

NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES THAT GO MISSING (INCLUDING BABIES)

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1. DEFINITION

These procedures apply if a child and his or her family 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 and unborn babies whose whereabouts become unknown in the following circumstances:

- A pregnant woman when the concerns have been noted about the welfare of the unborn child and there are on-going plans for that child following its 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. INDICATIONS

Local agencies and professionals working with children and families where there are outstanding concerns of 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 or is staying at an unknown location that increases risk to the child or children of suffering harm, Abuse or Neglect.

This possibility must also be borne in mind when there are concerns about an unborn child who may be likely to suffer Significant Harm either during the pregnancy or following the birth.

3. PROTECTION AND ACTION TO BE TAKEN

In any of the above circumstances either the FFAP service or for cases that are open the relevant Children's Social Worker holding case responsibility must be notified immediately.

The Children's social care team must then inform the Manager of the Safeguarding and Reviewing Unit immediately and no later than 1 working day if the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan. The Police must also be notified immediately or on the same day.

The Manager of the Safeguarding Unit (Children's Safeguarding and Reviewing Service) responsible for the List of Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan must be informed immediately. If this is not possible information must be shared either on the same working day or within 24 hours if a child who has a Child Protection Plan goes

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missing. This change of circumstances must be confirmed in writing to the team via the team email box and notified to the duty Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

At the same time, the Children's Social Work team must contact all local agencies who know or have professional involvement with 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. This includes as a minimum informing relevant health professionals, education provider (dependent on age of the child) and or other services that are designated a role within the child protection or LAC plan.

All notifications must be confirmed in writing within one working day.

The Children's social care team must ensure that 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 and unborn babies. 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, including Midwifery services where relevant.

The local authority's Designated Lead Education Officer within the educational establishment for tracking pupils children missing from education (CME) is Roz Danks, Head of Education Services and Strategic Lead for Education. The local authority's duties in relation to CME are operationally managed by Access Services. Please see CME section for further information. The Head of Access services should notify colleagues in other areas about a pupil whose name may show up on the roll of a new school. The Children's social worker team must ensure that all those with Parental Responsibility are informed that the child is missing.

NB: Social workers and education professionals should be aware of any individual characteristics of the child, diversity, cultural and/or religious issues, and beliefs or behaviours that may increase the risk of children being removed for purposes of Forced Marriage, Female genital mutilation (FGM) and Child Sexual Exploitation.

If, after following the above steps, and after 1 working day the child has not been traced, there should be a Strategy Discussion initiated by Children's social care chaired by a Children's social work Service Manager. As a minimum the strategy discussion should include police, health and children's social care.

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.

Dependent on circumstances and the level of concern, consideration may need to be given to use of media to help locate the child/ren and his/her/their family.

The Children's social work (CASS) team should give consideration to national notification of authorities and agencies including the Jobcentres Plus and the 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 should seek assistance from the Department for Work and Pensions to establish whether a benefits claim for the family has been or is being made in another area.

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.**

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If the Strategy Discussion agrees that the details of the child or family are to be circulated to other local authorities, the following details should be shared as a minimum:

- The children in the family;
- Other family members or significant adults;
- The circumstances causing concern;
- Action required if a child, family, pregnant woman is found;
- Details of contact arrangements for the Out of Hours Service, the social worker - including a named Service Manager for the out of office hours contact;
- Where possible physical descriptions of the key people and photographs, if available.

The above should be sent to the Manager of the Children's Safeguarding and Reviewing Service for distribution to peers nationally, who in turn should circulate within their own Children's social care and local agencies.

The Manager should inform the Head of Children's social care and the Council's Press office of any information circulated outside of North East Lincolnshire and any media implications.

Where appropriate consideration will also be given to whether or not an OFSTED notification is required.

If the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, the designated/allocated Social Worker should regularly consult the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service and/or Child Protection Conference Chair/LAC IRO 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.

4. ISSUES

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.

All those individuals or agencies that were initially notified of the child going missing should also be notified of his or her return. This should be confirmed in writing.

Any child who is found following a period of time as missing should, regardless of whether s/he is believed to have suffered Significant Harm, have a safe and well check on return and be interviewed by a social worker and/or the Police. (See Children Missing from Home and Care, Safe and Well). 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 and should be conducted by the designated officer/person within procedures. (See Children Missing from Home and Care).

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. Where CSE is suspected, those conducting interviews should be alert to the likelihood that the child could go missing again and that he or she may be unwilling or unable to disclose details until ready to do so.

If the child has been found in a different local authority area 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. Where the child is currently on a child protection plan the procedures for transferring in or out of the authority must be followed.

5. FURTHER INFORMATION (LINKS)

Report From The Joint Enquiry Into Children Missing From Care

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Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away and Go Missing from Home or Care

Missing Children: Who Carers? The police response to missing and absent children (HMIC, March 2016)