



North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership

# The Runaway and Missing from Home and Care Protocol

Update 2019-21



## CONTENTS

	Page No.
Introduction	03
Local Context	04
Definitions	04
Legislation	07
Principles	08
Push/pull factors	09
Overall requirements from statutory guidance on children who missing from home or care	10
Responsibilities under the guidance	10
Reporting a missing child and process followed	13
Children missing from care	13
When a child is missing	18
Agency reporting responsibilities	19
Periods of extended absence	19
The Police response	21
Return interviews	25
Support for 16 and 17 year olds	26

## INTRODUCTION

The Runaway and Missing from Home and Care Protocol (RMHCP), sets out how young people who go missing or run away will be safeguarded and monitored. Children who decide to run away are often unhappy, vulnerable and in danger. Recent studies have also highlighted the links between missing and child sexual and criminal exploitation.

The protocol seeks to ensure that vulnerable children are adequately safeguarded and their welfare is promoted by effective deployment of resources in a consistent and co-operative way. This is important both at the point when they go missing and when they are found. Preventative services need to be to respond to reduce the likelihood of young people running away in the future.

The protocol relates to:

- all children under 18 who are missing from home
- all children under 18 missing from a care setting

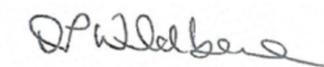
This protocol is in line with the Statutory Guidance on Children who Run away or go Missing from Home or Care - January 2014 (Department for Education). The protocol is addressed to directors and heads of academies, social care organisations, Police, young people's services, Family Hubs, health and education establishments and their employees.



Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People- Councillor Ian Lindley



Director of Children and Families Services – Steve Kay



NEL Safeguarding Children Partnership Chair – Chief Superintendent Darren Wildbore

## LOCAL CONTEXT

North East Lincolnshire has a population of 159,826, with 37,956 being children under 18 years old. 12.1% of households are lone parent households, which is higher than the England average of 10.6%. North east Lincolnshire is ranked as the 31<sup>st</sup> most deprived local authority in England. 20% of the population is classes as income deprived. 36% of dependent children (aged 0-15) live within the top 10% most deprived lower level social output areas.

North East Lincolnshire has increased its knowledge about missing, exploitation and the impact of early childhood neglect. It is reviewing its safeguarding arrangements.

In North East Lincolnshire most young people return within 12 hours of being reported missing and have remained in the boundaries of the Local authority. There is increasing concern about children being taken out of county in relation to exploitation and as a result the arrangements for managing the vulnerabilities are constantly under review to maximize intervention and safeguarding.

This document relates to all departments and services that work with children and young people. It is essential reading for all workers who come into contact with vulnerable children. Services and organisations need to ensure they have an awareness of the issues concerning children who go missing from home or care and are working with the advice within this protocol. This current protocol is written in line with the “Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away and go Missing from Home and Care.” issued January 2014 by the Department for Education.

This protocol is to be used as a guide only and it is acknowledged that as such it cannot cover all eventualities. Judgement is required from all professionals working with children to take appropriate action to safeguard welfare. It is not meant to replace the procedures for either the Police or social care and reference should be made to those procedures for specific steps.

## DEFINITIONS

The following definitions apply to this protocol and are in line with the “Statutory Guidance on Children who Run away and go missing from home and care” 2014 and are locally agreed.

### Definition of

**CHILD:** The terms “child “children” equate to any person less than 18 years of age and its use is not in any way meant to imply the protocol supports only the younger age bracket.

### 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’ through to high-risk cases that require immediate, intensive action.

## FOR CATEGORIES THE NEW DEFINITIONS ARE AS FOLLOWS;

No apparent risk	
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.
High risk	
The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.	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 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):

**‘A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible.’**

**MISSING CHILD:** a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.

**CHILD ABDUCTION:** Where a child has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence, there is a “crime in action” and should be reported to the Police immediately. This offence can also be committed by parents who abduct their own children where they take or retain a child in breach of or otherwise in accordance with a court order.

**IN CARE/Child looked after (CLA):** A child looked after by the Local authority is deemed to be in their care either with the agreement of their parents – Section 20 of the Children Act (known as “accommodated”) or by order of the Court. A young person is normally looked after until they are 18, at which point they are classified as “former relevant” under the Children Leaving Care Act (2000). It may also refer to children who seek asylum in the country, who are not accompanied by an adult.

### **Trafficking**

Children and young people who were trafficked remain vulnerable to going missing across the UK and out of the country. Trafficking involves the illegal trade in human beings for the purposes of sexual and criminal exploitation.

The ‘Trafficking Protocol’ defines human trafficking as:

“Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power, of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”

**RESPONSIBLE LOCAL AUTHORITY:** the local authority that is responsible for the child’s care.

**HOST AUTHORITY:** is the local authority in which a Child Looked after child is placed; when not the local authority area that holds parental responsibility.



## LEGISLATION

### Information Sharing

If there is concern about a young person's safety or well-being it may be necessary to share information with other agencies. The safety and well-being of the child must be the primary consideration when making such a decision.

Sharing of information must be in line with the confidentiality, data protection and human rights legislation and guidance. Information shared will need to be carefully recorded. In most circumstances consent from a parent / guardian would be gained to share information. There are however some circumstances in which sharing confidential information without consent will normally be justified. These are:

When there is evidence or reasonable cause to believe that a child is suffering, or is at risk of suffering, significant harm; or

When there is evidence or reasonable cause to believe that an adult is suffering, or is at risk of suffering, serious harm; or

To prevent, detect or prosecute a serious crime.

Child safeguarding issues will be required to be shared with the police and social care.

### Abduction - Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984

Anyone who "takes or detains" a young person under 16 without lawful authority may be liable to prosecution under Section 2 of the Child

Abduction Act 1984. Should a child choose to remain prosecution may be problematic.

### Protection - Section 17 of the Children Act 1989

A child or young person who has run away is likely to be a Child In Need within the meaning of Section 17 of The Children Act 1989. The local authority should give consideration to the provision of services for the child, including an assessment, to look at known

factors about the child and specific risk and required actions required.

If there is reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering significant harm the local authority should undertake appropriate enquiries to decide what, if any, action is required to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.

### Prosecution

A person, who unlawfully removes, keeps away, assists or otherwise encourages a child to run away or stay away from their care placement may be guilty of an offence and liable to prosecution (Section 49 of The Children Act 1989). North East Lincolnshire Council and Humberside police have worked together to issue Child Abduction Notices (CANs) to safeguard children. Harboursing is applied to children under 16 years of age and children looked after by the Local authority up to the age of 18.

## PRINCIPLES

### Prevention

North East Lincolnshire Council has a Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy (2016-2018). The strategy sets out the approaches taken to combat issues in relation to anti-social behaviour, families under stress in relation to domestic violence, substance use, school attendance, housing issues and impact of mental health. Effective early intervention can transform lives.

- **Prevention (upstream):** preventing or minimising the risk of problems arising- usually through universal policies like health promotion.
- **Early intervention (midstream):** targeting individuals or groups at high risk or showing early signs of a particular problem to try and stop it occurring.
- **Early treatment (downstream):** intervening once there is a problem, to stop it getting worse and redress the situation.

### Risk Assessment

Social care and the Police have systems for measuring risk and the required response. The social care forms are reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose. The forms are based on Signs of Safety principles and consider known facts such as what we are worried about and strengths. All responses to children whose whereabouts are unknown will be based on evidence based risk assessment. Understanding the risk the child is at or placing themselves at will assist professionals and carers manage their own anxieties and assure appropriate standardised responses. This risk assessment will need to be reviewed when a child is missing. All cases of children reported missing will be discussed with a multi-agency group on a weekly basis to consider additional patterns and elements of risk.

Understanding how children communicate and patterns of behaviour contribute greatly to reducing risks. Having a theoretical understanding of why children run away provides a framework for the risk analysis.

### Quality recording

Actions taken to locate a child's whereabouts and the decision making process need to be recorded with the appropriate recording systems in all agencies. This information is shared appropriately with agencies both for safeguarding based on the individual incident, understanding the needs of the young person and intelligence about hotspots or other children at risk.

### Multi-Agency working

Safeguarding children either missing or run away is not the responsibility of just one agency and effective understanding of roles and joint working is crucial to ensuring the processes work effectively. Information sharing is of utmost importance in ascertaining whereabouts and wellbeing whilst children are missing. This is in line with GDPR stipulations.

### Push/ pull factors

There are a range of factors at play when children run away. Whatever the reason it is highly likely that running away is a sign that something is wrong. The research conducted by the Social Exclusion Unit: Young Runaways (2002) found the following reasons commonly reported:

#### Push Factors

*Problems at home*

*Family break up*

*Mental health problems*

*Bullying*

*Problems at school*

#### Pull Factors

*Running to be near friends and relatives*

*Grooming for potential exploitation*

Local feedback from children reported missing when debriefed indicates issues with young people rejecting boundaries and issues of disagreements with step parents and siblings.

In 2018 local research into 47 children missing in the first 3 months of the year indicated a connection between children experiencing early childhood neglect and going missing when older. Of those missing most often in that period a high percentage had experienced fractured relationships with principle care givers and/ or significant loss. There was a difference for boys in this cohort who didn't appear to maintain a relationship at home and girls who were demonstrating attachment seeking behaviours.

## **OVERALL REQUIREMENTS FROM THE STATUTORY GUIDANCE ON CHILDREN WHO RUN AWAY AND GO MISSING FROM HOME OR CARE**

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **Local Safeguarding Arrangements**

The local safeguarding arrangements need to be satisfied that the working arrangements between agencies are effective and ensure the welfare and safety of children is promoted. As such the protocol will need to be updated, valid and responded to.

North East Lincolnshire has a vulnerability operational group that meets to discuss issues and patterns arising from the implementation and usage of the risks to children in the area. There is multi-agency representation at the group.

#### **The Local authority.**

The Local authority is required to promote the welfare and ensure the protection of children. The arrangements for ensuring functions are discharged for missing and runaway children will be part of any Ofsted Inspection.

The director of children's services is the named senior children's services manager responsible for monitoring policies and performance. The managers of Through Care and Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service (CASS) have the day to day strategic responsibility for ensuring the arrangements are met.

For Looked After Children the manager of the children's homes will have responsibility for ensuring strategies in each residential home to ensure sufficient engagement and reduce incidents of missing.

#### **The Police**

The Police provide a Missing Person's Officer. The missing person's officer attends all meetings and liaises with the local social work teams. The supervising sergeant provides decision making support and attends strategy meetings. The recent amalgamation of police services on the South bank of the Humber aims to increase capacity, consistency and skill base.

There are close working links with the child sexual and criminal exploitation services in the area.

The detective inspector is the lead in the Police with overall responsibility in that agency.

#### **Health**

The health services within North East Lincolnshire hold an extensive amount of information about children and families within the Local authority area.

Specifically Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust who manage the Emergency care centre at Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital see many children and young people, including those who are looked after, within the context of unplanned care.

As part of the Runaway and Missing from Home and Care protocol, Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust Safeguarding team are notified via the generic mail box of all children/ young people who are reported as missing, as a point of information - ( most children are found quickly and the process halts here).

When children are identified as missing for a prolonged period of time, Emergency Care records are accessed to determine if the child/ young person has accessed the department and this information would then be shared with the missing persons officer. In this circumstance an alert is placed on the child/ young person's emergency care record. The alert would then be removed once the safeguarding team had been notified that the child/ young person had been found.

Looked after children Health Team (Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust)

On receipt of the notifications of missing and/ or found, and returned debriefs, via generic email from Missing Notification inbox the LAC health team administrator filter the email and any non-LAC children are forwarded to the safeguarding team for action. The notification or debrief is scanned into the Systmone electronic health database and the relevant case holder is tasked to ensure they are aware of the missing episode. The record is flagged as a high reminder for health professionals using Systmone.

Should the missing child attend the emergency care Centre, staff members will inform the missing person's officer.

#### **Family Hubs**

North East Lincolnshire Council has locality teams working on a preventative level with families. Part of their role is to build relationships with children at risk of exploitation and missing.

The processes established aim to;

Safeguard young people from potential child sexual exploitation (CSE) and offer support for those who are being/ have been subjected to CSE.

Ensuring that young people are provided with a holistic response offering best placed support packages which include all partner agencies."

Raise young people's awareness around CSE and staying safe, increasing their knowledge and understanding in relation to this sensitive subject.

Build upon young people's resilience, identifying coping strategies and brokering in of specialist services to support with this.

Engage with young people from 'their starting point' in 'their chosen place'.

Identify, deter and appropriately manage those people who may pose a risk to children becoming involved in CSE and CCE.

There is a strong correlation between missing children and child criminal and sexual exploitation. North East Lincolnshire contains a seaside resort and an area of high deprivation which are known factors in relation to child exploitation. The working arrangements aim to meet these challenges with patrols out of hours in areas identified as high risk.

## Regional Arrangements

Humberside Police works to national guidance in order to provide a uniform response for runaways that present or are located in our area; working with their home Local authority to promote the welfare of the child. The presence of national guidance will ensure that should one of our children go missing in another area we will work with that area for their safe return. In order to establish effective working across two authorities, Humberside Police arranges their child protection services across the South bank working with two local authorities in North and North East Lincolnshire.

## Children placed outside of their own local authority area.

All local authorities have a responsibility to inform a host local authority when they place a child in another area. Should that child be missing this information should be shared via the FFAP front desk where a contact will be recorded. The host authority should share information about possible offenders or other children involved to enable protection of all children.

As the host authority for children placed in North East Lincolnshire, NELC will contribute to strategy meetings where appropriate for children from other authorities.

For North East Lincolnshire children placed in other local authorities, the North East Lincolnshire Council social worker should be notified of any missing incidents. Each Local authority has their own runaway and missing from home and care protocol and these will apply to our young people in those areas. Debrief information should be shared with the police both in the locality of the placement and within Humberside.

## Out of Hours Response

In the event that an emergency situation arises where a child cannot be returned home or to their care, placement, emergency accommodation can be sourced by contacting the out of hours service – 01472 326292.

The out of hours service will be required to monitor periods of absence during weekend periods. They will be required to notify senior managers of periods of absence over 72 hours (bank holiday weekends).

It is not considered appropriate for young people under 18 to be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, even in an emergency.

## Family

Agencies will need to be aware of the need to work in partnership with the child's family members and friends and take seriously information they are able to provide that may assist in locating the child. To this end they should be kept informed unless it is unsafe to do so or would impede enquiries and investigations to locate the child.

## Reporting a missing child and the process followed.

### Children running away or missing from Home

The first step for any reasonable parent/ carer when a child goes missing is to check their home and garden to ensure the child is not there. They will also need to check with family and friends; checking mobile phones etc. to ascertain whereabouts; visit locations the child is known to frequent and, when all of this has been exhausted, the Police need to be informed. If an agency learns a child is missing they must advise the parent/carers to report the absence to the Police.

The Police have an automatic alert system on COMPACT and an email is sent to the NELC Children's Front Door of any child that goes missing in the area. If the child is an open case to vulnerable children's services the social worker and manager will be immediately informed.

If the child is not an open case to statutory children's social care the information is collated by a Senior Practitioner within the IFD and a contact will be created. Checks are made with the Police missing persons' officer, parents and any other party thought to have relevant information to aid decision making in the case.

Following information gathering, if the young person has returned home, consideration is given as to whether it would be in the child's best interest to signpost the child and family to support agencies or to advise that a single assessment is offered. Consideration should also be given to whether there is need for the matter to be raised to a referral and an assessment be completed by the children's

assessment and safeguarding service..

No contact is closed until the whereabouts of the child and their welfare is established.

All children who go missing are discussed in a weekly partnership meeting (Vulnerability Screening) in which the circumstances around the missing, Independent Return Home Interview and any other relevant information is reviewed. This supports in understanding what interventions may be required to be implemented. Missing children are considered in line with the local authority Exploitation Process.

If after 72 hours the young person is still missing, a CASS case supervisor will organise a strategy meeting with Police to discuss features of the case, plan actions and a decision is made to allocate to a social worker for an assessment to consider the risks. An assessment will consider all dimensions of a child's life and will conclude with a plan to support the child and family and prevent further incidents of going missing.

For a high risk missing child, or for those missing children who are looked after and missing incidents are occurring increasingly frequently, the Team Manager who has operational management of the child must alert the DCS through an escalation form.

### Repeat Incidents

If a child's case is open to the child assessment and safeguarding service, Through Care or Children's Disability Service the social worker will be notified of the child being missing. They will take all necessary steps, including contacting and visiting the family, young person and liaising with the missing persons' liaison officer to locate and ensure the safety of the young person.

If, after 72 hours, the young person is not located, a strategy meeting will be held with the social worker, their case supervisor, the Police, health professionals and any relevant party to decide on a plan of action.

For looked after children actions required to reduce missing episodes and subsequent risk to be added to the CLA care plan.

All children in residential homes will have a missing risk assessment and action plan which is shared with the missing person's police officer and social worker.

## FLOWCHART FOR YOUNG PERSONS MISSING FROM HOME

### Identify child/young person is missing

Parents/carer/responsible adult identify time by which the child should be at the address.

Parents/carer/responsible adult should make enquiries to locate the missing young person with relatives/friends.

This should include searches of social media and the residence and local area if the child or young person is not located.

### Report to Police

Parents/carer/responsible adult should telephone Police with details of the missing person.

Details required: Child's name/DOB/where, when and who missing with/what child was last wearing/description of young person/recent photo/medical history/time and location last seen/circumstances of going missing/details of friends and associates.

### Officers conduct a risk assessment forming the basis for resulting proportionate actions

Risk assessment conducted by Police using COMPACT system.

Enquiries are then on-going. Information shared as appropriate.

### Young person is located or returns to home address

When a missing child is located by family or friends etc., it is their responsibility to return the child to the home address.

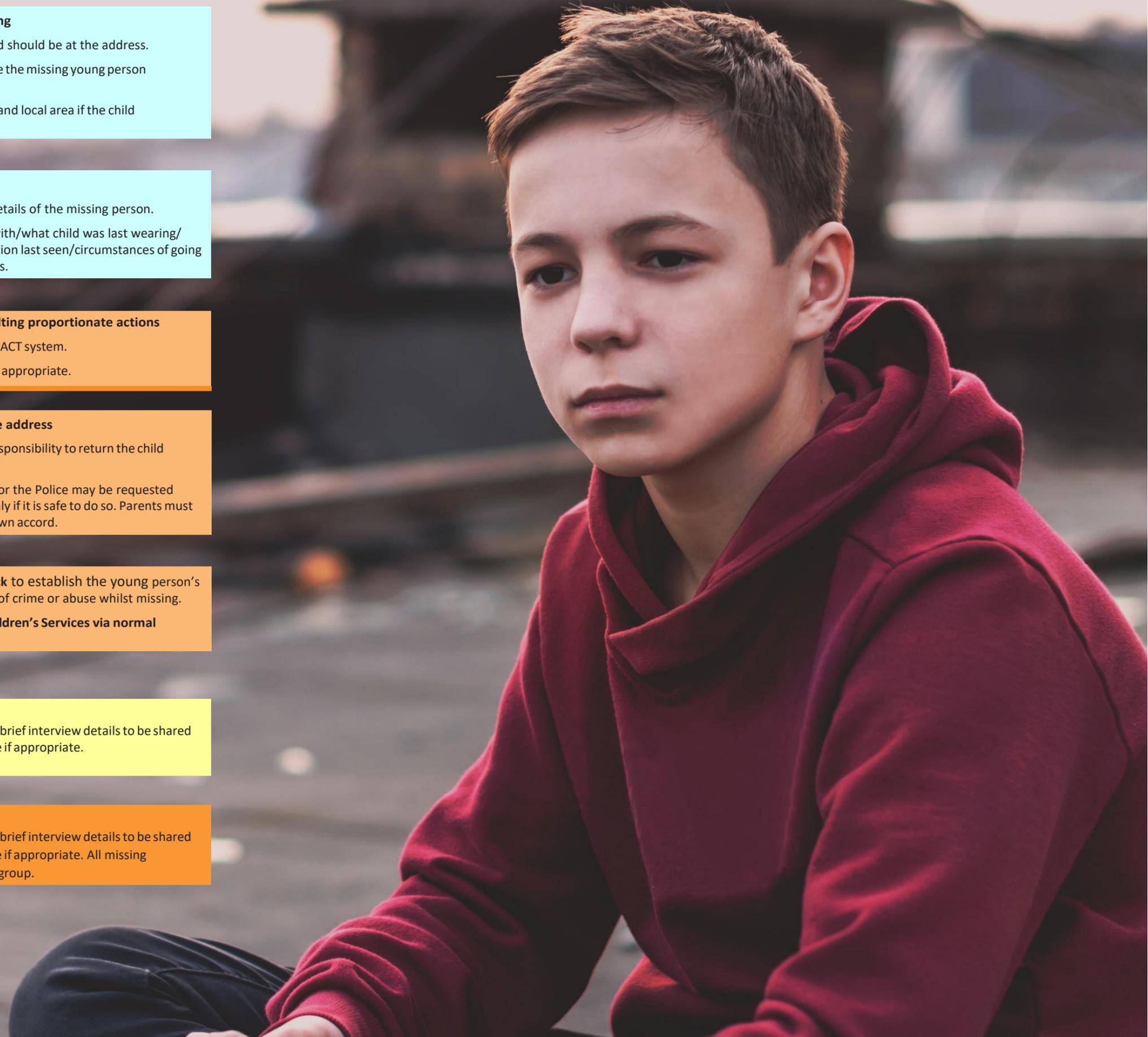
Where a risk is present, a Police Officer may accompany the family or the Police may be requested to collect and return the child/young person to the place of residence only if it is safe to do so. Parents must inform the Police when a child returns of their own accord.

**The Police should conduct an interview known as a Safe and Well Check** to establish the young person's well-being and safety and to establish whether they were the victim of crime or abuse whilst missing.

**If warranted, Police should refer child or young person to Children's Services via normal safeguarding channels.**

Return interview conducted by trained independent or trusted adult. Debrief interview details to be shared with police and social care including residential home if appropriate.

Return interview conducted by trained independent or trusted adult. Debrief interview details to be shared with police and social care including residential home if appropriate. All missing episodes discussed at the operational Vulnerability group.



## LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

### Preventative measures

Young people enter care in most cases because either they have been abused or neglected or because they have been rejected by their families or become estranged from their families and this increases their vulnerability. As such they are more vulnerable each time they go missing. Being perceived as “streetwise” does not necessarily lessen their vulnerability because of the types of areas they are likely to frequent and also because their judgement about the levels of risk are likely to be poor. In these cases the nature of the risk may be different. These missing children may not be in immediate danger, but can be vulnerable to longer term risk particularly from criminal and sexual exploitation. Their past experiences mean they already have many of the characteristics making them vulnerable to missing and exploitation. To this are added issues with trust, relationships, changes of support personal and relationships and other people living in their homes.

### Relationships with the young people.

Children Looked after are likely to have experienced rejection and emotional upheaval. Ensuring effective recruitment processes and training is vital to the commitment of the local authority to its young people. Building effective relationships through positive experience, communication, sharing and role modelling by residential staff and committed, responsive and reliable social workers is vital.

Each home is required to have visits by an independent person on a monthly basis under regulation 44 of the Children’s Homes Regulation 2001(amended 2013), when they must ensure the visitors speak regularly to the young people to establish their feelings about their welfare within the home.

Each home should ensure quality and timely recording to assist understanding of the young people. This allows the building up of detailed “pictures” of missing patterns, association groups, and whereabouts.

### Setting boundaries for the young people.

Young people need to understand how they will be cared for and why. For this purpose the staff members will also need to understand their contribution. Education establishments need to ensure a greater awareness of Criminal and Child Sexual Exploitation both for the staff team and more importantly the young people will improve the management of risk.

Young people locally have spoken of the homes being a place children want to return to. It is vital to maintain this standard, with positive activities, due regard to their wishes and feelings and caring enough to ensure boundaries are responded to.

Children’s individual needs should be considered in the context of them going missing. Where appropriate and safe to do so- homes should be flexible to meet individual needs. For example staff should be encouraging young people to compromise and agree extensions to boundaries as opposed to just refusing requests and children refusing to return home or avoiding being located or maintaining contact.

### Proactive planning

The completion of worry statements and safety goals with the involved family members and professionals will assist clarity on required approaches. The resulting safety plan will need to be reviewed, discussed and updated to identify current risk and appropriate actions.

Young people will need to be able to make contact with carers and vice versa. To enable this young people will need to be provided with the means of maintaining contact, e.g. via mobile phones and mobile credit. Staff members will need to encourage young people to stay in touch and leave mobile phones on and express why this is important.

Discussions with young people about different ways of keeping in touch can improve their understanding of risk – such as Facebook or Skype.

Young people should be provided with sufficient funds to use public transport, which will enable them to return home. However, it may be appropriate in assessed circumstances for the young people to be collected by a member of staff.

Another way of ensuring engagement, co-operation and maintaining contact with young people is building relationships with family and friends. Creating lists of addresses, contact details and networks that can be used to locate/find young people when they fail to return on time and sharing these with the missing liaison officer.

Working alongside other agencies will build an understanding of other agency processes for a smarter and more effective working partnership.

Missing children raises anxiety in carers and professionals; one way to manage this is to actively search known locations, calling friends, parents, family ensuring any harbouring is not condoned. Young people will often respect and respond to people if they know they are looking for them.

Knowing the dangers in the area helps to assess the risk a young person might be at. In order to manage the risks, a confidential sharing of information about high CSE risk offenders and vulnerable young people/ images is agreed.



## When a Child is missing from care

In all cases on reception into care or on change of placement, the social worker must complete the appropriate risk assessment form, considering the likelihood of the child going missing, their age and vulnerability. The completed form should be distributed to the carer and where appropriate, the school.

Consideration needs to be given to the child's risk of going missing, within the statutory LAC planning process and the subsequent forms to ensure the management of risk is addressed proactively. A recent photograph of the child in JPEG format be kept, to help Police officers recognise the child should the child go missing.

When a child does not return to their placement or goes missing those caring for the child will need to take all reasonable steps to locate and return them. Such steps should include contacting the child by telephone or via social media. It would also require contacting friends and checking the area the child was reported to be at.

Following this there needs to be consideration to the status of this absence. The relevant risk assessment forms should be used to take the salient factors into account in order to establish the level of risk and inform decisions about what action to take.

A strategy meeting will be required for a child missing over 72 hours or 3 incidents in 90 days. This meeting must be chaired by an agency decisions maker and involve professionals required to identify the child's whereabouts. The social worker should collate relevant information from the family prior to this meeting and feedback agreed information afterwards.

Appropriate consents should be gathered prior to the strategy meeting if possible including whether there is a need for legal action or authorization for publicity.

For children in foster care – If the child has failed to return to the placement and the foster carer does not know where the child is; they should report the child as missing to their foster link worker if during office hours, and to the Police and to out of hours service outside office hours.

Foster carers need to be aware of the need to search premises and to provide a recent photograph.

Carers can give permission for a child to remain with friends if they deem this to be suitable. A system is in place for residential units to confirm such arrangements with the police out of hours.

Allocated or duty social worker- will need to inform parents and/or persons with parental responsibility (unless such contact affects the welfare of the young person). They must inform the relevant service manager and liaise with the Police. The social worker will have to record all the information about action taken to ensure the welfare of the young person on the electronic social care records. Where appropriate to do so they will be required to participate in locating and returning the child.

## Agency reporting responsibilities when a child is missing

Local Education establishments (including maintained schools, academies, pupil referral units, alternative provision, colleges and independent school) should inform parent(s) and/or persons with parental responsibility and carers (unless such contact affects the welfare of the young person). If the child is not with the parents and whereabouts are not known, the police should be notified of this absence. The Police will then decide on the information available whether they are classified as missing. Issues of possible child sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation should be considered.

The Youth Offending Service: Should the Youth Offending service be aware a child is missing from one of their sessions/ activities they should, inform the person with parental responsibility and the Police. They will need to pass the relevant information to the young person's social worker or duty worker or out of hours and carer.

Information made available to them from other service users should be shared with the missing person's officer.

Out of hours service: Should inform the person with parental responsibility (if not already aware), the Police and the relevant child care service. If missing for over 72 hours they will need to notify senior management and seek permission for media release. Emergency overnight accommodation will be made available via the out of hours service

Residential Homes Upon completion of the risk assessment when a child is missing the staff members will email the missing person's distribution list to ensure that managers and social worker are aware of the absence and actions taken to that point, to locate the child.

### Periods of extended absence

Most young people have returned home by themselves within 12 hours of being missing. In those circumstances where absence is prolonged over 12 hours the service manager of the responsible team should be informed. At 48 hours the absence must be reported to the deputy director vulnerable children. At this stage consideration will need to be made to permit a media release.

At 72 hours a strategy meeting with the Police and other relevant professionals needs to be arranged. The details of the strategy meeting discussion to be recorded on the electronic recording system and relevant actions taken to locate the young person are agreed, including consideration to seeking assistance from local media outlets. If the young person remains unfound, then Police procedures will be followed until found or until the Police close the case.

For prolonged periods of missing, efforts should continue to locate the young person. Workers will need to carry out address checks, social media checks and child abduction notices served if appropriate; a further strategy meeting should be held with 48 hours of the original meeting and within each subsequent period of 48 hours.

Shared responsibility remains with social care to attempt to locate the missing young person. The allocated social worker should refer any child protection or abuse concerns as appropriate.

Once a young person is known to have absconded it is important that all parties work together to prevent further such incidents. Action plans need to be incorporated explicitly into the placement plans/information.

Consideration needs to be made about contacting people who allow looked after children to remain in their homes without permission, including letters informing them there is no consent given, use of Recovery Orders and in persistent cases, possible prosecution.

**Once young person is located and returned**

The reception a young person receives upon return is crucial. It may affect their likelihood of absconding in the future. All young people need to be aware that people were concerned about them and that the response delivered is in a firm but caring way. Once the wellbeing of the young person is immediately established then it is necessary to inform all relevant officers and establishments, persons with PR and/ or if relevant the out of hours Service, that the young person has been located.

The electronic case records (LL) should be updated as soon as possible; this can be inputted by the residential worker or allocated/duty worker. All agencies contacted about a missing child will need to be notified of their return. The MASH vulnerability lead will alter the missing person episode on Liquidlogic accordingly.

The young person will need to have a debrief interview with an independent worker. The interview is to ascertain where the child has been; their reasons for absconding and whether they were involved in or subject to any criminal activity whilst they were away. The debrief information should then be sent to the missing notification inbox with the police and health safeguarding box and other relevant agencies.

If it is evident that the child has been subject to a criminal assault, discussions need to occur as soon as possible with the Police. Clothing may need to be kept and a medical may need to be arranged. Foster and residential carers will need to be supported around this process.



## The Police response

**POLICE**

All actions taken by Humberside Police will be in accordance with the current Humberside Police practice direction and national documentation regarding guidance on the management, recording and investigation of missing persons. All relevant documents are placed on the Humberside Police Force intranet for reference.

Humberside Police will classify reports as missing in line with the definitions as cited on page 5 of this document.

No apparent risk	
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.
High risk	
The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.	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 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):

‘A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible.’

Humberside Police use the COMPACT missing person database to record all cases of missing persons.

Upon receiving a report of a child missing from home or care, the Police carry out enquiries (which are proportionate to the perceived risk) aimed at locating the child as soon as possible. Each investigation will be tailored to the particular circumstances of the disappearance. The Police should be provided with a recent photograph of the missing child or young person as soon as possible.

Once identified as a missing person, all incidents will be recorded directly onto the their missing person database. In some high risk cases, an incident log will be used in the initial stages, where the circumstances are fluid and dynamic requiring swift Police response, and for officer safety.

Overall responsibility for leading and managing investigations into missing people normally lies with the duty inspector. There is a duty inspector on duty 24 hours a day in the division. They can be contacted via the Police non-emergency number 101 or on 999 in case of emergency.

A risk assessment is carried out for each missing person on every separate occasion they are reported missing. This risk assessment may be conducted by the initial investigating officer, and subsequently confirmed or revised by the duty Inspector, and will form the basis for the subsequent investigation into the child's disappearance. In all high risk cases the incident is initially run off an incident log.

**Initially any child who goes missing should be considered as high risk. Subsequent information shared may allow a downgrading to medium. A detailed rationale must be recorded on Compact in justification. Risk grading may only to be changed by an officer at inspector rank or above and in the home area.**

The duty inspector creates an investigation strategy and considers the risk level. They consider the use of specialist resources to assist the investigation.

A police officer is deployed to carry out the investigation. High risk cases will immediately be brought to the attention of the duty detective inspector. A member of the BCU senior management team or duty senior officer will also be informed.

Staff [in the command hub] will assist in the stages of the investigation such as computer research, and checks with hospitals and custody suites. The duty inspector will be kept up to date with enquiries completed as the investigation progresses.

The duty inspector will consider a media strategy in liaison with the Humberside Police media office and any partner agency. Where a missing child is felt to be especially vulnerable or where they have been missing for a long time, it may be helpful to publish a media release. This would normally be done in consultation with parents and the children's social worker. However, for operational reasons primacy for such decisions lies with the police. The Police may also utilise the services of [www.missingpeople.org.uk](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk) and [www.missingkids.co.uk](http://www.missingkids.co.uk) to publicise the fact that a child or young person is missing.

The COMPACT missing person database sends an automatic email referral to North East Lincolnshire Council.

The Police missing persons' coordinator will ensure that every case involving a child going missing is considered for referral to North East Lincolnshire children's social care for single assessment of need, or if necessary, for enquiries to be made under section 17 or Section 47 of the Children Act 1989. A referral will be made when a child becomes a frequent missing person (3 incidents or more with a 90 day period).

Humberside Police will maintain open and regular communication with children's social care until a missing child is located.

It is the responsibility of the carer to contact the police and confirm that the missing child has returned.

Police should not return a child to the place he or she went missing from without notification/consultation with the social worker or out of hours team. If there are any safeguarding issues, concerns will be dealt with via established referral methods.

If the whereabouts are known or suspected, it is the responsibility of the parents or carers to arrange for the child's return. In exceptional circumstances, in the interests of the safe and speedy return of the child, the Police may agree to requests from parents or carers to assist in the local area. Police may be able to assist with transport to return the child but this could incur a charge for this service. The Police 'safe and well' checks are outlined later in the protocol

COMPACT records may not be closed without physically conducting a safe and well check, unless authorised by Superintendent or above.

The Police missing person coordinator will attend monthly meetings with the Local authority and other partner agencies, to scrutinise data, and establish patterns of children reported missing from home or care. This will help highlight concerns for individual children or specific establishments.





## Child Abduction Notices

A Child Abduction Notice is a useful tool aimed at tackling incidents where children or young people under 16 years old (or 18 under a full Care Order) go missing and are found with families or partners who are much older than them. It is anticipated that this procedure will be used in a limited number of cases per year and should reduce the opportunity for children and young people to go missing. It will be used to tackle people who target children and young people for sexual exploitation. Partner agencies should contact the Police dedicated decision maker in the Protecting Vulnerable People Unit (or Early Help and Safeguarding Hub EHaSH) to discuss the potential use of this procedure.

Relevant legislation: Sec 2 Child Abduction Act 1984 (child under 16).

Sec 49 Children Act 1989 (child under 18 subject of Care Order). (This does not apply to children or young people who are voluntarily accommodated under Sec 20).

## Safe and well checks and independent debrief interviews

Identifying why a child has run away can be a crucial to reducing the likelihood of it happening again and safeguarding the young person. A young person needs to be spoken to about their actions and rationale and any risks they were exposed to. The way to ensure this is done is in two parts;

**The Police Safe and Well Check**, whilst covering the initial need to establish safety, cannot replace the need for a fuller discussion. The interview should be conducted as soon as possible after the child is found. Its purpose is to establish if the child has suffered any harm, where they have been and with whom and provides the opportunity for the child to disclose any offending by or against them.

**Debrief return interview** should be undertaken by someone trained to carry out the interview and independent of the caring arrangements should this be the wish of the young person. This interview is carried out within 72 hours of return. The majority of debriefs are undertaken by Family First practitioners, unless there is an existing trusted relationship that make would make it more appropriate they carry out the discussion. This is especially important when a child:

**Has been missing for over 24 hours.**

**Has been missing on two or more occasions**

**Has been involved in criminal activity**

**Has been hurt or harmed**

**Known mental health issues**

The interviewer will need to consider the format of the debrief form and may need to speak with the young person on more than one occasion to build up sufficient rapport. Debrief information should be shared without haste with the missing person's officer and where relevant the care homes.

## Support for 16 and 17 year olds

Additional support for young people aged 16 and 17 is laid out in the “Joint Protocol for Homeless 16 and 17 year olds”. Reference should be made to that document. This joint protocol is an agreement that establishes the roles and responsibilities of different agencies towards homeless 16 and 17 year olds. It outlines the respective statutory responsibilities of the North East Lincolnshire Council housing departments and North East Lincolnshire Council Children and Family Services. In addition, it details the practical joint working arrangements between housing departments, children and family services and other agencies that can assist with the housing and support of homeless 16 and 17 year olds.

No single department of North East Lincolnshire Council has full responsibility towards homeless 16 and 17 year olds. Both children’s services and the homeless prevention team have statutory duties towards this vulnerable client group. Alongside this, other statutory and voluntary agencies also provide a range of services to these young people. This agreement and co-operation ensures that young people receive appropriate and timely services and are not passed between agencies.





## Contact details

If you believe a child is at immediate risk this should be reported without delay to the Police; for emergencies ring 999.

Contact should be made via the main switchboard number as follows 101  
The missing person's officer can be reached on 01724 241711 (Ext: 1711)

### **The details for contacting children and family services are:**

Children Assessment Safeguarding Service	01472 326292 – option 2
MASH	01472 326292 option 2
Through Care Service	01472 325232
YPSS	01472 325252

