



# Children who run away or go missing from home or care

## Definitions

Young runaway: a child who has run away from their home or 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.

Children may run away from a problem, such as abuse or neglect at home, or to somewhere they want to be.

There are no exact figures for the number of children who go missing or run away, but estimates suggest that the figure is in the region of 100,000 per year.

Although looked after children are particularly vulnerable when they go missing, the majority of children who go missing are not looked after and go missing from their family home. They can face the same risks as a child missing from local authority care and therefore, the same measures are applied for protecting both.



# What happens if...

The following chart shows the main steps that need to be taken when a child goes missing from local authority care, and where responsibility lies for those steps.

**Children's home or foster carer**

**Responsible authority**

**Host authority**

**Local police**

## Planning and placement

Local authorities should agree with local police and other partners a runaway and missing from care and home (RMFCH) protocol. Carers, local authority and police staff should be aware of the protocol as appropriate. All partners should work together to assess risks and develop appropriate strategies to prevent children from going missing and respond when children do go missing. Staff should receive appropriate training.

Children's homes should have explicit procedures in place both to prevent children running away or going missing, and to locate, return and support a child who has run away or is missing from their placement. This procedure must have regard to local protocols of the host authority.

Care planning should include assessment of appropriate placement arrangements to protect the child from the risk of going missing, and strategies for dealing with any known risks of running away.

When a child is placed out of area, the responsible authority must notify the host authority of the placement. Notification processes for missing episodes should be agreed between the responsible and host authorities.

## When a looked after child goes missing

The carer should take agreed actions to locate the child. If they can not be located, they should inform the police, the responsible authority and anyone else identified in the child's care plan (such as their parents).

Useful information to report to the police include:

- the child's name, date of birth, description and a recent photograph
- any details of where and when the child was last seen, who they were with, etc
- details of family, friends and associates
- details of the responsible authority.

The responsible authority should provide relevant information about the missing child to the police to enable all the risk factors to be considered.

The responsible authority should notify the host authority that a child in their area has gone missing.

Police should perform a risk-assessment which will form the basis for their operational response. The case will remain the subject of constant review, particularly in the light of new information and changes in circumstances.

# If You become aware...

If you are worried or become aware that students may (have) run away or go missing from home or care:

- Report it to Designated Safeguarding Lead or alternate (Pastoral Managers)
- Report to the local MASH Team/ Customer First