

## MKSCB MISSING CHILD POLICY

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- [Milton Keynes Council CYPS and Thames Valley Police Joint Protocol](#) concerning children and young people who run away or go missing from home or care.
- Thames Valley [Missing Children's Guidance](#) (2010)
- [Children Missing Education](#) (MK Council)
- [DCSF Statutory guidance](#) on children who run away from home or care, July 2009
- Association of Chief Police Officers Management, recording and investigation of missing persons
- National Police Improvement Agency Investigation of Missing Persons

Health staff should also refer to the NHS East Midland Missing Children and families Alert System (May 2011). This is the process to locate children who have disappeared from view following an undisclosed change of address and for whom there may be concerns about child welfare in respect of unmet need, vulnerability or abuse.

### DID YOU KNOW?

In Milton Keynes around 400 children and young people go missing each year – of these some go missing repeatedly. This means there are around 650 incidents of missing children and young people per year in Milton Keynes.

Females are more likely to run away than males.

The peak age range for running away is 14- to 15-years old.

Certain young people are more likely to runaway including those who define themselves as being gay, lesbian, disabled or having a learning disability as well as those living in stepfamilies and lone parent families.

There are strong links between running away and problems in other areas of young people's lives – such as school, drug and alcohol use and offending.

Research shows that a quarter of young runaways felt that they were forced to leave home. One in six of young runaways slept rough on the most recent occasion they were away. Half stayed with friends.

One in eight runaways said that they had to resort to survival strategies such as stealing and begging whilst away from home.

Around one in 12 of runaways said that they had been hurt or harmed on the most recent occasion that they ran away.

Over two-thirds of runaways said that their parents or carers did not report them missing to the police on the most recent occasion that they were away. A further 13% were not sure, and only a fifth (19%) said that they had been reported.<sup>1</sup>

#### REMEMBER

There is a distinction between young people who runaway and those who are forced to leave by their parents or carers.

Children and young people who are forced to leave will often not be reported missing – also many young people reported as missing are not runaways.

If a child is taken overseas it may be appropriate to contact the Consular Directorate at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office which offers assistance to British nationals in distress (Tel: 020 7008 1500).

#### CIRCUMSTANCES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF PROCEDURE

This procedure applies if any child goes missing or cannot be traced:

- Children looked after by the local authority
- Children looked after by the local authority placed with foster carers
- Missing from home or run away with cause for concern
- Children missing from a private fostering arrangement
- Children missing from a residential school.

#### PROFESSIONALS SHOULD INFORM:

- The Thames Valley Police Enquiry Centre on 08458 505505.
- The Social Worker for the child (or duty officer out of hours) if a child is actively open to social care, and specifically if:
  - A child subject of a child protection referral or a **Section 47 Enquiry**
  - A child with a **Child Protection Plan** goes missing or is removed from her/his address outside the terms of the Child Protection Plan
  - A **Child in Care** who leaves or is removed from his or her placement, without this being part of the **Care Plan**
  - A child about whom there are concerns e.g. one who is subject to Initial Assessment / Core Assessment / Child in Need Plan
  - A child where there are developing concerns about their safety

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<sup>1</sup> All statistics were taken from Still Running II: findings from the second national survey of young runaways, The Children's Society 2005

#### CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE MUST THEN INFORM:

- The designated safeguarding manager (01908 254307) if the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan
- The Independent Reviewing Officer if the child is a child in care.
- Any individuals known to hold parental responsibility for the child (not if Honor Based Violence is known or suspected)
- All other local agencies who know the child

Existing records in these agencies must be checked to obtain any information which might help trace the missing child, e.g. details of friends and relatives, and this information should be passed to the police officer undertaking the missing person enquiry.

The Designated Nurse Safeguarding (01908 278675) must be notified about a missing child, family or a pregnant woman. S/he will co-ordinate the circulation of appropriate local or national notifications.

Schools should refer to the MK Council [Children Missing Education](#) guidance and refer the case to the Education Welfare Service (01908 657800).

The social worker should discuss with her/his manager whether to notify members of the extended family and if so, how.

#### STRATEGY MEETING

If the child has not been traced **within 5 working days** a strategy meeting should be convened.

Members of the meeting will need to consider whether to circulate other local authorities and other agencies in the area in which the child and family are thought to have gone.

Consideration should be given to national notification of authorities and agencies including social security, the benefits agency and child benefit agency.

A senior member of Children's Social Care should seek assistance from the department for work and pensions/Inland Revenue if the police have not already contacted them.

If there is any suspicion that the child may be removed from UK jurisdiction, appropriate legal interventions should be considered and legal services consulted about options.

It should also be agreed by all agencies at this stage what action will be taken when the child is found. Actions set should be relevant to the individual case.

If the strategy meeting agrees details of the child/family are to be circulated to other local authorities, the lead social worker should draft a short letter giving details of:

- The children in the family
- Other family members or significant adults
- (Where relevant) the category of registration
- The circumstances causing concern
- Action required if a child is found
- Contact arrangements for lead social worker/social worker - including out of office hours
- Physical descriptions of key people (and photographs, if available)

The letter should be sent to the designated safeguarding manager (01908 254300) who in turn must:

- Inform her/his director and the council's press office
- Distribute it to her/his peers nationally with the request that they circulate the information to relevant parts of Children's Social Care and other local agencies
- Copy in the Head of Child Protection helpline:  
NSPCC Weston House  
42 Curtain Road  
London  
EC2 3NH

#### WHEN A CHILD IS FOUND

Within 24 hours of the child's return, the police will inform all relevant agencies of the child's return and undertake a "safe and well" check. This will ensure as far as possible that it is safe to return to the home or care institution or placement that they have been absent from, and explore steps to minimize the likelihood of the child going missing again.

If the child is not known to Children's Services but has been missing 3 or more times within a 90 day period, Children's Services will undertake an Initial Assessment of the child's individual and family circumstances.

A joint interview by the police and Children's Social Care will be arranged if there are already concerns in existence relating to either:

- The missing individual, the circumstances under which they went missing, their activity whilst missing or potential exposure to danger/risk whilst missing, or
- The care establishment that the child or young person has been absent from, or
- Their home circumstances.

Good practice dictates that any child found following a period missing should, regardless of whether s/he is believed to have experienced, or be at risk of, **Significant Harm**, be offered an interview with an independent person. Barnardos is currently piloting this service in Milton Keynes. This interview should provide a safe opportunity for the child to discuss any concerns regarding her/his care including if s/he chose to run away from an abusive situation. It must take place without parents, foster carers or residential staff either present or in close proximity.

If the child indicates a wish to be interviewed by an alternative professional, all reasonable efforts must be made to accommodate her/his wishes.

If the child has been found outside of the local authority and is not likely to return, representatives of the 'receiving' authority must be involved in this strategy discussion and the transfer of the case must be discussed (see also **Children Moving across Boundaries Procedure**).

#### DECISION-MAKING FOR ALL CASES

If the child is **Looked After**, the Independent Reviewing Officer would need to decide if an early Child Care Review is required. If the child is subject of a **Child Protection Plan**, the designated safeguarding manager must decide and record whether to bring forward the next review conference.

The social worker and team manager must give explicit consideration to any need for legal action, and record the reasons for their decision.

#### CHILD INDICATED BY OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO BE MISSING

Each designated safeguarding manager must ensure that duty systems incorporate a method for keeping and referring to the notifications of children and/or families who are missing.

If, after two years there is no communication from the authority where the child and/or family went missing, the child and/or family's details may be removed from the list.

#### CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION

As a result of daily registration schools are particularly well placed to notice when a child has gone missing. If the missing child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, the head teacher must inform the allocated social worker immediately. If they are unavailable then they must contact the team where s/he is based.

Having made initial enquiries about the child's whereabouts the school should refer to the [Children Missing Education Guidance](#) unless they have concerns as outlined above and then they must follow the guidance previously detailed.

Milton Keynes CYPS has a Child Missing Education point of contact within the Education Welfare Service and every practitioner working with a child has a responsibility to inform them if they know or suspect that a child is not receiving an education. [educationwelfareservice@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:educationwelfareservice@milton-keynes.gov.uk)

The Education Welfare Service will then make the relevant enquiries.

