

Missing Child Policy

This Policy Relates to the following Legislation

- Children Act 1989
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015

This Policy Relates to the following Regulations and Guidance

- Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (2017)
- Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards (2015)
- Safeguarding children, young people and adults policy [Ofsted] (2015)
- Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (2014)

This Policy Applies To:

- a) All those involved in service delivery on behalf of The Lioncare Group and including those currently employed directly by the organisation, and those whose services are commissioned on behalf of The Lioncare Group including but not limited to Therapists, Instructors, Consultants, and other associated Professionals.
- b) All those involved in service receipt and including the Children, Relatives, Social Workers, the Commissioning Local Authority, and relevant others.

Responsibilities Associated with this Policy:

All employees, whether they are 'front-line' engaged directly in the task of caring for, educating, and supporting the children in our care, or 'ancillary' (e.g. House Keeper, Maintenance Worker, Administrator etc.), are personally responsible for managing their own conduct in relation to following this policy.

All employees whether they are 'front-line' or 'ancillary' are also responsible for supporting their colleagues and co-workers to follow this policy.

Members of the Management Team (Senior Therapeutic Carers, Senior Learning Support Assistant, Deputy Managers, Assistant Head Teacher, Registered Managers, and Head Teacher) are responsible for ensuring all those employed directly are made aware of this policy and guidance, and for managing and monitoring its appropriate implementation, and for taking necessary action to guard against any breach of this policy.

The Executive Team (Service Manager and Executive Director) are responsible for reviewing this policy and at least annually and more frequently if and when it is considered necessary to do so, and for ensuring this policy remains fit-for-purpose.

Monitoring and Review of this Policy:

The implementation of this policy and its corresponding guidance will be monitored continuously, and the policy itself will be reviewed at least annually in August of each year by the Executive Team and in consultation with relevant others including where possible and feasible employees and with due regard to any changes in current legislation and regulation and guidance.

Policy Statement

The Lioncare Group's Missing Child Policy and Procedure sets out:

- the steps we take to prevent children in our care from running away or going missing or otherwise being absent without permission (collectively referred to throughout this policy as "missing")
- the explicit procedures to be followed to locate, return, and support a child who is or has been missing from our care
- the roles and responsibilities of the adults caring for the children and in the wider organisation of The Lioncare Group, in relation to a child who is or has been missing.

In accordance with the Department for Education Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care (2014), The Lioncare Group aims to work collaboratively with Brighton & Hove City Council and Sussex Police and other partners in respect to the Runaway and Missing from Care and Home (RMFCH) protocol known locally as the Brighton & Hove Policy on Missing Children and the Brighton & Hove Missing Children Practice Guidance. The Lioncare Group's Missing Child Policy and Procedure document incorporates those aspects of the protocol that relate to the duties and responsibilities of The Lioncare Group in caring for children.

The Lioncare Group aims to work together with all partners to assess risks and develop appropriate strategies to prevent children from being missing, and respond appropriately if and when this occurs.

All employees of The Lioncare Group receive appropriate training, instruction, guidance and supervision to equip them with the skills, knowledge, and understanding they need to maintain best practice in relation to preventing children from, and responding when children have been, missing.

Definitions

It is important to clarify its interpretation of the various different terms used to describe situations when children are not physically where they should be or expected to be i.e. having run away or gone missing or absent without permission or lost. The following definitions are taken from section 8.21 of the *Sussex Child Protection Procedures and Guidance on The Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons Association of Chief Police Officers (2005)*:

Missing Person

Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established whatever the circumstances of disappearance and where this behaviour is out of character, or the context suggests the person may be the subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another. He or she will be considered missing until located and or her wellbeing, or otherwise established.

Missing Child

Where the child's location or reason for absence is unknown and/or there is cause for concern for the child because of their vulnerability or there is a potential danger to the public and/or other risk factors are present. A child in this category must be reported to the police. Sussex Police have stated they will listen to views about an early pro-active response where social care staff can present evidence that the whereabouts of the child are not known and also that there are known and significant risks.

Example from Practice: *a child is challenged about their involvement in an incident in the home. The child becomes angry and walks out of the home. An adult follows the child to attempt to engage with them and encourage them to return to the home; however, the adult loses sight of the child and can no longer be certain where they are. The adult carries out a thorough search of the area but cannot locate the child. The adult returns to the home and notifies the senior person on shift and the Registered Manager and any other people significant to the child (e.g. school friends or family members etc.) are contacted to find out if the child has been in touch with them. A thorough search of*

the home and grounds is conducted and other children in placement are asked if they have any information that may assist. The child's combined care plan and treatment programme is consulted and **the agreed significant period of time**^{1 1} section of the individualised risk assessment states that if that child is absent for longer than 40 minutes then they are to be considered as missing and the relevant protocols and procedures are to be carried out. In this case the child is missing, not absent.

Absent

"A person not at the place where they are expected to be or required to be". Clearly some children absent themselves for a short period and then return and their whereabouts are known. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed, either on purpose or accidentally, and may be testing boundaries. Children who make telephone contact and agree a time to return, but subsequently fail to do could also fall within this definition. This kind of boundary testing is within the range of normal teenage behaviour and not necessarily considered a risk, although a more general response such as additional support and advice may be helpful as behaviour of this nature may fall within a wider safeguarding remit. The clear expectation is that unless there is clear, verifiable information that confirms a child is safe, they must be deemed to be missing and every child regardless of circumstances must be deemed by the Local Authority as missing within four hours.

Example from Practice: a child is challenged about their involvement in an incident in the home. The child becomes angry and walks out of the home. An adult follows the child to attempt to engage with them and encourage them to return to the home; however it becomes apparent that the adult's presence is increasing the child's agitation and turning the situation in to a game of cat and mouse. The adult makes the professional judgement to inform the child they are returning to the home and look forward to the child doing likewise. The child walks on to Lioncare House where the Administrator greets them and makes them comfortable whilst contacting the Home to inform of the child's location and safety. In this case the child is absent, but not missing.

Children who become lost

Children who because of their age or due to a degree of intellectual impairment become separated from their carers, become temporarily disorientated and become missing as a result and would wish to be found. This is clearly very frightening and upsetting for all involved.

Core Values and Beliefs Held by The Lioncare Group

When children are absent without permission or go missing from our care, their welfare and protection is paramount.

Children go missing for a variety of reasons. They must be found as quickly as possible, returned to a safe place, and have a clear opportunity to say what made them go missing. We must listen to their reasons with respect and act accordingly and then support the child to no longer feel they need to absent themselves or go missing again.

All appropriate information must be shared with the Police and other professional agencies in order to facilitate the safe return of the child.

Planning ahead for the possibility of a child going missing is essential and forms part of the combined placement and treatment programme for the child whilst they are living in our homes.

Early strategies, appropriate interventions and pro-active support must be in place to encourage children not to go missing. We recognise there is a link between being absent without permission and/or going missing, and placement stability. Where adults believe there is a serious risk of a child becoming absent without permission and/or going missing, they have a duty to request a placement

¹ Significant period of time is decided on an individual basis for each child, following consultation with the concerned social worker and placing authority, and relates to the age of the child, degree of their understanding, pattern of their needs and perceived level of vulnerability, is agreed during the admission meeting prior to the child being admitted to the home and at regular intervals thereafter.

stability/network meeting is held without delay.

We recognise there is a clear link between children being absent without permission and/or going missing, and increased risk of sexual exploitation. All adults caring for children looked after and supported by The Lioncare Group are expected to remain alert to potential signs of sexual exploitation. The definition of sexual exploitation from the National Working Group is as follows, “the sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive something (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, affection, money) as a result of performing and/or other performing on them, sexual activities”.

We recognise that child sexual exploitation can occur through use of technology without the child’s immediate realisation of what is happening / that they are being exploited, for example the persuasion to post sexual images on the internet with no immediate payment or gain. In all cases those exploiting the child have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength, economic and/or other resources.

We believe that when a child is absent without permission and/or missing, we need to be careful about making judgements that they are safe. **We do not know what we do not know** and no assumptions about safety are made in the absence of clear verified information.

Preventative Measures

The Casework Managers of each child cared for by The Lioncare Group are responsible for ensuring that all personal details relating to the child for which they have responsibility, including contact addresses for family and friends, are recorded on file, and that the key information, including physical appearance etc., recorded on the combined care plan / treatment programme is regularly updated. They are also responsible for ensuring that an up-to-date photograph of the child is available on file.

The whole team of adults in each home and the school are responsible for ensuring the Case Records and Plans for each child, and including Placement Plans, Safeguarding Risk Profiles, Positive Behaviour Support Plans and Individual Education Plans, are regularly reviewed and updated and include the following:-

- the degree and nature of risk and vulnerability should the child become absent without permission or go missing;
- the views of the child and those with potential responsibility on the subject of being absent without permission and/or going missing;
- the level of supervision/support that should be provided for the child
- how colleagues (including the Head Teacher, the Registered Manager, the Service Manager and the Executive Director), other professionals (including teachers and school staff where the child doesn’t attend The Lioncare School), social worker, parents and significant other family members will be informed if the child becomes absent or goes missing.
- consideration of any external influences in the child’s life that may encourage them to become absent or go missing.
- the likelihood of the child being harboured, any previous episodes, location frequented by the child and trigger incidents;
- agreed interventions.

Adults are aware of the importance of planning ahead and remaining aware of the potential for a child to be absent without permission.

Activities are structured and planned to minimise the risk of situations developing in which a child

may feel the need to be absent without permission or go missing. Adult carers remain ready and able to assert their permission in a situation where a child is threatening to be absent without permission or go missing e.g. standing in the way of the child and/or stating forcefully the reasons why they should not leave and why the adults do not want them to leave.

They use their skills and knowledge of the child to ascertain whether the child genuinely wishes to be absent without permission, or whether they actually want to be stopped. The child may be seeking reassurance that the commitment of the adults is high, they may be testing-out boundaries, particularly those of authority and power, or they may be attempting to communicate in the only way they know how to that they are in turmoil, distress, experiencing “break-down” or feel vulnerable.

All adult carers have responsibility for providing the children in their care with opportunities to discuss reasons why someone may wish to be absent without permission, and to provide positive reinforcement of behaviours and attitudes expressed by the children that support non-running away. They endeavour to show genuine care and concern for a child who is making attempts to be absent without permission or to go missing.

If a child displays warning signals of feeling a need to run away, become absent without permission, or go missing, adults attempt to re-establish communication with the child, and find ways to positively reinforce non-running away behaviour. They also attempt to help the child to realise that staying in the home environment is more rewarding/exciting for them than that obtained from the running-away behaviour and that difficulties and problems can be resolved in a better way.

We aim to achieve a healthy balance between:

- addressing issues of boundary setting/maintaining
- helping the child understand the concept of cause-and-effect
- positive reinforcement of non-running behaviour
- non-punitive means of encouraging the child to remain within the boundaries of the living environment and the agreed rules of their placement. This is reflected in the type of reparation (or sanction) applied following an incident of being absent without permission or being missing (note: only applied where such action is deemed beneficial in supporting the child in gaining learning that will help them not to run away, be absent, or go missing in the future). The usual reparation (or sanction) is limited to the child remaining in the home for no-longer than one evening of the same week in which the absence occurred, in the company of an adult, thereby providing opportunity for the child to interact and engage in some form of shared and meaningful activity.

The Lioncare Group believes that educating those responsible for the care and wellbeing of the children living in our homes and attending our school as to the reasons why children run away, make themselves absent without permission, or go missing, is essential in helping to prevent children being absent or missing.

Children may run away or go absent without permission or go missing for many reasons including, but not restricted to, the following;

- An attempt to protect themselves from abuse, including bullying, or perceived threats of abuse and/or bullying.
- As a result of peer group pressures. Peer group pressures can re-enforce the risk-taking decisions being made by children and also can create group based norms and expectations around what others might view as risky being viewed by the group as fun and ‘a buzz’.
- Being scared and/or afraid, feeling unable to cope or feeling dis-connected from the adults around them; they may feel they are failures or not valued with regard to some aspect of their lives that has not been apparent to adults who otherwise seem close to them.

- They may have been enticed or persuaded to go missing; been abducted by an adult who is acting inappropriately and who is using the child to meet their needs; or been rejected by the parents/family members e.g. failed to attend a contact visit or send a birthday card or present.
- There may be particular ‘push’ or ‘pull factors pushing or pulling the child away from the home. Children may run from Home due to negative factors there (e.g. the arrival of a new child or adult, or some other change in the dynamic of the current children’s group or adult group), or they may run to a peer group of children or adults to whom they feel a sense of belonging or loyalty.
- A less commonly understood but nonetheless real situation affecting many of the children looked after by The Lioncare Group is the belief that if they run away from the home, then they can run away from their unbearable past experiences, difficulties, and problems, or those they are experiencing in the here and now of the present day, or that they face in their not too distant future (e.g. resurfacing memories of abuse, having to take responsibility for a wrongdoing, or being confronted with the reality of having to begin thinking about moving on and leaving the Home or School).

Responding To A Child Running Away, Being Absent, Or Going Missing

Procedure: Step 1 – Assessing the Risk

In all cases of a child being absent without permission and/or missing, the child concerned is regarded as being at risk and vulnerable. We recognise that being absent without permission or missing may be the child’s way of communicating their own perceived state of turmoil, distress or vulnerability, or of feeling unsafe or at risk, or of projecting in to those around them the unbearable feelings they are experiencing and cannot contain (e.g. a need to make others feel the same overwhelming anxiety that the child is feeling, and that may unrelated to anything happening in the here and now). As such, the adults caring for the children looked after by The Lioncare Group do not view such behaviour as being a control issue, difficult behaviour, or an act of delinquency. Instead, a non-punitive and concerned approach is adopted.

Assessing Risk

The teams of adults working with the children in our care endeavour to maintain consistency of approach in regards to dealing with situations of absence without permission and/or going missing. In assessing the significance of a child’s absence from their Home or School, the above definitions and guidance, and agreements already contained in the child’s combined placement and treatment programme, are taken into consideration and include:

- The age of the child;
- The legal status of the child;
- Previous behaviour and history;
- The emotional needs of the child, e.g. whether there has been any variation in their mood or whether they have expressed any intention to harm themselves or others;
- Behaviour of the child as influenced by peer groups or others;
- Mental and physical health needs;
- Whether the child has been the victim or perpetrator of violent, homophobic and/or racist incidents prior to disappearance;
- Whether the child has been subjected to bullying;
- Is the child suspected to be a subject to crime in progress, e.g. abduction?
- Whether the child is perceived as running to/running from someone/something;
- The risk of offending;

- The risk that the child may be targeted for sexual exploitation.

Agreed Framework to Assess and Clarify Risk

The Lioncare Group has adopted the 'Traffic Light' framework set out below and that is consistently applied in Brighton & Hove across all relevant agencies and practitioners.

The children in our care who may present on admission with a history of going missing behaviour, or who may begin displaying such patterns of behaviour in response to, or testing the limits of, the consistency of care we offer, will generally be graded as Orange or Red, rather than the lower grading. It is recognised that most children in care are in care due to the instability and difficulty in their lives and consequently are more likely to experience a number of vulnerabilities compared to the general population.

The framework set out below does not reduce or otherwise remove the duty and responsibility of all adults employed by The Lioncare Group to use their professional judgement to take any action they feel is necessary to protect the safety of a child, based on an assessment of risk, report concerns to the responsible agency, and share data and intelligence where doing so is likely to promote the safety of a child or children.

GREEN – Requires determination of RISK = LEVEL 2

These children have low level additional needs that are likely to be short-term and that may be known but are not being met, or who may have additional needs requiring multi-agency intervention and a lead professional or team around the child.

Indicators/Risk Factors

The Child

- Occasional truanting or non-school attendance
- School action or school action plus
- Identified language and communication difficulties
- Few or no qualifications
- Slow in reaching developmental milestones
- Minor health problems which can be maintained in a mainstream school
- Low level mental health or emotional issues requiring intervention
- Pro-offending behaviour and attitudes
- Early onset of offending behaviour or activity (10-14)
- Coming to notice of police through low level offending
- Expressing wish to become pregnant at a young age
- Early onset of sexual activity (13-14)
- Sexually active (15+) with inconsistent use of contraception
- Low level substance misuse (current or historical)
- Poor self-esteem
- Lack of age appropriate behaviour and independent living skills that increase vulnerability to social exclusion

The Home

- Adult carers request advice to manage the child's behaviour
- Adult carers require advice regarding social exclusion e.g. hate crimes
- The child is unsettled in placement and struggling to form positive, stable relationships there
- Associating with anti-social or criminally active peers
- Not accessing contraceptive and sexual health advice, information and services
- The child experienced the above difficulties whilst living at home or in previous placements.

Previous Experience: The child experienced the following difficulties in their background:

- Inconsistent care whilst living with family or alternative setting e.g. inappropriate child care arrangements or young inexperienced parent
- Inconsistent parenting whilst living with family or alternative setting, but development was not significantly impaired
- Lack of response to concerns raised regarding the child whilst living with family or alternative setting.

AMBER –To be screened to DETERMINE RISK = LEVEL 3

Children being cared for by The Lioncare Group may experience ambivalence on occasion and at different stages of their placement, towards the need for them to be and towards those caring for them. For a few children this ambivalence, dissatisfaction, or unhappiness may be acted out by regularly going missing; either running away from the home or their carers or running away to friends or family members who might explicitly or complicity encourage or allow this. In each case the risks associated with the people or places they run to must be as fully investigated as possible. Additionally, preventive strategies such as working closely with the child must be developed to address such underlying causes of runaway behaviour. These may include children who have been assessed as “high risk” in the recent past, or children who are working through and reflecting on particularly difficult aspects of their past experiences, present realities, or future plans (e.g. chronology work, restorative justice, or transition planning) and now require additional support. The allocated Social Worker will act in the role as the Lead Professional.

Indicators/Risk Factors

The Child

- Short-term school exclusions or at risk of permanent exclusion and/or persistent truanting
- Statement of Special Educational Needs
- Disability requiring specialist support to be maintained in mainstream setting
- Appears to have undifferentiated attachments
- Physical and emotional development raising significant concerns
- Chronic/recurring health problems which they reject help with
- Missing appointments – routine and non-routine
- Under 16 and has had (or caused) a previous pregnancy ending in still birth, abortion and miscarriage
- Coming to notice of police on a regular basis but not progressed
- Received fixed penalty notice, reprimand, final warning or triage of diversionary intervention
- Evidence of regular/frequent drug use which may be combined with other risk factors
- Evidence of escalation of substance use
- Evidence of changing attitudes and more disregard to risk
- Mental health issues requiring specialist intervention in the community
- Significant low self-esteem
- Victim of crime including discrimination
- Lack of age appropriate behaviour and independent living skills, likely to impair development

Previous Experiences: The child experienced some of the following factors in their family background:

- Physical care or supervision of the child was inadequate or parents had learning disability, parental substance misuse or mental health impacting on parent’s ability to meet the needs of the child, non-compliance with professionals, inconsistent parenting impairing emotional or behavioural development, inconsistent boundaries or responses

RED –ENHANCED DETERMINATION OF RISK = LEVEL 4

Many of these notifications will initiate a S.47 as they relate to a child who may well be experiencing or at risk of significant harm that requires statutory intervention such as child protection or legal intervention.

Indicators/Risk Factors

The Child

- Chronic non-school attendance and/or truanting
- Permanently excluded from school, frequent exclusions or no educational provision
- High level disability which cannot be maintained in a mainstream setting
- Serious physical and emotional health problems
- Challenging behaviour resulting in serious risk to the child and others
- Failure or rejection to address serious (re)offending behaviour. Likely to be in cohort of youth offending management
- Evasive, inconsistent or shut down with carers and social workers or other key professionals about where they have been & who with when missing.
- Known to be part of gang or postcode-derived collective
- Part of a peer group who mutually influence going missing from foster or children's home as well as pro-offending and risk taking behaviour
- Appears to be receiving sums of money regularly from unknown sources
- Complex mental health issues requiring specialist interventions
- In sexually exploitative relationship
- Under 13 engaged in sexual activity
- Frequently go missing from home for long periods
- Distorted self-image
- Appears to be experiencing current harm through their use of substances
- Has complicated substance problems requiring specific interventions and/or child protection
- Other children in their peer group or former peer group begin to express concerns about them
- Has complex needs whose issues are exacerbated by substance use
- Severe lack of age appropriate behaviour and independent living skills likely to result in significant harm e.g. bullying, isolation

Previous Experience: The child experienced the following difficulties in their background:

- Has a history of being exposed whilst at home to a range of risk factors, instability and abuse caused by adult mental health, substance misuse, learning difficulty and domestic abuse and this has caused significant issues in the child forming stable and trusting relationships with carers and professionals.
- Finding it hard to make a commitment to being at their home placement due to above reasons
- Strong push and pull factors repeatedly influencing the child's behaviour.
- No-one in network of carers and key professionals is able to get clear information from the child on what they are doing for large periods of time.

Guidance on the Framework to Assess and Clarify Risk

GREEN - This risk grading category is broadly for children with lower risk indicators who have gone missing more than once but not repeatedly. This can mean however that as information is gathered or a missing episode is prolonged that a decision is needed to upgrade the response to Amber. A Green Level Response would be for consideration of Single Assessment. For children in our care, a strategy meeting would be held and it is expected that this would contain an updated assessment of risk in view of the missing episode or episode. For a child who goes missing regularly, the view may be taken by the lead professional that a free-standing risk assessment is necessary.

There must be evidence that the child's risk assessment contained in their combined care and treatment programme is being updated by new incidents and consideration of upgrading new incidents on top of the evidence of this in the strategy meetings.

AMBER - This risk grading category relates to a child who may go missing repeatedly, (i.e. 3 or more times), and where there are ongoing risk factors/risk-taking behaviours. A single assessment is mandatory for Amber graded missing episodes. Where more concerning information is received it

may be necessary to hold a strategy discussion.

RED - This risk grading category relates to those cases where there are multiple risk factors and evidence that significant harm may be being caused. These risks are viewed as being both significant and/or immediate. Strategy Meetings for missing children in care in this red risk band should always re-evaluate risks and recommend pro-active actions to address these risks. Red graded children in care cases would normally be referred by the Local Area Safeguarding Board to the Vulnerable Children's Liaison Group or Care Planning forum in order that a review of risks and thresholds can be undertaken and a proportionate and effective care plan agreed, unless actions agreed at strategy meetings or child in care reviews are starting to be effective in reducing risk. In some of these cases it will be necessary to consider whether legal advice is required to test whether secure accommodation thresholds on welfare grounds are being met.

Procedure: Step 2 – Locating the Child

Having assessed the risk², adults take agreed actions to locate the child.

- An adult undertakes a thorough search of the area and immediate vicinity in which the child was last known to have been, so long as it is deemed safe to do so (i.e. with regard to the potential risk to the adult of doing so, such as the time of day or night, the relative safety of the area, and the potential risk to the adult if they are searching in isolation and away from others).
- The senior team member on duty initiates a thorough search of the building and grounds around the home or school and contacts adults in the other homes (and where applicable, the school) operated by The Lioncare Group to ascertain if they or the children in the homes / school have any knowledge or information that may assist locating the child.
- Adults are pro-active alongside the police in checking known contact phone numbers and addresses in order to ensure that very active attempts are made to find the child by all who know them; it is not expected that the search responsibilities rest just with the police.
- Where appropriate as determined by the adults on duty and with responsibility for the care of the children, a special House Meeting (or special Community Meeting in school) is called for the purpose of asking the other children if they know of or are party to any information that may assist the adults in locating the absent or missing child and helping them to be returned.
- An adult considered to have a good relationship with the child then initiates a wider search of the community, particularly locations or friends known to be visited by the child. The adult maintains regular communication with the home / school throughout.

Procedure: Step 3 – Reporting the Child as Absent or Missing

If a search proves unsuccessful, a statement is written in the daily log book detailing:

- the time the child was found to be absent without permission or missing
- the last known movements of the child
- the last known interaction between the child and others (adult or child)
- the clothing worn by the child before being absent without permission

Once the significant period of time has elapsed, all relevant information is logged in the daily log book, section 1 of an absent without permission form completed.

The absent without permission form includes information relating to the following:-

- Name of child
- Date of Birth
- Placement

² The assessment of risk is expedited through much of the above having been undertaken prior to any event or situation of a child actually being absent or going missing.

- Care status
- Circumstances relating to the child
- Specific risks relating to the child being missing

The shift co-ordinator or senior adult on duty is responsible for notifying the following:

- Sussex Police (the following information will be passed to the police: 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 child's Placing Authority (out of normal office hours, the duty team are contacted)
- Parents and/or family members where appropriate and named in the child's care plan
- The Registered Manager (The Registered Manager in turn is responsible for alerting the Service Manager and/or the Executive Director of The Lioncare Group at the point when the Registered manager considers this appropriate and necessary, depending on the specific circumstances of the situation).

If the child who is absent without permission or missing is risk assessed as being at Red (level 4 – i.e. significant risk of harm), the Registered Manager is informed immediately and without delay. They then initiate the relevant Safeguarding procedures in line with the local Area Safeguarding Team policy. In the absence of the Registered Manager, notification is made immediately and without delay to the Service Manager (or Executive Director in their absence).

In all cases where a child goes missing who is the subject of Police Protection, the Police are informed immediately.

Where appropriate, the situation is openly discussed with the other children living at the home (or attending the school) in a supportive and sensitive manner in order for it to become a learning opportunity for the other children, and to support them in managing their own fears and anxieties. Planned activities and routines are where possible followed through to help the children see the benefits of non-running away behaviour.

The Registered Manager consults with the referring authorities service manager, police, parents, carers, significant others, school and all concerned agencies with the aim of agreeing a strategy for further action if the child remains missing for longer than 24 hours.

In all circumstances where a child has been missing for more than 24 hours, the Registered Manager will ensure a Strategy Meeting has been called by Brighton & Hove, to which the Police are invited. The Strategy Meeting will also be attended by the Registered Manager (or in their absence, the Deputy Manager), and depending on the circumstances, the Service Manager and/or the Executive Director of The Lioncare Group. This meeting must take place within 3 days of a child being missing. If the circumstances relating to a child are particularly concerning then an immediate Strategy Meeting must be convened. If the child is found before the Strategy Meeting takes place, consideration must be given to the Strategy Meeting going ahead to consider the circumstances relating to the child's missing episode.

The Strategy Meeting will consider the following:-

- Information relating to potential risk/harm
- At what stage publicity will be sought
- Information relating to possible locations
- What contact has there been with the child
- Whether secure accommodation should be considered
- A clear strategy for finding the child
- Any additional specific information which should be passed

All Strategy Meetings are minuted and the minutes circulated within 48 hours of the meeting. A date must be set for the next Strategy Meeting in the event of a child not being found (this will need to be

brought forward if there is evidence of potential/actual harm/risks increasing).

In situations where a child is missing for periods of time, but not enough to trigger the action points in the protocol, a Strategy Meeting must be considered with any rationale not to hold a Strategy Meeting clearly recorded.

Regardless of the circumstances where there have been three missing or absent episodes within a six month period, a Planning Meeting is convened to which the Police are invited. This meeting will look at the broader care planning issues around the child as well as looking at specific missing episodes.

Procedure: Step 5 – Return of the Child

Immediately upon the child being found and/or returned to the home (or school), or being notified that the child is found or located, the shift co-ordinator or senior adult on duty is responsible for ensuring the following have been notified and made aware:

- Sussex Police
- The child's Placing Authority (out of normal office hours, the duty team are contacted)
- Parents and/or family members where appropriate and named in the child's care plan
- The Head Teacher (where applicable)
- The Registered Manager (The Registered Manager in turn is responsible for updating the Service Manager and/or the Executive Director of The Lioncare Group).

The shift co-ordinator or senior adult on duty is responsible for ensuring all and any relevant information relating to the period that the child was absent or missing is gained and recorded clearly in the homes log book.

If the whereabouts of the child become known to the adults but the child is not in a place of safety, the adults immediately make arrangements to notify the local police in the area where the child is for the purpose of ensuring the child is protected and safe as soon as is possible.

The adults then make the necessary arrangements with the police to either go and collect the child or, if the police are prepared to do so, await the child's return by the police.

On their return, the child is welcomed back in to the home. This is vital in helping to promote in the child the sense of a level of trust that the adults really care about them, that the home is a caring, nurturing and concerned place to live, and that as an individual, they are valued and of worth.

The child is offered food and a drink. An adult is identified to undertake this action and ensure that the child's needs are met. Depending on the length of the absence without permission or the child being missing, the time of day of the return of the child, their apparent state of mind and physical condition, and with regard to any instruction by the police (i.e. in the event of the child possibly having been subject to sexual exploitation that may or may not necessitate them being medically examined), the child may be offered the opportunity of taking a bath/shower and a change of clothing.

The child is informed of the genuine concern about them shared by the whole group, and of the need to discuss the absence, but that this can wait until they have settled back in to the home. An attempt is made to ascertain whether the child has sustained any injury, assault (physical and/or sexual) or other event requiring immediate attention, whilst being absent without permission or missing. If so, they are given immediate access to resources appropriate to their needs.

If the child is returned by the police, information regarding where the child was found, whom they were with and any other relevant details are sought from the attending officers.

Following the return of the child, part 2 of the absence without permission form is completed and copies distributed accordingly.

At all times, adults caring for the children strive to actively seek to gain a genuine understanding of

the individual child's circumstances and experiences which are triggering episodes of running away, being absent or going missing. Adults show the child genuine concern by;

- Being understanding, calm and relaxed with when interacting with the child, regardless of the circumstances leading up to and during the child's absence.
- Seek to maintain a trusting relationship with the child and remain non-judgemental
- Be straightforward, honest, and genuine with the child; if the adult was anxious for the child, let them know.
- Listen to the child and accept what they are saying as a serious communication.
- Explain things to the child in a way they may understand.
- Offer the child choices and never force a child into making decisions, and especially decisions they don't fully comprehend.
- At all times, show the child respect; if they don't experience you respecting them, then how can you expect them to respect you?

Conducting Safe & Well Checks When Children Are Found

Safe and Well checks are an essential initial response once an absent or missing child is located. They may be carried out by social workers, police officers, adult carers or other authorised professionals. This is in order to ensure that any immediate care needs a child has are met, whether for food, medical attention, someone to talk to, to disclose to or to have adults who can help them feel safe from any immediate risks they feel are continuing.

They may lead to other forms of help being provided, (e.g. medical appointment), non-uniformed police officer being called to speak to and listen to the child.

If the child feels able to disclose more fully where they have been, what they have been doing and who with, then this can be reported back as a full return interview. When a child has chosen to engage with and trust a certain adult with important information, they do so for a reason. If the adult chosen by the child is someone from their home placement, it may not be considered necessary for a social worker or police officer or similar to do the same. However, this will need to be confirmed with all relevant parties and never assumed.

Any adult carer to whom a child begins to share such information must ensure they have explained fully to the child, before they share the information, that the information may well need to be shared with others and that the adult would never make a promise "not to tell" as this would not be a proper way of looking after children.

If the child has disclosed more fully to an adult carer where they have been, what they have been doing, and who with etc. then the Registered Manager is responsible for ensuring this information is fully logged and recorded, that the child is made aware that this information will need to be shared with others (and with whom so far as this is possible to say), and for confirming with the allocated social worker that these safe and well checks have been done.

Arrangements for Return Home Interviews and Who Offers Them

Return Home Interviews (RHI's) are a key way of seeking to actively find out the risks children have been exposed to when missing as well as to listen to their concerns and difficulties and demonstrate concern for their welfare. If the child is able to engage with this it can lead into discussions about how to prevent these situations arising in future, what help the child may need and whether this help can make them feel less the need to run away/go missing. All runaway behaviour is a reaction to something which troubles the child and/or a seeking of attention and excitement which they may feel is lacking for them. It is this unmet need which can make runaway children so vulnerable to exploitation.

National Statutory Guidance makes clear, however, that there is evidence that children may not feel able to open up fully to their carers, statutory key worker, to the police or to other authority figures. Once children are beginning to get into trouble and behave in ways they know that responsible adults would disapprove of, they may be less likely to have an honest and open conversation due their fear of the consequences for themselves or others whom they seek to protect. The Guidance is based on the results from pilot projects and authorities which have used an Independent Return Interview scheme. This provides children with the opportunity to speak with an adult who has no role in decision making in their lives and importantly no role in having to appear to make judgements about their behaviour.

Brighton & Hove City Council has recently made the decision to stop using the charity 'Missing People' for the purpose of conducting RHI's. Instead RHI's are now conducted in house by Brighton & Hove City Council. The missing person's coordinator for Brighton & Hove City Council is Bethany Byrne (bethany.byrne@brighton-hove.gov.uk).

The Brighton & Hove Missing Person's Team only take referrals via the Police for those children reported as missing and not absent. They share information in accordance with "Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)". The Missing Person's team receive instant notifications from the police system every time a child goes missing and returns. When the child returns, the police notification automatically prompts an RHI referral to the Missing Person's Team unless the team is told not to go ahead. The Missing Person's team attempt to make contact with the child, meet the child, and conduct the RHI. An RHI report is shared with the police.

If the RHI is declined by a parent or carer, or if the child is unreachable then the referral is closed. As long as the child went missing within the Brighton & Hove City region, the Missing Person's team will offer the RHI. An RHI is not offered outside of the Brighton & Hove City region; in this situation the child's placing authority is contacted by the relevant Registered Manager (or by a team member delegated to undertake this task) and that placing authorities own procedures for conducting RHI's is followed and/or alternative steps to conduct an RHI are taken and as agreed with that placing authority.

Responsibility for Maintaining a Safe Environment

Where a child has been absent or missing, adults must be aware of the potential that the child may have introduced in to the home objects or substances that are not permitted (e.g. weapons, drugs, alcohol etc.). With this in mind, the child should be quietly but diligently be monitored throughout the following 24 hours period and any indication that they may have such object or substance on their person or in their possession must be addressed immediately to avoid unnecessary risk of harm to self or others.

Likewise, situations of frequent or persistent running away, being absent without permission, or going missing, may be considered to constitute a breakdown of placement. Under guidance and instruction from the Service Manager and Executive Director of The Lioncare Group, and with due regard to any procedures being initiated by the child's placing authority or by Brighton & Hove (the host authority), the Registered Manager may need to initiate a planning meeting to raise the issues, or in serious cases the disrupting placement process may be triggered. This is an unfortunate but essential consideration for senior managers of The Lioncare Group to hold at all times in order to maintain a safe facilitating therapeutic environment not only for the child in question, but also the other children living at the home, the adults caring for them, and for all those living and working in The Lioncare Group.