

Children and Families who go Missing (including unborn children)

RELATED GUIDANCE AND INFORMATION

[Statutory Guidance on Children Missing from Home and Care \(DfE\)](#).

See also: [HERE TO LISTEN? Return interviews provision for young runaways, Children's Society \(2013\)](#).

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1. Introduction

Local agencies and professionals, working with children and families where there are outstanding concerns of actual or potential [Significant Harm](#), must bear in mind that unusual non-school attendance, missed appointments, cancelled or abortive home visits, may indicate that the family has moved out of the area.

This possibility must also be borne in mind when there are concerns about an unborn child who may be at future likelihood of suffering Significant Harm.

These procedures apply if a child in the following circumstances goes missing or cannot be traced:

- A child who is the subject of a child protection referral or [Section 47 Enquiry](#);
- A child who is the subject of a [Child Protection Plan](#), who goes missing or is removed from her/his address outside the terms of the Child Protection Plan;
- Any child known to a statutory agency who goes missing in suspicious circumstances or about whom there are concerns - e.g. one who is subject to an Assessment where there are developing concerns about their safety.

These procedures also apply to adults whose whereabouts become unknown in the following circumstances:

- A pregnant woman when there are concerns about the welfare of the child following birth;
- A family where there are concerns about the welfare of the child because of the presence of an individual who poses a risk to children or other person suspected of previously harming a child.

2. Agencies to be Notified

In any of the above circumstances the relevant Children's Social Care Services team holding case responsibility must be notified immediately.

The Children's Social Care Services team must then inform the Manager of the Safeguarding Unit immediately, if the child is subject to a [Child Protection Plan](#). The Police must also be notified immediately.

The Manager of the List of Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan must be informed immediately, if a child who has a Child Protection Plan goes missing. See **Local Contacts**.

At the same time, the Children's Social Care Services team must contact all local agencies who know the child, to inform them of the situation and where the child is the subject of a Child Protection Plan all members of the [Core Group](#) must be informed in writing.

The Children's Social Care Services team must ensure existing records in these agencies are checked to obtain any information, which may help to trace the missing child, e.g. details of friends and relatives, and this information should be passed to the Police officer undertaking the missing person enquiry.

The Designated Safeguarding Children Nurse must be notified about a missing child, family or a pregnant woman. Notification must occur immediately for a child subject to a Child Protection Plan. S/he then has responsibility for initiating appropriate local or national notifications of Clinical Commissioning Groups and Hospital Trusts.

The Pupil Tracking Officer should notify colleagues in other areas about a pupil whose name may show up on the roll of a new school. See **Children Missing from Education or with Issues Regarding School Attendance/Poor School Attendance Procedure**.

The Children's Social Care Services team must ensure that all those with [Parental Responsibility](#) are informed that the child is missing.

The social worker must discuss with her/his manager whether to notify members of the extended family and if so, how.

3. Strategy Discussion

If, after following the above steps, the child has not been traced, there should be a [Strategy Discussion](#) initiated by Children's Social Care Services chaired by a Children's Social Care Services Manager.

Parties to the Strategy Discussion will need to consider whether to circulate other local authorities and other agencies in the area in which the child and family are thought to have gone.

The Children's Social Care Services team should give consideration to national notification of authorities and agencies including Job Centre Plus and the Benefits Agency and [Child Benefit agency](#). This notification should be completed within 48 hours of completing the missing person report.

A senior member of Children's Social Care Services should seek assistance from the Department for Work and Pensions if the Police have not already contacted them.

If there is any suspicion that the child may be removed from UK jurisdiction, appropriate legal interventions should be considered and Legal Services consulted about options. It may also be appropriate to contact the [Child Abduction Unit](#) or the [Consular Directorate at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#), which may be able to follow up a case through their consular post in the country or countries concerned. See also [Working with Foreign Authorities: Child Protection Cases and Care Orders Departmental advice for local authorities, social workers, service managers and children's services lawyers, July 2014](#).

See also procedures on **Forced Marriage Procedure** and **Safeguarding Children at Risk of Abuse through Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Procedure**.

4. Follow-up Action by Children's Social Care Services

If the Strategy Discussion agrees that the details of the child or family are to be circulated to other local authorities, the social worker should draft a short letter giving details of:

- The children in the family;
- Other family members or significant adults;
- The circumstances causing concern;
- Action required if a child is found;
- Details of contact arrangements for the social worker - including out of office hours contact;

- Where possible physical descriptions of the key people and photographs, if available.

The letter should be sent to the Manager of the Safeguarding Unit for distribution to her/his peers nationally, who in turn should circulate within their own Children's Social Care Services and local agencies.

The Manager should inform the Head of Children's Social Care Services and the Council's Press office.

If the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, the [Lead Social Worker](#) should regularly consult the Child Protection Conference Chair and if the child is not found within 20 working days, the [Child Protection Review Conference](#) must be brought forward to consider whether any other action should be taken.

5. When the Child, Family or Adult is Found

When a child is found, there should, if practicable, be a further Strategy Discussion within one working day, attended by previously involved agencies. In all cases, where the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, a Strategy Discussion must be held within one working day to consider:

- Immediate safety issues;
- Whether to instigate a [Section 47 Enquiry](#) and agree if a single or joint agency enquiry is necessary;
- Who will interview the child if a Section 47 Enquiry is to be initiated;
- Who will interview the child if a Section 47 Enquiry is not required;
- Who needs to be informed of the child's return (locally and nationally).

Any child who is found following a period of time as missing should, regardless of whether s/he is suffering or likely to suffer [Significant Harm](#), be offered an interview by a social worker and/or the Police Liaison officer or an independent person.

This interview should provide a safe opportunity for the child to discuss any concerns regarding her/his care including if they chose to run away from an abusive situation.

If the child indicates a wish to be interviewed by an alternative professional, all reasonable efforts must be made to accommodate the child's wishes.

If the child has been found in a different local authority/county and is not likely to return, representatives of the 'receiving' local authority must be involved in the [Strategy Discussion](#) and the transfer of responsibility for and/or services to the child and family must be discussed.

If the child is subject to a [Child Protection Plan](#), consideration must be given by the social worker and Manager in consultation with the Conference Chair, as to the need to bring forward the next [Child Protection Review Conference](#).

The relevant Children's Social Care Services team must give explicit consideration on the need for legal action, and record the reasons for their decision.

6. Children Missing from Other Local Authorities

The Manager of the Safeguarding Unit must ensure that a system exists for keeping and referring to notifications of children and/or families who are missing.

If, after 2 years there is no communication from the authority where the child and/or family went missing, the child and/or family's details will be removed from the list.