Strategy meeting to be convened by the police with the allocated Social Worker

Yes

No

No

Yes

Child Found?

Missing episode to be closed with circumstances of being found/returned on Mosaic when Found notification is received by C&F Hub BSA’s. Decision to be made on level of intervention

Missing episode to be closed with circumstances of being found/returned on Mosaic.

Once the child returns, they will be offered an Independent Missing Chat. If accepted, the Missing Chat will be completed and uploaded onto Mosaic. MPLO’s will also be provided with a synopsis of the Missing Chat. If the child is open to Social Care information from missing chat should be used in the child’s plan and the C&F Assessment.

Decision by the police whether the child is still at risk and where appropriate the police will refer to Children and Families.

* 1. At first contact, it is necessary for the Children and Families Hub to establish whether the case should be directed to the Assessment & Intervention Team; the Family Solutions Team; and if it involves persistent absence from school, notify the child’s school and the Specialist Education Service where they are involved.   
     1. Where there is a concern that a child may be at risk of suffering significant harm, the case will be referred to an Assessment & Intervention Team. An Assessment & Intervention Team will decide whether the case should be managed under s17 or s47 Children Act 1989.
     2. Managing school attendance is the responsibility of the school in the first instance. However, if the young person is a persistent absentee (i.e. with less than 85% attendance) the school may refer to the Family Solutions Team or the Specialist Education Service, should the referral criteria be met. If the young person is considered to be at risk of significant harm, the school must contact the Children and Families Hub.

1. **Missing Chats (Independent Return Interviews)**
   1. Missing Chats are important to ensure that children have the opportunity to speak to somebody independent about going missing. This will provide an opportunity to offer the child additional support and build relationships that may help protect the child from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing, or from risk factors in their home (pull/push factors).
   2. All Essex children 10 years or older who go missing, irrespective of whether they are receiving statutory services, are offered a Missing Chat. On the child’s first missing episode and where the child has been missing on 3 + occasions, they will receive an additional verbal offer of a missing chat by the Involvement Service or Family Solutions. All Missing Chats will be recorded on Mosaic by the Involvements Service / Family Solutions worker. A synopsis of the missing chat will be sent to the Social Worker and the Police.
   3. Missing Chats are a voluntary activity, children and young people have the choice to accept or decline. Missing Chats can be conducted by professionals who are independent of any ‘statutory care’, should the child prefer a known trusted adult to speak with the Involvement Service will support this to take place.

**Missing Chat Process**

Missing Chat offer to ALL Essex Children 10 years and over who have been reported Missing to Police. Service / Family Solutions.

Missing Chat Accepted

Missing Chat Declined

Involvement Worker / Family Solutions worker to complete Mosaic Missing Chat Form to evidence decline.

Involvement Worker / Family Solutions conducts Missing Chat either on phone or in person.

No further action on current episode.

Involvement Worker / Family Solutions completes Missing chat Mosaic Form.

Synopsis shared with Social Worker and Police.

NOTE: Consent

For all children Looked After – parental consent is assumed and not required.

For all other children and young people (irrespective of whether they are open to Social Care) – parental consent IS required. Parents **MUST** sign the Missing Chat form in agreement for the Missing Chat to take place (or indicate agreement if not seen).

Young People MUST also sign (or indicate agreement if not seen) the Missing Chat to demonstrate their agreement to complete the Missing Chat and understanding that the Missing Chat will be shared with their social worker (if they have one) and other professionals where relevant.

1. **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)**

In respect of UASC, the Social Worker will also need to refer to the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children **Policy and Procedure Document**

* 1. Both the child’s status as UASC; and that they may have been or are known to have been trafficked will be included in their assessment and Care Plan, together with any actions that are to be taken to make them safer. Equally, this guidance should be followed for all UASC Children in Care who go missing/absent from placement.
  2. Please refer to the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Policies and Proceedures

1. **Children and Young People on Part Time Tables, Exclusion or not on a school role.**

7.1 Children who are on part time timetables, temporarily excluded from school or not on a school roll are particularly vulnerable to missing episodes not reported or whereabouts not known.  Allocated Workers should contact Education Access for children who are on a part time timetable to discuss particular issues regarding individual children who are missing their education using the email address   [provision@essex.gov.uk](mailto:provision@essex.gov.uk) .

7.2 For children who have recently moved into Essex and are not in the process of securing a school place or who have gone missing  from school and cannot be traced please contact the Children Missing Education (CME) Team at [Mail.ChildrenMissingEduction@essex.gov.uk](mailto:Mail.ChildrenMissingEduction@essex.gov.uk).

1. **Notification to Senior Managers**
   1. Social Workers should notify the Director for Local Delivery or their delegated representative in respect of a child who is missing, if:

* The child has been missing for 5 days
* There is a risk in the community for the missing child. (i.e. exploitation)
  1. In exceptional cases, e.g. those involving children from more than one Quadrant, the Executive Director for Family Operations will be notified, by the Director for Local Delivery.
  2. Progress on children who go missing will be tracked at a strategic level, by senior managers on receipt of reports from the Missing Co-ordinator informed by Insight and Intelligence.

1. **Missing and Child Exploitation (MACE 1 and 2) Group**

9.1 MACE is a quadrant based monthly meeting in which children who are vulnerable to CSE and Missing are discussed in a multiagency forum.

Mace 1 will:

* Identify children and young people who have recently been/ or are currently missing from care or home and all highly vulnerable/or victims of exploitation.
* Share responsibility across all agencies to identify children and young people who are vulnerable and to oversee what plans are currently in place to manage the risk
* Review Missing Prevention plans to ensure that practitioners are responding appropriately to children and young people who are frequently running away from home or care
* Provide the allocated worker with guidance and advice around responding to missing episodes and possible preventative measures that can be put in place
* Identify children and young people who may be at risk of sexual exploitation and to share this information and intelligence with relevant agencies to safeguard the child or young person.
* Ensure that a robust multi-agency Missing Prevention Plan is put in place for children and young people who are discussed at the panel.
  1. Mace 2 is a quadrant based forum to consider operational activities necessary to tackle exploitation and missing episodes throughout the quadrants through analysing trends, patterns and identifying hotspots, considering where possible tactical data and information from a District and City Level.

**Appendix 1: Definitions**

It is important to understand that the terms missing, absent, high and medium risk, have specific meanings in the guidance, so that we communicate effectively with partner agencies.

* **Child**: *‘anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. ‘Children’ therefore means ‘children and young people’…’*
* **Young runaway**: *‘a child who has run away from their home of care placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.’*
* **Missing child**: *‘a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.*’
* **Looked after child**: *‘a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.’* In Essex, Family Operations refers to all of these children as *‘children in care’*.
* **Responsible local authority**: *‘the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child’s care and care planning.’*
* **Host local authority**: *‘the local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority’s area.’*
* **Care leaver**: *‘an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.’*
* **Missing from care**: *‘a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (eg, school) and their whereabouts is not known.’*
* **Away from placement without authorisation**: *‘a looked after child* [child in care] *whose whereabouts is 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.’*

In addition, the Police use the following definitions:

* **Missing**: *‘Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of farm to themselves or another.’*
* **High Risk**: *‘a risk that 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.’*
* **Carer**: for the purpose of this document, *‘carer’* means the adult with whom the child usually lives e.g. a parent, foster carer, supported lodgings provider or manager of residential home or semi-independent unit.

**Appendix 2: Related Documents:**

SET Procedures-A copy of the SET Procedures can be found at http://www.escb.co.uk**Appendix 3: Services for Missing Children**

1. **Helplines and Useful Contacts**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **OTHER USEFUL CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBERS FOR THE FAMILY** | |
| **ECC CONTACT DETAILS** | **0845 606 1212** |
| Missing Chats | Involvement Service [**lucy.stovell@essex.gov.uk**](mailto:lucy.stovell@essex.gov.uk) |
| Missing People Helpline – Helpline number to call for advice, support and options if you, or someone you love, goes missing or runs away - it’s free, 24 hour and confidential.  Young people can also call this number if they have gone missing or are thinking about going missing. | Free phone 116 000 |
| Re-unite Children abducted from the UK. | Advice line 0116 2556 234 Telephone 0116 2555 345 www.reunite.org |
| www.missingkids.co.uk | 020 7230 4029 |
| “Family Lives” is a UK registered charity offering support to anyone parenting a child. | 0808 800 2222 https://www.familylives.org.uk/ |
| Samaritans – This is the telephone helpline that provides free, confidential, emotional support. | 08457 90 90 90 www.samaritans.org.uk |
| Childline is the free helpline for children and young people in the UK. Children and young people can call on **116123** to talk about any problem –counsellors are always there | 116123  www.childline.org.uk |
| National Domestic Violence Line” – an organisation offering advice on domestic violence issues. | Freephone 0808 2000 247 |

**NB: This list of services is not an exhaustive list.**