

A child is defined as any child up to the age of 18. The police use two categories for children who are not where they are expected to be - missing and absent.

The definition of **Missing** is as follows:

"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 harm to themselves or another".

The definition of **Absent** is as follows:

"A person is not in a place where they are required to be".

The classification of a child who is 'missing' or 'absent' will be based on ongoing risk assessment. A child whose whereabouts are known would not be treated as either 'missing' or 'absent'. The decision about whether to categorise a child as 'missing' or 'absent' rests with the police, but clearly multi-agency assessment will assist this decision making process.

Children under the age of 16 years old are not legally considered as being able to live independently. For children over the age of 16 years old consideration should be given to their legal status, physical and emotional needs when making a judgment as to whether they can live independently.

Why is it important?

Children who go missing may place themselves and others at risk and each missing episode is potentially serious. The reasons for their absence are often varied and complex and cannot be viewed in isolation from their home circumstances or their experiences of care.

The Risks

The immediate risks associated with going missing include:

- No means of support or legitimate income - leading to high risk activities
- Involvement in criminal activities including criminal exploitation
- Victim of abuse
- Victim of crime
- Victim of sexual exploitation
- Alcohol and/ or substance misuse
- Deterioration of physical and/ or mental health
- Missing out on schooling and education
- Increased vulnerability

The longer-term risks include:

- Longer-term alcohol/ drug dependency
- Crime
- Homelessness
- Disengagement from education
- Sexual exploitation
- Poor physical and/ or mental health

Anyone working with children in a professional capacity should use their judgment to take whatever action is deemed necessary to protect and safeguard the child.

How do we do it?

Every "missing" episode should attract proper attention from the professionals involved, who must collaborate to ensure a consistent and coherent response is given to the child on their return. The



One Minute Guide Missing from home, care or school



'Children Going Missing from Home or From Care Risk Assessment Toolkit' must be completed to aid your assessment and intervention for the young person.

When a child does go missing, we want to be able to intervene in a timely way to prevent that child suffering harm and to recover the child to safety as soon as possible. We do this by partnership working, information sharing, problem solving and performance management. Interventions may be focused on the individual child, a child's home, or by targeting 'pull' factors in the community. Interventions are important in attempting to address repeat missing episodes. Interventions must also be informed by effective return interviews. **The child's view will be taken seriously.**

Interventions for looked after children must be driven by and reflected in the placement information record and in any care plan. The reporting of a child in care as a missing person should not be used as a sanction against the child by any practitioner or manager. The national minimum standards and regulations for children's homes and fostering services require all providers to have in place procedures for when a child is missing from their care establishment. These procedures must be compatible with local protocols.

The local authority will report a missing 'looked after child' to the police according to this protocol.

What to do if a Child goes missing

If it comes to the attention of any agency that a child is missing, they must advise the parent/carer to report this matter to the police.

They also need to advise the parent of their agency's duty to ensure that the matter is reported to the police and if necessary, follow this up by contacting the police to verify that the child has been reported missing.

Return interviews: Safety, Assessment and Information Gathering

'Return Interviews' is the term applied to the safety, needs and risk assessment carried out by the statutory children services department and/or their partners. It should include an exploration of the reason the child left their home or placement as well as what risks they were exposed to whilst missing. The 'return interview' is different from a police 'safe and well' check and is not an Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interview.

Return Interviews should be offered for every instance of running where a child has:

- Been missing for over 24 hours;
- Been missing or has runaway on three or more occasions;
- Engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence;
- Has known mental health issues;
- For a child in care a return interview should always be conducted. Appropriate safeguarding procedures should be followed where there are safeguarding concerns, for example:
 - Where the child has been hurt or harmed whilst they have been missing (or this is believed to have been the case)
 - Where there is known or suspected risk of sexual or criminal exploitation or contact with persons posing a risk to children.

It is acknowledged that a returning child may well share different parts of their experience with different people. It is the responsibility of all agencies therefore, to attend to issues of immediate safety, future support, safeguarding needs and information-sharing.

The return interview should be conducted in all instances within 72 hours of the child's return, unless there are exceptional circumstances. These will be undertaken by Barnardos or Children's Social Care following notification by the Police. The interview will be recorded and all return interviews must be signed off by a children services team manager after presentation by the relevant professional. A strategy meeting under S47 Children Act 1989 should be convened for all children graded at high risk.

If the young person is looked after, they must be offered an independent advocate



One Minute Guide Missing from home, care or school



Children not receiving a suitable education

This was previously known as 'Children missing from education' and there was some confusion in relation to the use of term 'missing'. Children not receiving a suitable education are defined as children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll and who are not receiving a suitable education by any other recognised means. When a child fails to attend school, this may be for a variety of reasons and may indicate that the child is at risk of harm. The education authority should make reasonable enquiries to ascertain the circumstances before reporting them as missing to the police. Details of these enquiries are contained in guidance for local authorities on children

For more information:

Portsmouth MASH - **023 9268 8793** or MASH@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

Out of Hours - 0300 555 1373

PSCP – Portsmouth Safeguarding Children's Partnership

Hampshire Constabulary - Emergency 999, Enquiries 101

Central referral unit - 0845 671 0271

Barnardo's Miss-U - 01489 796684

[B4U Missing interview](#)