

***MISSING CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE
AND PREGNANT
WOMEN***

***Insert for local Inter-
agency Child Protection
Procedures***

**Safeguarding Children
North East England
Regional Inter-agency Procedures**

MISSING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND PREGNANT WOMEN

Where a child/young person is missing from a local authority placement, the SSD/Police protocol 'Responding to Children and Young People who are Missing from Placement' is to be followed instead.

1. Recognition and Referral/Notification

Practitioners should refer to Social Services in any of the following circumstances:

- A child/young person, known to a statutory agency, who goes missing in suspicious circumstances (with or without their families) about whom there are developing concerns for their safety.
- A child/young person or unborn baby who is the subject of referral defined as child protection or subject to child protection (S47) enquiries.
- A child/young person on the Child Protection Register who goes missing or is removed from his/her address outside the terms of the child protection plan.
- A pregnant woman who goes missing when there are concerns about the welfare of the expected baby.

2. Education

As a result of daily registration, schools are particularly well placed to notice when a child/young person has gone missing. Head Teachers should inform the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) about any child/young person who has not attended school for ten days without provision of reasonable explanation. The EWO should make reasonable enquiries, such as home visit, liaison with Social Services or Housing and notify the school if it appears that the child/young person has moved out of the area. The EWO should contact the School Nurse for information and should inform her if it appears the child/young person has moved out of the area.

Head Teachers should inform the EWO and Social Services immediately if a child/young person who fits one of the categories listed above appears to be missing.

3. Health

Where a Health professional has concerns regarding a child/young person/unborn baby's welfare and the child/young person/family/pregnant woman is missing, reasonable enquiries should be made with the General Practitioner/Health Visitor/School Nurse to ascertain their whereabouts. Discussions should take place with a Manager and/or Health Child Protection Adviser. If the child/young person remains untraced, consideration should be given to making a referral to Social Services for initial assessment of need and, if necessary, child protection enquiries.

4. Police

Every case of a missing child/young person/pregnant woman must be considered for referral to Social Services for initial assessment of need and, if necessary, child protection enquiries. On all occasions, the Police Child Protection IT systems should be checked for previous involvement. Police Officers should also refer to the ACPO Manual on Missing Persons.

5. Social Services

Where notified of a child in any of the circumstances listed in Section 1, Social Services must inform the local Child Protection Police without delay.

The Custodian of the Child Protection Register must be informed if the child/young person or unborn baby is on the Register.

If the child/young person is the subject of court proceedings or a court order, legal services must be informed.

Social Services must contact all local agencies/professionals, including Education and Health, who are involved with the child/young person to inform them of the situation and to seek any information which may assist in the search.

The Designated Nurse for Child Protection should be informed about the missing child/young person or pregnant woman. S/he will inform the Named Nurses for the PCT(s) and NHS Trust(s) in the area. The Named Nurses will inform key professionals within their Trusts.

Education Child Protection Officers (or equivalent) should be informed and are to ensure liaison with relevant Education colleagues.

Existing records in all agencies must be checked to obtain any information which may help to trace the missing child, for example, details of friends and relatives. This information is to be passed to the Police Officer undertaking the missing person enquiry.

6. Strategy Meeting

If, following the above, the missing child/young person or pregnant woman has not been traced, a Strategy Meeting should be convened within two working days of Social Services being notified that the child/young person/family or pregnant woman is missing.

The Strategy Meeting must include representatives from Social Services, Police, Health, Education (if a school-age child) and any other agency which has current or recent involvement with the child/young person/family or pregnant woman.

Members of the meeting must:

- Consider whether to circulate other local authorities and agencies in the area(s) in which the child/young person/family/pregnant woman may have gone.
- Consider whether there should be national notification of authorities and agencies including Department for Work and Pensions, the Benefits Agency, Child Benefit Agency, NHS National Intelligence Unit and National Missing Persons Helpline.
- Decide whether assistance should be sought from the Department for Work and Pensions (in which case this should be by a senior member of Social Services).
- Consider the need for legal intervention if there is any suspicion that the child or young person may be removed from UK jurisdiction.

7. Follow up Social Services Action

If the Strategy Meeting agreed that the details of the child/young person/family or pregnant woman are to be circulated to other local authorities/agencies, the Key Worker/Social Worker should draft a letter giving details of:

- The children in the family

- Their legal status
- Parties with parental responsibility
- Other family members or significant adults
- Whether the child's name is on the Child Protection Register and if so, the category
- The circumstances causing concern
- Action required if the child/pregnant woman is found
- Details of contact arrangements for the Key Worker/Social Worker, also out of office hours contact arrangements
- Where possible physical descriptions and photographs of the child/young person, pregnant woman and any others involved.

The letter should be sent to the Custodian of the Child Protection Register for distribution to the other Register Custodians in the specified areas, who in turn should circulate within Social Services and to local agencies.

The Custodian should inform the Head of Children's Services (or equivalent).

Where a missing child is subject to registration on the Child Protection Register and is not found within 20 working days (of initial notification to Social Services) the Review Child Protection Conference must be brought forward to consider whether any other action should be taken.

8. When the Child/Young Person or Pregnant Woman is Found

When the child/young person or pregnant woman is found, Social Services in the home authority should hold a Strategy Meeting/Discussion within the working day to consider:

- Immediate safety issues
- Whether to instigate a child protection (S47) enquiry and/or any Police investigation
- Who will interview the child/young person (See below)
- Who needs to be informed, locally and nationally, that the child/young person or pregnant woman has been found.

If the child/young person or pregnant woman has been found outside of the home authority area and is not likely to return, representatives from the host authority must be involved in the Strategy Meeting/Discussion and the transfer of the case must be discussed

9. Interviewing the Child/Young Person

When a missing child/young person is found, an interview should take place. This should happen regardless of whether s/he is believed to have experienced, or be at risk of, significant harm.

A Social Worker and/or a Police Officer should undertake this interview. If the child/young person indicates a wish to be interviewed by an alternative professional, all reasonable efforts must be made to accommodate their wishes.

The interview should provide a safe opportunity for the child/young person to discuss any concerns regarding their care, including if they chose to run away from an abusive situation. Whoever undertakes the interview should endeavour to ensure that it takes place without parents or carers present or in close proximity. If the parents/carers do not agree to the child/young person being interviewed in private, the Social Worker should discuss the circumstances of the case with his/her Manager and, if thought necessary, legal advice sought.

10. Decision Making for All Cases

Following any child protection (s47) enquiry, there must be inter-agency liaison to agree the next steps. This must include consideration of whether it is necessary to hold an Initial Child Protection Conference or, in the case of a registered child, to bring forward the Review Child Protection Conference.

11. Children Missing from other Local Authority Areas

Social Services must ensure that there is a system for keeping and referring to the notifications of children and/or pregnant women who are missing and that duty/intake staff are kept informed.

12. More than One Incident of a Child/Young Person Missing from Home

SSD must ensure that there is a system for centrally collating relevant information relating to all incidents of a child/young person going missing from home, in order to develop a multi-agency co-ordinated response.

13. Other Relevant Procedures

Depending on the circumstances, practitioners should refer to the following regional inter-agency documents:

- Forced Marriage: Safeguarding Children and Young People
- Safeguarding Children and Young People from Abroad
- Sexual Exploitation through Prostitution: Safeguarding Children and Young People
- Cross Boundary Issues: Safeguarding Children and Young People
