



**Kent County Council**

# **Children Missing from Care - Guidance for Foster Carers**

**Kent Fostering & Kinship Service**

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### 1. Introduction:

When a child in care is missing without a foster carers permission but the foster carer/s know where the child is, they will need to treat the situation differently to when they don't know where the child has gone. This policy, in accordance with Regulation 13 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2011, sets out the procedure to be followed if a child is missing in both of these circumstances. These procedures are compatible with the [Kent Safeguarding Children Multiagency Partnership Runaway & Missing from Home & Care Protocol](#) and underpinned by the [Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care](#).

Under Fostering National Minimum Standard 5 foster carers must ensure that;

- *The care and support provided to children minimises the risk that they will go missing and reduces the risk of harm should the child go missing.*
- *They know and implement what the fostering service and the responsible authority's policy is in relation to children going missing.*
- *They are aware of, and do not exceed, the measures they can take to prevent a child leaving without permission. See [Kent Fostering Service Promoting Positive Behaviour & Safer Care Policy](#).*
- *Children who are absent from the foster home without consent, but whose whereabouts are known or thought to be known by carers, are protected in line with the procedure detailed in this policy.*
- *In partnership with the fostering service and responsible authority take appropriate action to find children who are missing, including working alongside the police where appropriate.*

- *Help children to understand the dangers and risks of leaving the foster home without permission and are made aware of where they can access help if they consider running away.*
- *Where a child goes missing and there is concern for their welfare, or at the request of a child who has been missing, work with the fostering service and responsible authority to consider the reasons for the child going missing and what action should be taken to prevent the child going missing in future.*
- *In partnership with the fostering service and where agreed appropriate, challenge the responsible authority where a 'Missing Conversation' is not undertaken by childrens services to privately speak with the child and consider their reasons for going missing and any concerns that need to be explored and addressed.*

## 2. Definitions

The [Statutory Guidance On Children Who Run Away Or Go Missing From Home Or Care](#) uses the following terms in relation to missing children:

**Missing Child:** A child or young person reported as missing to the police by his family or carers;

**Looked after child missing from care:** Where a looked after child is missing from their placement and their whereabouts are not known and /or the child is known or suspected to be at risk;

**Away from Placement Without Authorisation:** Where a looked-after child's whereabouts is known or thought to be known but unconfirmed.

**Young Runaway:** A child or young person under the age of 18 who has run away from their home or placement or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.

The Police, as the lead agency for investigating and finding missing children, will respond to children going missing or being absent from their foster home based on ongoing risk assessment. The police use the following definitions;

**Absent:** A person is not at a place where they are expected or required to be (and there is no apparent risk)'.

**Missing:** Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another'.

## 3. What to do when a child is absent from the foster home

Some children will absent themselves from their foster home or not return home at an agreed time, for example following a boundary being put in place that they don't agree with or lose track of time. This can be worrying for foster carers, particularly if

the child stops communicating with them and the foster carer doesn't know immediately where they are and/or who they are with. It is important however to remember that the child is not necessarily at risk and that this kind of boundary testing is well within the range of normal teenage behaviour and should not normally come within the definition of "missing".

When a child has left or not returned to their foster home, foster carers must act like any responsible parent and take all practical steps to establish the child's whereabouts and ensure that they return to their home without delay. This includes the following:

- Contact the child, their friends, family, associates.
- Search the home, surrounding areas and vehicles for indicators of where the child might be, explain their absence and assist if finding them (e.g. mobile phones, social media, website activity, diaries).
- Speak with other children and adults who live in the foster home.
- Attend the place where the child is and collect them if it is safe to do so.

The foster carer must detail in the child's diary records that the child was absent without authorisation/permission and inform the child's social worker who will record the absence on the child's Liberi case notes.

#### **4. What to do if a child is missing from the foster home**

Foster Carers should consider a child missing if they are absent from the foster home without permission **and** their absence causes concern for their welfare or safety. It may also be outside of their normal pattern of behaviour to go unaccounted for. The child's level of vulnerability should be taken into account, alongside any relevant information in their Care Plan and Safe Care Plan when making a judgement about risk.

If a child is deemed as **missing** foster carers must report the child as missing to the police first and then immediately inform the child's social worker and the fostering social worker.

If the child is deemed missing outside of KCC working hours, once the foster carers have reported this to the police, they must immediately contact the County Out of Hours Service on **03000 419191** to also report the child as missing (and can expect to receive advice, guidance and support where needed).

The foster carer must detail in the child's diary records that the child was missing and the child's social worker will record the matter on the child's Liberi case record.

#### **5. What happens when a child returns to their foster home**

If and when a child returns to their foster home following being missing, foster carers can expect the child to be seen by their social worker and/or other appropriate person (i.e. duty social worker) and offered a 'Missing Conversation' within 72 hours of their return.

The purpose of the Missing Conversation is to explore and understand the reasons why the child went missing; explore and understand the circumstances around the missing episode; prevent future missing episodes; learn activities, associates and risks and address those risks with protective strategies; and identify and address harm that the child might have suffered.

A review of placement arrangements may take place to ensure any learning from the Missing Conversation is agreed and clear for the foster carer and the Safe Care Plan would ordinarily be amended in discussion with the foster carer, child (if appropriate), fostering social worker and child's worker to ensure that the foster carer is clear and able to put in place any agreed change to manage missing episodes.

## **6. Young People 18 – 21 years old 'Staying Put' in the foster home**

Any young person living with foster carers under a 'Staying Put' arrangement is an adult and the fact that they are over 18 should be considered but not to the detriment of considering any vulnerability of which the foster carer is aware when making a judgement about risk.

If the foster carer and young person have communicated and there are no concerns for the young person's welfare or safety then no further action needs to be taken. It is also important for foster carers to remember however, that young people are expected to be in their staying put arrangement for at least four nights per week and if they are at home less than this, the carer must inform the young person's personal advisor and their fostering social worker, who will meet with the young person to try to find out why they are not staying there and to try to find a solution to re-engage them. If the young person continues not to use the arrangement the Personal Advisor will escalate it to their manager

If the young person cannot be reached or located and the foster carer believes them to be at risk, then they must report their concerns to the police and then the County Out of Hours Service on **03000 419191**.