



London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham | The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea | Westminster City Council

Inter-agency Missing Children Protocol WCC, LBHF, RBKC

December 2017



1. Introduction and Legislative Framework

This protocol is published by the Tri-borough Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and is based on the following legislative guidance:

- [Children Act 1989](#) Section 49, 50, 51.
- [The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations](#) Vol 1, 4.88, 4.91.
- [The Children Act 2004](#) Section 10 (1) (2).
- [DoE Statutory Guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care](#) January 2014.
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015.](#)
- [London Child Protection Procedures Children Missing from Care, Home and School](#) 2013.
- [ACPO interim guidance on 'Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons'](#), 2013.
- [Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked 2011.](#)
- ['Time to Listen' – A joined up approach to Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Children](#)

1.1. Purpose of this protocol

The purpose of this protocol is to assist practitioners across all agencies to develop a robust response to children and young people who go missing. This will include preventing the child suffering harm and recovering them to a place of safety as soon as possible. **It is expected that all agencies working with children who are missing from home or care will implement this protocol and ensure their staff are aware of it.**

1.2 Scope of the protocol and protocol

This protocol covers children and young people under the age of 18 (up to 25 for children with disabilities/SEN and Care Leavers) including:

- Children who are missing from care (including residential care homes).
- Children who are missing from home.

This protocol does **not** cover children missing from education but is informed by good practice guidance on this specific area. **The guidance in this document should not be read in isolation.** Additional guidance as outlined in Section 1 should be followed alongside this document and is particularly significant when working with missing children who are at risk of:

- Child Sexual Exploitation.
- Domestic Abuse.
- Self Harm.
- Involvement in criminal activity or drugs/County Lines.
- Children with disabilities.

1.3 Tri-borough Principals

Children who are missing from home may be at greater risk of harm as a consequence of their basic need for food, safety and shelter and/or from the people with whom they may come into contact with. Risks can include physical harm, sexual exploitation, drug abuse and involvement in a range of other criminal activities. Additional vulnerability due to their age, level of understanding or the significance and seriousness of the circumstances that led to the missing episode may also be present.

Tri-borough Children's Services have undertaken a number of positive steps to review policy and practice on Missing Children. This includes a short-life working group led by the LSCB to review sovereign protocols and practice and incorporate organisational learning from the 2012 Ofsted Missing Children Thematic Inspection. Three further thematic reviews took place (2015, 2016 & 2017) which explored responses to missing children and what factors contributed to making a difference. These in conjunction with the Ofsted review in 2016 (Time to Listen) have informed our key principals to ensure:

- Effective use of performance data, return interviews/responses and advocacy services to better understand the needs of children who go missing.
- Improved risk assessment procedures to provide a better co-ordinated response to cases of missing children.
- Strengthening of partnership working to ensure consistent and robust information sharing and pooling of resources to provide support to children at risk and their families.
- Alignment of practice and recording data.
- Improving our strategic approach to addressing the needs of missing children.
- Strengthened strategic planning and preventative work to inform practice and reduce the number of missing children.
- The importance of forming a stable relationship with the child to enable change.

The following principals should be adopted by **all agencies** in relation to identifying and locating missing children¹:

- The safety and welfare of the child is paramount.
- Locating and returning the child to a safe environment.
- Child Protection Procedures will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child is missing, has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm.
- Notification to the Police should take place once it becomes clear that a child is missing. It is important that the Police are made aware of all known risk factors.
- Every 'missing' child who returns will be offered a 'Return Home Interview' by someone other than the direct carer.
- Where the child is known to Children's Services or meets the criteria for a referral to Children's Services the Local Authority will ensure that there are a range of service options to address the child's needs when they return.

1.4 Strategic Leads

There are two leads for Missing Children based within the Local Authority and Police respectively who are responsible for specifically identifying vulnerable absent and missing children and to co-ordinate a response in order to reduce long-term risk. Both roles will identify and share best practice in relations to missing children.

Key functions of the Local Authority Missing Children's Co-ordinator:

- Tracking and monitoring documentation of missing episodes and Return Home Interviews/responses for all children who went missing.
- To track missing data across the three boroughs and identify trends and map patterns

¹LSCB Child Protection Procedures 2013

- Promote good social work practice around missing children
- Offering advice and support on all missing cases especially those with high risks.
- To alert senior managers of cases identified as high risk.
- Attending selected network or strategy meetings.
- To be part of a regular multi-agency forum including Police and Health partners where patterns and trends of frequently missing young people are considered. These multiagency relationships to be maintained.
- To work with Workforce Development to develop training for staff in recording systems.
- Provide advice and support to carers, which will assist them to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child including information on appropriate community resources including health, education and financial benefits.
- To ensure that the voices and views of children and young people are sought, heard and represented appropriately and evidenced throughout the work undertaken.
- To keep up to date on policy and procedure around Missing Children through training and seminars.

Key functions of the Police Missing Person's Co-ordinator:

- Identify vulnerable individuals who go missing or absent on more than one occasion, and who may be vulnerable or victims of crime whilst they are missing, via ABS MERLIN reports.
- Collate and disseminate intelligence on identified problematic persons or locations.
- Monitor incidents of missing and absent persons, to identify individuals in need of protective measures and link in with appropriate specialist departments, e.g. Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) teams, gangs, County Lines, etc.
- Identify CSE trends within Police Merlin reports and alert the allocated practitioner and the borough CSE investigator.
- Identify those cases where multi-agency intervention is required to tackle the problem of repeat absences.
- Make any safeguarding referrals as required, to social services and other agencies.
- Assist in the development and delivery of training packages in relations to Missing Children.
- Develop thorough knowledge of legislation, regulations and procedures that relate to the safeguarding of vulnerable children.

2. Definitions

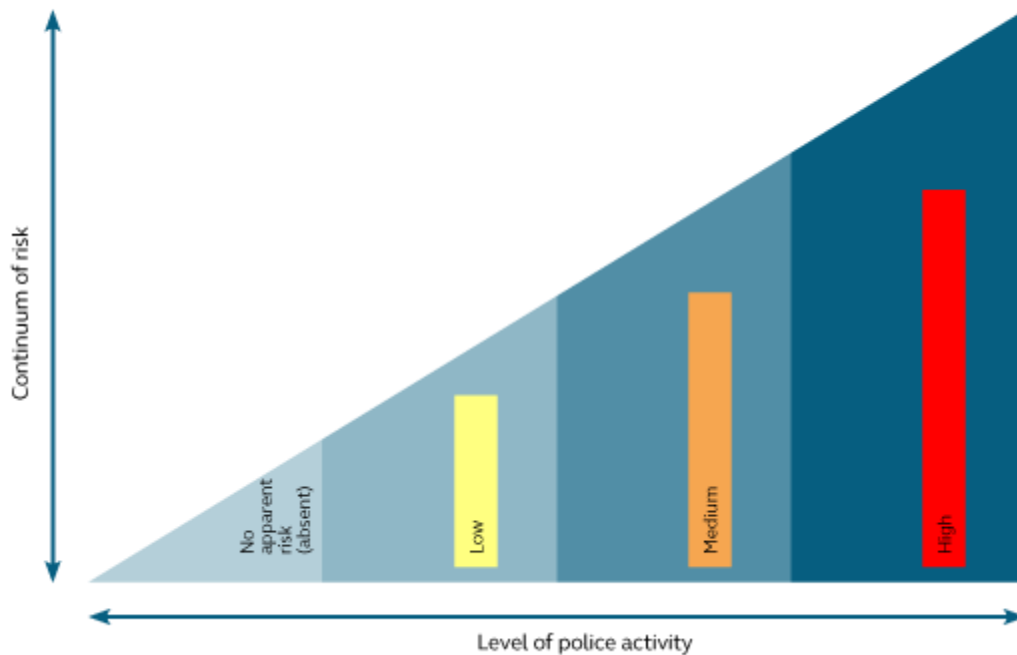
There are a range of definitions used across agencies for the purposes of referrals, risk assessment and recording data. This protocol refers to our definitions which have been developed in agreement with Police and partner agencies.

2.1 Definition of Missing

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

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

Missing definition



3. Children at risk – Planning

3.1 Planning

Research shows that Looked after Children are over-represented in the cohort who go missing². Prior to each placement (and for children at home who are at risk of going missing), Children's Services staff (including Social Workers, Residential Workers and Foster Carers) should assess the risk of the child going missing and complete a **Grab Pack**. (See Appendix 1)

The Grab Pack should include a common set of information:

- Personal details of the child (including description)
- Known addresses and history
- Known associates and addresses frequented
- Up-to-date photo of child
- Any known contact numbers/email
- Behaviour details
- Other useful information e.g. medical, physiological
- Details of previous missing episodes if known and where found.

Good practice would also suggest that this common set of information would be regularly updated for all children who go missing. This should be provided to the following where relevant:

- Parents/Carers
- Police
- Emergency Duty Team
- Social Worker (if another professional has completed this)

The Grab Pack should be uploaded on the child's case records.

3.2 All cases should be regularly reviewed and records updated to include the following information ensuring it is readily available when required:

- The degree and nature of risk and vulnerability if the child goes missing (Risk Assessment – Appendix 2).
- The views of the child and those with parental responsibility on action to be taken if the child goes missing.
- The level of supervision/support that care staff will provide for the child.
 - How parents/carers will be informed if their child goes missing.
- Consideration of any external influences that may result in a child's removal without consent.
- The likelihood of the child being harboured, any previous episodes, locations frequented by the child and trigger Incidents.
- Agreed interventions.
- Placement stability – their feelings about the separation from their families, carers or friends or about the placement they are in, or the restrictions placed on them.
- Going missing as a coping strategy when difficulties arise.
- Influences both within and outside the placement.

² LSCB Child Protection Procedures 2013

- A desire to return to their families/carers or spend time with their friends.

4. Responding to a child missing from Home or Care

Notification of missing children can be received from a number of agencies. Where it becomes known a child is missing, both the Police and Social Care should be made aware. A multiagency response is important ensuring information is shared between agencies and the appropriate action is taken to assess and respond to the level of risk within the legislative timeframes.

4.1 Response from Parents/Carers

Children may go missing from home or care for a number of reasons. Parents/carers are expected to undertake a number of actions to try and locate a child who is missing before reporting them to the Police **as long as it is safe to do so**:

- Fully search the accommodation and surrounding area/vehicles.
- Search the home for any important leads e.g. mobile phones, diaries, letters, notes explaining absence, email and website activity etc), which may inform the investigation and/or assist in protecting or recovering the child.
- Spoken with other children in the family or who live in the home to obtain relevant information about the missing child.
- Made all appropriate enquiries regards the whereabouts of the child. This will involve trying to contact the child themselves, friends, family, associates, appropriate locations, local hospitals and the local police custody office.

For children missing from home, it is expected that the parent/carer will inform the Police without delay. When referring to the Police any relevant information that might help to find or support the child should be shared, including:

- Description of the child including their clothing.
- Details of where the child was last seen and with whom.
- Recent photograph.
- Relevant addresses, known associates and addresses frequented.
- Previous history of absenteeism and circumstances of where found.
- Circumstances under which the child is absent.
- Any factors that increase the risk to the child.

For Looked After Children it is expected that Children's Services are contacted in the first instance where risks will be considered and advice provided. Unless Children's Services are aware where the child is, the Police will need to be informed.

4.2 Response from the Police

The police definition of 'missing' is based on a continuous monitoring and risk assessment. [See ACPO guidance](#) for further information on how these definitions are applied to missing children.

Going missing should be treated as an indicator that the individual may be at risk of harm. The safeguarding of vulnerable people is paramount to Police and a missing person report should be recognised as an opportunity to identify and address risks. The reasons for a person deciding to go missing may be complex and linked to a variety of social or family issues.

Three key factors should be considered in a Police missing person investigation:

- protecting those at risk of harm
- minimising distress and ensuring high quality of service to the families and carers of missing persons
- prosecuting those who perpetrate harm or pose a risk of harm when this is appropriate and supported by evidence.

The Risk Assessment Table (Police)

The following table should be used as a guide to an appropriate level of police response based on initial and on-going risk assessment in each case. Risk assessment should be guided by the College of Policing principles, the [National Decision Model](#) and Police [Code of Ethics](#).

No apparent risk (absent)	
There is no apparent risk of harm to either the subject or the public.	Actions to locate the subject and/or gather further information should be agreed with the informant and a latest review time set to reassess the risk.
Low risk	
The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but minimal.	Proportionate enquiries should be carried out to ensure that the individual has not come to harm.
Medium risk	
The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.	This category requires an active and measured response by the police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting. Generally all children under age 18, who go missing, will be tasked as medium risk.
High risk	
<p>The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child is in danger through their own vulnerability; or</p> <p>The child may have been the victim of a serious crime; or</p>	This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of police resources – action may be delayed in exceptional circumstances, such as searching water or forested areas during hours of darkness. A member of the senior management team must be involved in the examination of initial lines of enquiry and approval of appropriate staffing levels. Such cases should lead to the appointment of

The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.

an investigating officer (IO) and possibly an SIO, and a police search adviser (PoISA).

There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place where appropriate. The MPB should be notified of the case without undue delay.

Children's services must also be notified immediately if the person is under 18.

Risk of serious harm has been defined as (Home Office 2002 and OASys 2006):

When receiving a missing person report in relation to child, the Police will tailor their response to the circumstances and the risk assessment. The Association of Chief Police Officer Missing Persons Guidance 2013 states that missing incidents relating to any person under 18 years should NOT be classified as low risk.

4.3 Response from Multi-Agency Assessment Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

- Police complete research on all new missing children episodes once they have returned.
- If appropriate, a full MASH safeguarding risk assessment will be completed on new missing referrals.
- For all open cases, Police will send the Missing Person Merlin to the Missing Children's Coordinator and to the relevant borough
- Where completed, the MASH information product should be used to inform risk analysis during a missing episode and on return home.
- The Missing Children's Coordinator will lead on identifying possible links between children, locations and child sexual exploitation. This information is then shared with the relevant parties.

4.4. Response from the Local Authority

The local authority should provide sufficient information to the Police to enable all risk factors be considered. The **Grab Pack** should be completed and updated to for all LAC children to include all vulnerabilities. A **Grab Pack** should be completed for children at home who go missing frequently. A **Risk Assessment** should be completed for each missing episode. Consideration should be given to the timeframes outlined for young people in both the missing categories and the subsequent required responses (further considered below). Multiagency input from other practitioners/agencies currently involved in supporting the child such as the Social Worker, CAMHS, Education Welfare or the school is essential.

There is a requirement for each Local Authority to record all missing episodes.

If the child's whereabouts are known or suspected, parent/carers/residential staff in conjunction with the Social Worker should decide whether to allow the child to temporarily remain in that location, or to arrange for their return. These children should NOT be classified as missing nor

reported to the Police. The responsibility for returning these children remains with Children Services, but the Police can assist with this return if there is reason to believe there will be criminal or public order issues.

The facility to refer missing episodes on new cases to MASH for additional safeguarding checks will be available in each borough.

The Missing Child record should be completed immediately on every occasion a child is 'missing'. This is to aid and inform information sharing, analysis and recording.

4.4.1 Strategy Discussions/Meetings

Whilst the majority of children who go missing return within reasonable timescales and do not go missing regularly, there are a minority of children for whom their episodes of going missing cause great concern for those practitioners working with them. This may be because they have gone missing for an extended period, they have gone missing on a number of occasions or there are particular risks associated with their periods missing from home (e.g. risk of sexual exploitation; criminal activities; substance use; self-harm, etc.).

For all missing children, a strategy discussion should be held within 3 days and a strategy meeting should be arranged within 5 days if the child is still missing. Dependant on the level of assessed risk, it may be necessary to convene an immediate strategy meeting following the notification of a missing child.

The following actions should also be completed:

- Where already subject to a Child protection Plan, the Social Worker should inform the Local Authority Head of Safeguarding or equivalent, the Independent Reviewing Officer/Child Protection Advisor and the local Public Health Designated Nurse.
- Representatives from the relevant agencies should attend the strategy meeting as well as other practitioners involved with the child.
- If looked after, and where deemed appropriate, the child's parents/carers should be informed of the missing episode.
- The Director of Children's Services should also receive notification of all children who are missing for more than 72 hours.

Where there are cases of repeated missing episodes, consideration must be given to the reasons for this and what action is appropriate to ensure the child is safeguarded in a model of early intervention and prevention. Good practice would suggest that multi-agency Strategy Meetings are conducted until there is confidence that the issue has been resolved. These meetings should be at a minimum of six weekly or more frequently depending on the level of presenting risk.

Strategy discussions should also consider:

- The need to initiate a missing child health alert which will notify all local health providers of the missing child and any particular vulnerabilities. This will be particularly important if the child/young person has identified health needs such as a mental health condition, substance misuse or underlying health conditions. The Named Professionals within all NHS provider organisations can initiate these alerts.
- The need to initiate a national Local Authority alert.

- Agreements on communication between agencies and with the child/ parents / carers; action required and agreed to locate the child; updates to the Risk Assessment; and agreements in relation to a Media Advertisement Strategy.
- Where a LAC has been missing for 72 hours or more on 3 or more occasions, the Child's Placement Action Plan should be updated to include information on how practitioners should support the child/young person and ensure they are safeguarded. This will be convened by Children's Services, chaired by the child's Independent Reviewing Officer or Child Protection Coordinator where possible (and by a Team Manager or equivalent), with all relevant agencies invited. The child's parents/carer should be informed of all action (if deemed appropriate) and be regularly updated, as well as the Director of Children's Services, the Lead Member and the appropriate divisional Chief Inspector. If the child has been missing for over **28 days** the borough Commander or their representative should meet with senior managers from relevant agencies to review the plan to locate the child.

4.5 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

There are many additional factors to consider when UASC children are reported missing and further practice guidance should be sought to ensure there is a coordinated approach to full information sharing. Close co-operation with UK Immigration and the Police will be important. The assessment of need to inform the care plan may be critical in these circumstances and an assessment should seek to establish:

- Relevant details about the child's background before they came to the UK.
- A picture of the young person if consented to.
- An understanding of the reasons for why the child came to the UK.
- An analysis of the child's vulnerability to remaining under the influence of traffickers.
- A risk assessment as to the likelihood of the UASC going missing/being trafficked. If trafficking is a risk, you must refer to the [National Referral Mechanism](#).
- Consider putting the young person in a safe place.
- The appropriateness of information being divulged as to the whereabouts of the young person.

When UASC's are reported missing, they will retain their status of a 'Looked After Child' unless one or more of the below criteria are met.

- They return to a birth parent/someone with parental responsibility.
- They are located in another country.
- The case is taken over by another local authority.
- They are age assessed as being over 18yrs.

The Home Office should be informed the child/young person's missing status and will hold a current photograph and finger print record if entered the UK legally.

When concerns of significant harm are identified i.e. in cases of possible trafficking or sexual exploitation, a strategy meeting should be held which should consider what preventative measures can be put in place to safeguard the child/ young person. Children Looked After reviews should be held as required by statutory guidance until the young person is deemed to be no longer 'Looked After'.

No UASC under 16yrs who go missing should have their 'Looked After' status removed.

For young people aged 16 and 17yrs who go missing a LAC Review chaired by their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) should be held to determine whether they remain 'Looked After' or whether it is appropriate to have their legal status changed to 'Relevant/Former Relevant'.

- If a young person has not been found by their 18th birthday then a multi-agency missing children meeting should be held to determine whether the case should be closed to the Local Authority. The case would remain open to Police.
- The missing children meeting should incorporate information from the Police, Home Office and other agencies where appropriate. The case should only be closed if there are no ongoing concerns about the vulnerability of the young person being expressed.
- Any decision to close the case should be on the proviso that it is reopened if the young person is located and found to be in need of services as an eligible, relevant or former relevant child. The Director of Children's Services should be informed.

Additional practice guidance on safeguarding UASC can be found in [Safeguarding Children who may have been trafficked 2011](#).

4.6 Children placed outside the Local Authority

Where a child who is missing from one Local Authority area and presents themselves in another Local Authority area it is important for the two authorities to negotiate to ensure the safe return of the child. If any child protection concerns have arisen whilst the child was missing, the responsibility for making Section 47 enquiries is with the **Local Authority where the alleged abuse took place**, but this should be done in liaison with the placing Local Authority.

If a child from within our area is placed in another Local Authority, the Missing from Care Protocol for the relevant authority should be followed with agreement and regular communication with the Social Worker responsible for the child. It is essential that where there is a risk of the young person going missing, the host authority and Police are made aware and provided with the Grab Pack.

If a child from another Local Authority is placed within our area, this practice guidance and protocol should be implemented in agreement with the child's Social Worker and with regular communication with them.

The placing authority and the placement provider should therefore liaise regularly and take all reasonable and practical steps to establish the whereabouts of the child. This will include contacting any persons whom he/she is likely to be associating with and arranging for those places to be checked. If the location of the child is known or suspected, the placing authority and placement provider must liaise to agree responsibility for locating and returning the child. However, if there are thought to be specific issues of safety or public order difficulties in returning the child, then action should be agreed between the Police and Children's Services.

4.7 Care Leavers 18-25 y.o.

The local authority has a duty to provide support, guidance and an allocated practitioner to 'former relevant' care leavers aged between 18-25 years. This includes supporting and offering advice in respect of the holistic needs of those leaving care and maintaining regular direct contact. There are care leavers that do not always maintain regular contact with the service and the local authority has a duty to reach out and encourage an ongoing relationship. There are care leavers that go missing as opposed to not maintaining contact. Examples include former-UASC care leavers that have received a negative asylum claim or are at risk of doing so and go missing to avoid deportation, those that are wanted by the police for investigation into criminal matters or those that are fleeing domestic abuse or exploitation. Allocated practitioners and their managers should discern whether a care leaver is missing as opposed to not maintaining contact through assessing the circumstances including but not limited to whether a care leaver has gone missing from their placement, whether they have not attended college/university, whether this is out of character and whether their family or other agencies have had recent contact with them.

Where it is assessed that a care leaver is missing their practitioner should complete a risk assessment that considers their individual needs and vulnerabilities such as mental health, domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, substance use and learning needs. The assessment should include any contact with relatives and other agencies and relevant information from this communication. Contact with family to discuss the individual that is missing should balance the right to privacy as an adult against assessed risks and vulnerabilities. Assessed risk to self or others should be considered when taking the decision to override the right to confidentiality.

Care leavers assessed to be missing rather than not in contact with the service should be reported as a missing adult to the Police Missing Persons Unit local to their address, providing a photograph if available. This report should include reporting specific vulnerabilities, when a professional or family member last saw them and why they are assessed to be missing.

The Home Office should be informed when former-UASC go missing. This will assist if missing former-UASC are located in other Home Office regions or by border agencies.

It is important that the practice in relation to missing care leavers follows the same good practice standards that are applied to missing children. This includes practitioners doing all they can to try to locate the individual, reaching out to them and emphasising their concern for them. This will include maintaining regular contact with family members who may hear from them and be concerned for their wellbeing and with key professionals.

Care leavers that are assessed to be missing should be reported to the team manager within 3 working days and to the relevant Head of Service within 5 working days. The team manager will continue to track and review those missing on a weekly basis and keep the relevant Head of Service updated.

When care leavers cease to be missing it will be important for practitioners to meet with them to understand their current needs and vulnerabilities and what additional support or specialist services may be helpful. This will include determining placements and whether the care leaver can return to their previous placement. Practitioners will inform their team manager and in turn the Head of Service when a care leaver ceases to be missing.

Practitioners will maintain up to date records on Mosaic/KCICS when care leavers are missing. Case records will also evidence the efforts that practitioners have made to reach out and locate the individual, communication with other parties and analysis of risk.

5. Planning for the Child's Return

5.1 Response from the Police

Once a child has returned home, the Police will carry out a **Safe and Well Check/De-brief** as soon as possible ([See ACPO Guidance for further details](#)). The aim of this is to check for any indications that the young person has suffered harm; establish the reasons for their disappearance; find out where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them. Even where a young person is going missing frequently, there is a requirement to undertake the Safe and Well Check and every effort should be made to visit those young people missing from home on every occasion. If during the Safe and Well Check the police identify that there are immediate safeguarding concerns, then a referral should be made to Children's Services. In addition, if a private fostering arrangement is in place, this will also need to be reported to Children's Services.

When the Police locate a child who is reported as **missing from home** they will normally return the child to the parent/carer. When the Police locate a child who is reported **missing from care** they will normally return the child to the placement and undertake a Safe and Well Check. However, there may be occasions when it is appropriate or necessary for agencies and the family to discuss who will be responsible for returning the child. If there are specific and identified issues of safety or public order associated with returning that child then a coordinated approach to recover the child should be agreed with the Police. In some instances it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home or placement and in such cases Police will liaise with Children's Services or the relevant Emergency Duty Team (out of hours) for an evaluation of their safety.

Where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child could suffer significant harm, particularly if returned home, the Police can take that child into **Police Protection** and remove them to suitable accommodation which could include the home from which the child originally went missing (Section 46 of the Children Act 1989). However, the Police are not given the power to use force to take a child into Police Protection but 'reasonable force' may be used to prevent a child suffering significant harm. For full information on safeguarding concerns, refer to the [London Children Protection Procedures](#).

For young people aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless the Local Authority should complete a single assessment. Where the assessment indicates they are a child in need and require accommodation under Section 20 of Children Act 1989, they will become looked after.

When a Looked After Child goes missing frequently from a care setting, it may not be practicable for the Police to see them and conduct a Safe and Well Check every time they return. In these cases, a reasonable decision should be taken with regard to the frequency of Safe and Well Checks by the Police, and when such checks can be undertaken by the person responsible for the young person's welfare within the care setting. However, caution should be taken if there is any suggestion that the young person is running away from something occurring within their care setting.

5.2 Response from the Local Authority

For Looked After Children, Children Services will be responsible for recovering the child and returning them to their home or placement, unless the child is located by Police. In some

instances, it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home or placement and in such cases the Police will contact Children Social Care or the Emergency Duty Team (out of hours) for an evaluation of their safety.

When another professional/associate has located the child, Children's Services will be responsible for making arrangements for their return to the Children's Home/Foster placement. Where possible, residential staff/foster carers will transport the child themselves, however where this is not practical, arrangements will be agreed between the residential staff/foster carer and the social worker/EDT. There may be occasions where it is appropriate for the Police to assist. This will be subject to discussion and agreement on a case by case basis.

5.2.1 Independent 'Return Home Interviews'

On return the child should be offered a 'Return Home Interview' carried out by the allocated social worker or a representative deemed most suitable and agreed to by the child. For Looked After Children, the person undertaking the 'Return Home Interview' should be independent of the line management of the residential establishment or the foster home. This should allow the child to talk openly about why they went missing, where they were and any risks they experienced. This information should be gathered with a non-judgemental supportive approach and should be used to inform the current assessment/intervention.

The 'Return Home Interview' should be carried out within **72 hours** of the child's return; If not possible, it should be completed at the earliest opportunity. Where possible, the child should be seen separately as well as with their parent/carer and consent should be sought to share information with other services where appropriate. All efforts should be made to carry out the 'Return Home Interview', however if this has not been possible due to the lack of response or engagement by the child/family, then this should be recorded appropriately. Additional information should be sought from the child's parents/carer, to help prevent further missing episodes. If other services, such as Youth Offending Team/Service, CAMHS, school are involved they should be informed of the relevant information from the missing incident and from the 'Return Home Interview'. The 'return Home Interview' can also be completed by someone from the professional network if the child wishes. The findings from the interview should be shared with Police to aid intelligence gathering.

The 'Return Home Interview' should make an assessment about the level of intervention required to safeguard the child, and consider the following:

- Who the child was with?
- Where did they go?
- Factors that led them to go missing?
- Experience while they were away; have they been victim of a crime?
- Do they need to seek medical support?
- Be curious and consider substance misuse, sexual activity, gang links, child sexual exploitation, trafficking etc.
- The child's presentation when they returned?
- Did they return with any new belongings/gifts (CSE/drug link)?
- Discuss the child's viewpoint of risk.
- Planning forward to prevent further missing episodes.
- Educating them around risk factors and initiate safety planning work with them.
- Ensure the child and family/carer are aware of support available to them.
- Gain information from family/carers and relevant agencies.

5.2.2 Return Home Response for Frequently Missing Children (3 incidents or more in a rolling month)

For children who go regularly missing, the following process should be followed:

Step 1: The management review

It is the expectation that where children are going missing, this is reviewed in supervision regularly demonstrating strong management oversight. However, where a child has reached the status of frequently missing i.e. 3 times in one month, a further management review of the case should take place and be recorded within case notes. This should consider associated risks such as CSE (consult required?), gangs, drugs, risk to siblings etc. Through conversations with the Social Worker, an agreed response tailored to the child's needs should be agreed and shared with the network. This should include what to do whilst the child remains missing but for this section the focus is once they return home. The missing response should focus on the development of a meaningful relationship with the child and their parent/carer to enable change (explored further in step 3).

Step 2: A Strategy meeting and Missing Children's Coordinator consulted

The timeframes remain as per current process: If a child remains missing a strategy discussion should be held within 3 days (Head of Service alerted) and a strategy meeting held within 5 days. A strategy meeting should also be held if a pattern is forming i.e. the child has gone missing three times. The Missing Children's Coordinator should also be consulted with and will be able to attend strategy meetings on high risk cases. The clinicians are also able to provide consults to support practitioners.

Step 3: The Return Home Response is triggered

The response outlined in step 1 is triggered. Strengthening the relationship with the child and their family is central to this. This response should not focus on just one meaningful contact with the child; instead it is a process focused on building rapport and trust with the child and their key relationships. Listening to what is going on for them is paramount in conjunction with safety planning to help develop an understanding of and manage any risk. The child should still be asked if they would like to speak to an independent person during this time. The interventions should be recorded in case notes/case summaries.

Step 4: Management Review

After 4-6 weeks, the Manager and Social Worker should review the agreed interventions – is any impact evident? Should the plan continue or be altered? This should be recorded in case notes.

Please note, the missing record still needs to be completed to document the date and time the child went missing and returned (See Appendix 3 for guidance around Return Home Interviews).

8. Supporting Agencies

Non-emergency Police 101

Missing People

Missing People is a registered charity and was formerly known as the National Missing Persons Helpline. They provide support and advice for families via a national 24 hour free phone Helpline (116 000) for people who are missing someone.

Email: 116000@missingpeople.org.uk

Missing Person's Bureau

This bureau sits within the National Crime Agency and is a national and international point of contact for all missing persons. The bureau acts as a hub information exchange and hosts a national database of missing and unidentified records.

missingpersons bureau@nca.pnn.police.uk

Missing Kids

<http://www.missingkids.co.uk/>

Missing Kids UK is a website run by the Missing Children Team, part of CEOP within the National Crime Agency. They are a specialist unit providing advice and support to UK law enforcement and other partners in relation to missing children issues. They work closely with the Missing Persons Bureau and promote the use of the [Child Rescue Alert](#) system to quickly and safely recover high risk missing children.

Stop the Traffik

A global charity which aims to build resilient communities and prevent human trafficking.

9. Tri-borough Key Contacts

Lead Persons for Missing Children

Nasheen Singh

Operational Director of Family Services Westminster

Tel: 02076412253 Email: nsingh@westminster.gov.uk

Local Authority Missing Person's Co-ordinator

Rebecca McIntyre

Tel: 02076415706 Email: rmcintyre@westminster.gov.uk

Police Missing Person's Co-ordinator

DC Mark Campbell

Email: Mark.Campbell2@met.pnn.police.uk

Multi-Agency Assessment Safeguarding Hub Manager

Catherine Hoy

Tel: 02076415428 Email: choy@westminster.gov.uk

Emergency Duty Team

Jed McAndrew

Tel: 0207 361 2473 Email: Jed.McAndrew@rbkc.gov.uk

Tri-borough Designated LAC Nurses:

Kensington & Chelsea:

Samantha Bouamar

Tel: 020 7598 4943 Email Samantha.Bouamar@rbkc.gov.uk

Lin Graham-Ray

Tel: 020 8753 5265 Email: Lin.Graham-Ray@lbhf.gov.uk

Westminster:

Christine Nicholls

Tel: 0207 641 7639 / 0207 266 8781 Email: mnichol2@westminster.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Grab Pack for Looked After Child/Young Person who may go Missing

This information should be verified **at the beginning of any new placement** and updated with as much information as possible. **Do not leave any Section Blank** and ensure this information is available when reporting an absent or missing child to the Police along with any further information arising from risk assessment.

<p>Recent Photograph to be provided to carer</p> <p>These should be updated as and when necessary, and at least annually.</p>	<p>(Attach Here)</p>
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Child's full name	
Nickname/Street name:	
Current Home Address:	
Parents Home addresses:	
D.O.B	
Gender	
Ethnicity	
Legal Status:	
Languages spoken	
Length at current placement (if in care):	
Provide details of the child's friends, include their home addresses and contact details where possible:	
Child/Young Person mobile number or other modes of contact (i.e. email, Facebook)	
Oyster card number and Adult sponsor (U16):	
Physical appearance (eye colour, hair, glasses, facial hair, piercing, clothing)	
Distinguishing marks	
Height & build	

Medical conditions & medication required	
Does the child smoke, consume alcohol or illegal/recreational drugs?:	
Any Physical or Learning Disabilities?	
Any Mental Health Issues?	
Statement of Special Educational Needs?	
School/College/Employment	
Details of any court order	
Name and address of GP	
Name and address of Dentist	
Any previous history of absconding and where they were found	
Any circumstances which might increase the risk to the child	
When was the child last seen, in what circumstances and by whom?	
What was the last method of contact with the child? I.e. Facebook, WhatsApp, BBM, text	
Name, team and phone number of social worker	

Completed by:

Date complete

Appendix 2: MISSING CHILDREN RISK ASSESSMENT RECORD

Risk assessment: for children and young people who run away from home / care.

Name of child or young person:	
Mosaic/KCICS ID:	Date of Birth:
Age:	Legal Status:
Address from which missing:	
Risk indicators	Risk assessment information
Is the child subject to a S47 enquiry or Child Protection Plan?	
Is the child a pregnant teenager or teenage parent?	
Is the child on medication/suffering from medical condition?	
Does the child need essential medication or treatment not readily available to them e.g. asthma inhaler, insulin, epipen?	
What are the usual circumstances of the child/young person going missing i.e. is the young person running to someone or from a situation?	
When does the young person usually leave the home?	
Where do they usually go? Are with family or friends? or with people who are unknown or undesirable?	
Is the child known to associate with adults or children who present a risk of harm e.g. sexual offenders, persons who pose a risk to children?	
What is the level of maturity has the young person shown in being able to make decisions about themselves or others?	
What are the agreed coming-in times, if any?	
Does the child have access to any money and how if necessary will they obtain this?	
Are there any known issues/events happening in the child's/young person's family or close friends? Family/relationship problems or recent history of family conflict/abuse	
What has been the past method of return i.e. via family or on their own	

Risk indicators	Risk assessment information
Are there any mental health concerns?	
What is the risk of suicide/self- harm?	
What are the indicators of this?	
Is there any likely use of drugs/alcohol/solvents? If so, type and amount?	
Is there past involvement of offending and in what form?	
Is the child/young person a risk to the community and in what way?	
Is there risk of sexual exploitation? Has the child been presented at MASE?	
Has any previous harm suffered while absent?	
Are there any concerns about new friends/boyfriends/associates?	
Is there any concern of abduction or being prevented from returning?	
Is there a risk of forced marriage?	
Is the child experiencing bullying/racial and/or homophobic abuse?	
Are there any signs or indicators that child is experiencing difficulties or abuse in the placement?	
Does the child have physical or learning disability/difficulties?	
Any further information and knowledge	

This risk assessment grid above should be used as a guide and involve discussion and pooling of information to agree an informed risk assessment. In cases of little knowledge or where there is disagreement, the child or young person should be considered as being at higher risk.

Young Person Date.....

Social Worker.....Date.....

Home Manager/Family Placement Worker.....Date.....

Foster Carer/Parent.....Date.....

Appendix 3: Return Interview Guidance – areas to consider

Children who go missing may be running from something which places them at risk and may run into, or to, situations which also place them at risk. Professionals must provide the child with the opportunity to talk about these issues in order to safeguard them. Below are some areas for consideration when talking to a child following their return from being missing/absent:

Return Home Conversations

Guidance after a young person returns from a period of missing

1. Aims

- To build a relationship with the young person
- To provide an opportunity for them to talk
- For us to show care and concern for the young person's well being
- To prevent further harm
- Hold in mind that this will not be a one off discussion and the child can talk to you about their experience anytime.
- It is also an opportunity to seek other information from important carers, family members and the network around the child.

2. Planning

- Take time to prepare and plan for your meeting
- If not you, who is the best person to talk to the young person?
- Think about where to meet the young person? At home? At school? In a café? With whom? When's a good time?
- Think about what questions to ask? What would you want to be asked if you'd gone missing? Considering your language; remaining non-judgemental, neutral and curious.
- Think about a possible activity to aid the conversations e.g. play a computer game; go for a hot drink or a walk? What does the young person like doing and could this be combined with the conversation?

3. Showing Care and Concern

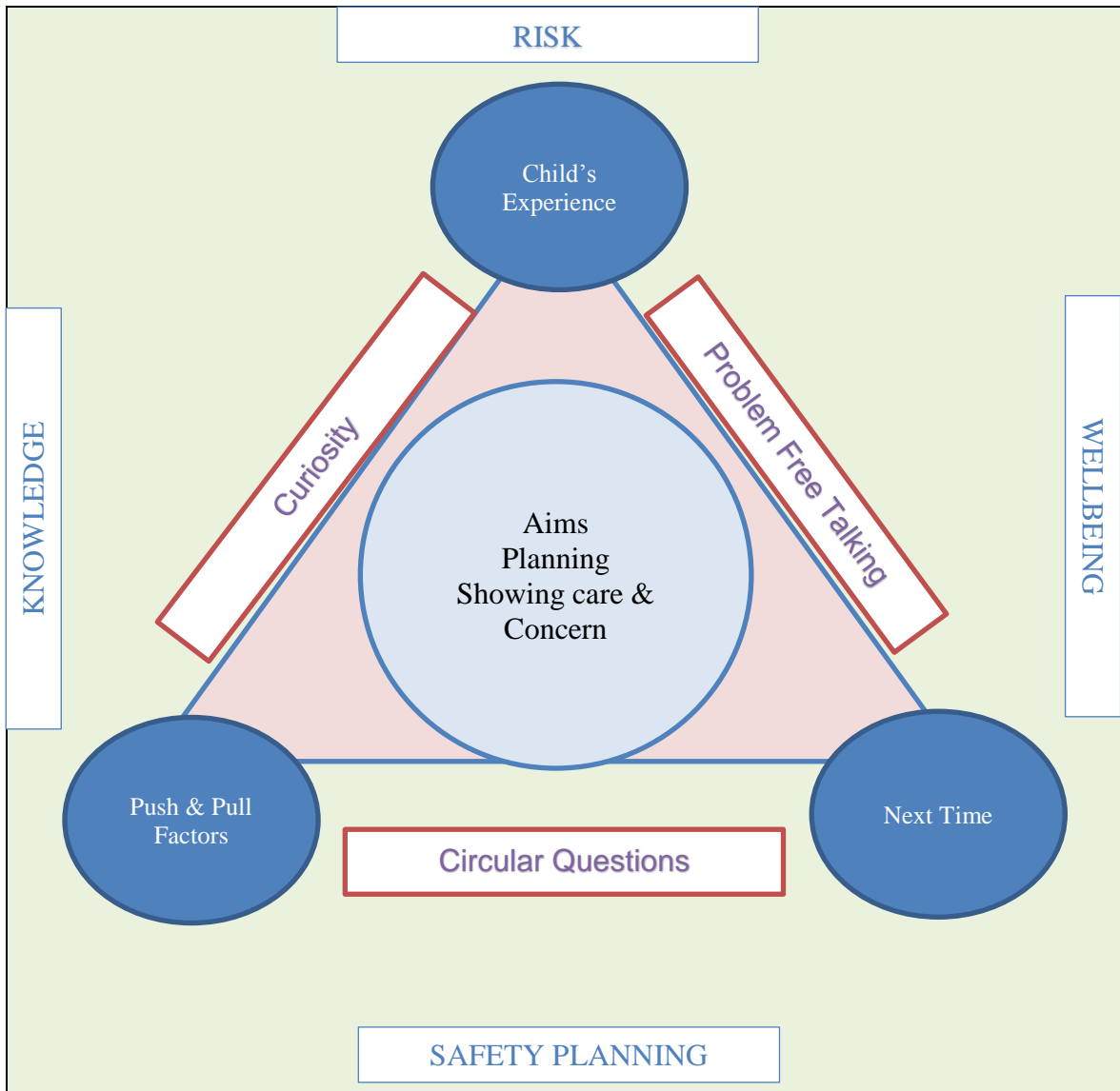
- Take time to show you are glad to see the young person and that they have returned.
- Start if possible with problem free talking - getting to know the young person; finding out how they are and what has it been like since they have been back? What have they enjoyed/not enjoyed? Who missed them most or least and who did they miss most or least?

- Share rationale for wanting to talk to the young person. E.g. Concerns about them and their safety, holding them in mind while they were missing. Checking out if they are ok and what we can do to help reduce further incidences and reduce the risk. Be honest with where information will be shared and with whom.
- Ask permission from the young person to talk about their experiences and if they want to, acknowledge lots of people might be putting pressure on them to talk about this. Explore what they are willing to share (talking about talking) – “what would help us talk or be unhelpful?”
- Try to discover what is their understanding and experience of going missing and what are their pull and push factors to going missing. (possible worksheet)

4. Safety Planning for next time (Possible worksheet)

- It's possible that the young person is unwilling to talk about what happened to them.
- Use your conversations to progress to safety planning and what happens next time.
- Consider asking questions like, what would you say to a friend who was going missing? How could they keep safe? What would you want your best friend to know?
- Provide contact numbers of organisations (local and national) that can help including emergency services.
- Explore different options and places of safety. What would they do differently next time if anything?

The diagram below has been designed as a prompt and to show the interplay between what is helpful to keep in mind and be thinking about during the return home conversations.



Donna Wright and Claire Lyons 2017

The interviewer should provide the child and carer with information about how they can access further or on-going support services. Provide contact details for Missing Persons Charity (116000 / 116000@missingpeople.org.uk / missingpeople.org.uk).

Return Home Conversations – Question Ideas

These are some questions we've thought about that we might use when we speak to young people who have been missing. They are just some ideas and we'd usually just pick a few, always concentrating on the responses we get and building on what we know about the young person and our connection with them.

Problem Free Talking – think about connecting with the young person and use what you already know about the young person to start off the conversation.

- How have things been since you got back? What have you noticed?
- Did you have any ideas about us meeting today? What did you imagine we might talk about?
- If I were to be helpful to you right now, what would I be doing?
- Have you been seeing anyone else since you got back? How's that been?
- How would I know that our conversation was going well or not going well? What would I notice?
- What questions should I be asking you if we were going to talk about what happened? Do you want me to talk about it with you or tell you what I know first?

Opening spaces – think about asking questions that help to open up conversation and create connections.

- When you went missing, we were really worried about your safety – does that make sense to you?
- What do you think we were most worried about?
- Who missed you the most do you think? Did this surprise you?
- What was it like for you while you were away? What ideas do you have about what was going on for your carers/family/parents?
- What do you think I most need to know about? Is there a way in which its okay for you to tell me stuff?
- Who was on your mind when you were away? Did you think going away was helpful?
- Were you thinking about leaving again what might you say to yourself?
- What could your carer/parents do differently when you want to leave?
- Do you know of other people who go missing? Do you think they see things like you do?
- What are the bad points about running away? Who can you talk to about that?

Future Orientated Questions – think about asking questions that are linked to the future moving away from the present difficulties future together.

- Who could you speak to in future before leaving?
- If you do go, what are you going to do to keep yourself safe?
- What ideas do you have about who can help you stay? What do they need to be doing?
- Where are the safe places that you go and hang out? Where are the unsafe places?
- If you had a friend who was in a similar situation to you or going missing what would you want them to know about and do? What would you share with them?

Donna Wright, Caroline Pipe, August 2017.

Appendix 4: Tri-borough Quick Guide for Missing Children Procedures

This quick reference guide is to support you in following the Statutory Missing Children Protocol. **Rebecca McIntyre is the Missing Children's Coordinator** and is available for advice and guidance with these procedures rmcintyre@westminster.gov.uk tel: 0207 641 5706.

What to do:

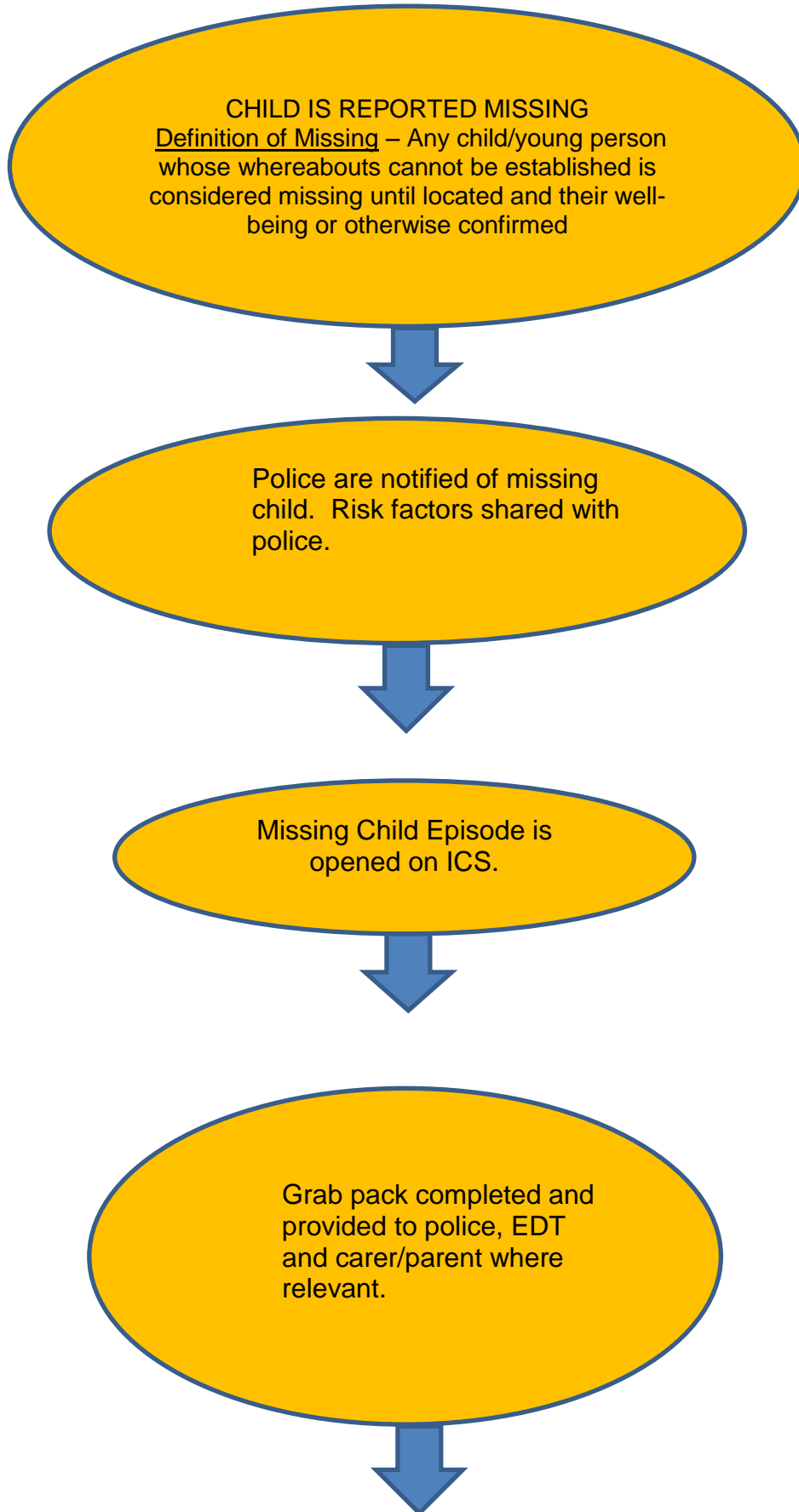
- Firstly, check that the child's parent or carer have reported the child as missing to the police. The police will then generate a missing merlin.
- Once a merlin is received from the police. You must ensure that a **Missing Record is created on Fwi/KCICS**. This should be completed each time a child goes missing.
- A **Grab Pack** should be completed for all LAC children and children that go missing from home frequently. The Grab Pack includes personal details, family and associates details, recent photograph and known risk factors and relevant information. This should be updated regularly. It should be shared with Police and Carers as well as EDT.
- A **Risk Assessment** should be completed and updated each time a child is missing. This too should be shared with police.
- A **Strategy Discussion with Police should be held within 3 days** of the children going missing and this should be recorded on Fwi/KCICS. You need to ensure that you agree an immediate strategy for locating the child and an action plan with Police. Discussion should include arrangements for attempts to be made to contact the child on a daily basis.
- If child remains Missing a **Multi-Agency Strategy Meeting should be held within 5 days**. This should include the network involved with the child as well as the Police missing persons unit investigating, and a Health Lead. This is an opportunity to share information, plan for locating the child, and making a decision on all actions required.
- If the child is a regular missing young person consideration should be made to hold a Strategy Meeting with police and all agencies involved with the child to plan and prevent on-going missing episodes.

- For children who continue to be missing, review strategy meetings should be regularly held to ensure the network continues to share relevant information.
- The Assistant Director should be notified within 3 days of the child going missing.

What to do when the child returns:

- The police will complete a debrief as soon as possible after the child has returned.
Please note this is NOT a Return Home Interview.
- **A Return Home Interview should be completed within 72 hours of the child's return and recorded on Fwi/KCICS within the missing episode/record.**
 - The return home interview can be conducted by any independent professional who is known to the child and the child should be asked whom they would like to conduct the interview
 - If the child chooses a professional other than the Social Worker to speak to, you should assist that professional with this process.
 - If the Return Home Interview is not completed a rationale for this should be recorded on Fwi/KCICS. You could still obtain information from parents/carers/agencies as they may have other useful information and intelligence relating to the missing episode.

MISSING CHILDREN QUICK GUIDE



Within 3 days of missing, Social Worker has a strategy discussion with police. Head of Service is notified.



Within 5 days of missing, social worker holds a strategy meeting (to include police, MCC, health and professionals involved with family/young person). Director of Children's Services notified.



Missing 7 days or more, regular follow-up strategy meetings are held to continue to try and recover child.

Child Returns/is recovered



Return Home Interview is completed within 72 hours.
If child does not engage with initial return home interview, on-going interviews/sessions are held to engage child in discussion around safety and push/pull factors. Consideration for reviewing child's plan.



Provide Feedback to police following Return Home Interview.



LISTEN TO VOICE OF CHILD

Children who repeatedly run away:

- **AFTER 2 OR MORE MISSING EPISODES, DISCUSSIONS WITH CHILD AND FAMILY TO OFFER FURTHER SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE**
- **ACTIONS REVIEWED AND ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES CONSIDERED**
- **LINK IN WITH LOCAL ORGANISATIONS WHO CAN PROVIDE FAMILIES AND CHILDREN WITH LONGER-TERM HELP**
- **FOR LAC CHILDREN, REVIEW OF CARE PLAN WITH NEW STRATEGIES TO HELP MINIMISE FUTURE MISSING EPISODES**
- **LISTEN TO VOICE OF CHILD**

**FOR ADVICE AND SUPPORT PLEASE CONTACT THE MISSING CHILDREN'S COORDINATOR, REBECCA MCINTYRE AT 0207 641 5706
RMCINTYRE@WESTMINSTER.GOV.UK**