

Missing from Home Protocol

Introduction

It is estimated that approximately 100,000 children and young people run away from home or care over night in the UK each year; 1 in 10 of these being under 11 years of age and 8% stating they were harmed whilst they were away. Running is often a clear indicator that something is seriously wrong at home. Research and practice in the UK has shown that significant numbers of young people run away in response to serious problems at home, for example, neglect abuse or family conflict.

Of the estimated 100,000 children and young people who run away from home or care, one in six end up on the streets. A young person might run away from home or care for various reasons, but when they do so it usually means something in their life isn't going right. Furthermore, these young people face the particular range of risks that come from having to find alternative places to stay and the means to survive.

It is the responsibility of local government and their partners to safeguard the young and vulnerable, including young runaways. This is normally done through the Local Children's Safeguarding Board.

Guidance

Statutory guidance has been developed to help LA's put better systems in place to support young runaways from both home and care. The guidance, *Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care*, emphasises the importance of young runaways being offered a return interview and stresses the importance of information sharing and using common assessment. It also explains the need for a named person to be responsible at a local level. The guidance relates to children missing from home and care (Pan London 5.27) and children missing from school (Pan London 2.28)

Referrals

Children are brought to the attention of Children and Families from several sources. The primary source is via the police. All children who have come to the notice of the police as a result of going missing are logged onto a police merlin. These merlins are reviewed by the Police Public Protection Desk, who undertake further research and collate this information into a PAC (Pre Assessment Check). A running log of PAC's is kept by the Public Protection Desk who work closely with CYPS First response to track patterns which may indicate that a child/ YP is at risk.

Children may be reported missing by other agencies notably schools. The procedures are clear that where other agencies report a child/ YP as missing and those with parental responsibility or care of the child have not done so this constitutes significant harm. Children missing from school will be referred to First Response if there is evidence that they

are a victim of crime, if they are the subject of a child protection plan, if they are looked after, privately fostered, subject to an ongoing s47 investigation, are constantly avoiding contact or are they are deemed at risk due to issues such as criminal activity, forced marriage or honour based violence.

Categories

Children coming to notice fall into a number of categories;

- **Children who return home late from school or an arranged day time activity and have been reported missing by their parents. These episodes are defined in the Pan London Child Protection Procedures as ‘unauthorised absence.’ Pan London CP procedures 5.27.1.**
- **Children/ YP who return home late from an evening activity and have been reported missing by their parents. These may relate to Young People who are pushing boundaries or may be evidence of unhappiness/ at risk at home or in the community including sexual exploitation or gang related activity. The Pan London Procedures advise that the agency first alerted to this episode should discuss with parents whether this constitutes an unauthorised absence of a missing episode. It also recommends that unauthorised absences are monitored to ensure that patterns are not developing which may indicate more serious concerns.**
- **Children who are missing for longer period including over night. The lead agency for these children is the police. (pan London 5.27)**

Quality assurance:

- Framework 1 reporting has been enhanced to include a referral category of ‘ unauthorised absence’ to be used for children over 11 who meet the criterion for a level 1 response (see below). This will allow monitoring of repeat episodes which will be reported on monthly, 3 monthly, 6 monthly and annually to identify patterns of behaviour and determine what level of intervention is required.

Multi agency response

It is essential that the agency response is sensitive to the needs of children and young people, commensurate to the risk and works in partnership with parents and carers.

Child/ Young person is reported as missing or has an unauthorised absence
PPD alert social work teams for children placed in Haringey for other authorities.
Screening team record absences for Haringey Children in care and alert the appropriate service
Screening team record episode for all other allocated children and alert appropriate service
All other reports reviewed by the screening manager

Level one response

- Particulars of the referral to be considered by the screening manager taking into account any historical intervention. Where there are no known additional factors action will be as follows

- Unauthorised absence of YP over 11 who returned home within 4 hours – report will be logged onto the FWI system, NFA

- 3 episodes of going missing/ unauthorised absence – Discussion with Youth Community and Participation (YCP) for early intervention and CAF if required

- Un- authorised absence of a child under 11 where length of missing period is of concern (eg over two hours) or where there are historical concerns – initiate a gathering information episode to screening SW, school and health checks to be undertaken. Screening manager to review matter again to decide whether CAF or an initial assessment are required.

Level Two Response

- where a child /YP has been reported missing and not returned within 4 hours the action will be as follows:

- screening to open up a gathering information episode and assign to screening worker to:
- liaise with police missing persons' officer

- speak to the carer/parent
- gather information from other agencies

- ScreeningTM/FR TM to review on a weekly basis and a strategy meeting to be held at 14 days of the YP has not returned.

- strategy meeting to include YCP/ missU project worker

-Where the child/ YP has returned but there are historical concerns or if the child is under 11

– screening manager to open a gathering information episode as above and manager to review with a view on completion of a CAF or assessment if required.

Level 3 Response

Where the child has returned after a period away from home.

-Professionals/Strategy meeting to be convened to include YCP/ MissU worker/ Police missing person's officer

- strategy meeting to identify named lead professional to undertake the return from missing interview with the YP, develop an action plan and manage delivery of this.

- Core assessment to be completed on all children in the family

-Consideration to be given for referral to Barnardo's sexual exploitation project if this is an assessed need via Safeguarding Panel