



Kirklees Safeguarding Children Board
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Kirklees Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB)



Missing Children Strategy 2017-2019

**Working Together to Safeguard Children
who go Missing from Home or Care**

Statement of Intent

This strategy relates to children missing from home or care who are under 18 years old

Children and young people missing from home or care is a safeguarding issue; although the majority of children and young people who go missing return or are found quickly, all children and young people who go missing irrespective of the amount of time that they are missing for, are at risk.

The reasons behind why children and young people go missing are varied and complex, these *push-pull* factors, may include the child or young person running away because of problems at home or school, such as abuse, neglect, or bullying, or they may be pushed out of their home by parents /carer. Alternatively a child or young person may go missing because they want to be somewhere other than their home, or because they want to be with someone they are unable to be with, unless they run away. Moreover a child might be coerced to run away and go missing by someone who has power or control over them; Whatever the reason, at the time, children and young people often feel that they have no choice other than to run away.

Children and young people whilst missing from home or care may experience physical and /or emotional abuse, additionally they are more likely to engage in risk taking and self-harming behaviour, and they may find themselves sleeping rough, often committing crime in order to survive, whilst also feeling fear and loneliness. As a consequence of being missing, their education, family and social relationships and life chances often suffer. Moreover missing children and young people are particularly vulnerable to trafficking, violent crime, drug and alcohol misuse and exploitation, including sexual exploitation, as either a cause or consequence of going missing. Significant evidence highlights that children and young people who go missing from home or care are at increased risk of being at risk of, or experiencing sexual exploitation. It is therefore essential that all partner agencies act rigorously to reduce incidents of children going missing. Agencies must ensure that they have processes in place to assess why a child / young person went missing, what they experienced whilst missing and how any future risk of that child /young person going missing could be reduced.

Looked after children are over represented in the statistics for children reported missing and are considered particularly vulnerable; especially in terms of being vulnerable to grooming and exploitation. Whilst looked after children and young people go missing for a variety of reasons, it is important for professionals to understand the reasons why, in order to assist with minimising risk and frequency, effectively safeguard, and achieve placement stability. Information gained from return interviews is therefore invaluable.

The majority of children and young people, who go missing, do so from their family home, these children and young people are equally vulnerable, and require the same level of protection and response from professionals and service as children looked after. However many children remain hidden from professionals, and the Children's Society notes that only a third of children who go missing are reported as such to the police. Whatever the push or pull factors are that influence a child or young person to go missing from home or care, approximately one quarter of those who do, are believed to be at risk of serious harm.

The issue of missing children is therefore significant, and to ensure that children and young people in Kirklees can live free from the feeling they have no other choice other than to go missing, and also live free from the risks associated with being missing, this strategy has focused on three overall strategic objectives; prevention, protection and provision, which demand child-focused, co-ordinated, and effective multi-agency responses.

How we will achieve our objectives?

The KSCB Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Work Stream will monitor progress against the strategic objectives, by working in accordance with an agreed detailed action plan, taking into account new legislation, research, policy and guidance.

The strategic lead officer for this group is a senior leader within the West Yorkshire Police, whose role it is to support the multi-agency work required. The strategic planning and collaborative multi-agency working will enable effective leadership and progress our understanding and practice, which in turn will improve the lives of children and young people at risk of harm from going missing from home or care.

The strategy will be reinforced by local practice guidance and a KSCB Missing action plan, will complement the West Yorkshire Joint Procedure for Children Missing from Home and from Local Authority Care:
http://westyorkscb.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/pr_missing.pdf

The strategy should be read in conjunction with current KSCB Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy, procedure, policy and protocols, and the West Yorkshire KSCB Consortium procedures for Safeguarding Children who may have been Trafficked:
http://westyorkscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_safeg_traff_ch.htm

Reference can also be made to the West Yorkshire joint procedure for Forced Marriage:
http://westyorkscb.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/pr_missing.pdf

For guidance relating to children missing from education please refer to the West Yorkshire joint procedure Children Missing from education:
http://westyorkscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_ch_miss_frm_educ.html

Prevention

Objective

Reduce the number of children, who go missing whilst also ensuring that children and young people understand the risks associated with going missing.

We are going to achieve this by:

- Ensuring effective information sharing, and promoting the importance of intelligence sharing with the police amongst partner agencies, including arrangements for information sharing between different local authorities when a child runs away to another area
- Creating systems to effectively collate and analyse data relating to children who go missing, to provide an understanding of the 'picture' and context of 'missing in Kirklees and identify patterns that indicate particular concerns. Including analysing patterns and monitoring outcomes and of children placed in the area by other local authorities and for Kirklees Looked After children placed in other local authority areas, who go missing from care or are away from placement without authorisation.
- Implementing clear referral and assessment processes, which identify children and young people at risk at an early stage across all partner agencies, ensuring children have full assessment and referrals to relevant services for intervention and support are made.
 - Educational establishments to ensure that links are made between schools and other organisations to highlight risk if children abscond from school and are at or believed to be at risk of exploitation.
- Proactively raise awareness of the risks associated with children going missing, with children, young people, parents, carers, local communities and businesses. Including providing child friendly materials and undertaking a city wide public facing campaign.
- Train front line practitioners to identify risk factors associated with children going missing and to provide a knowledgeable, consistent response to assessment, intervention and risk management
- Develop young people's participation groups, with children who have experienced being missing so that children's voices inform knowledge, understanding and future service delivery
- Establishing professional links with national agencies such as CEOP, UKHTC, UKBA, Missing People, Missing Person's Bureau and NWG.

Protection

Objective

Reduce the risk of harm to those children and young people who go missing from home or care

We are going to achieve this by:

- Developing an agreed inter-agency framework for assessing and classifying the degree of risk for when a child goes missing from home or care, or when a missing child comes to agency attention.
- Ensuring that robust multi-agency risk assessments and management plans, that involve specialist support services, are in place for all children and young people who have been missing from home or care, whilst also ensuring that risk assessments and management plans are coordinated, effectively actioned and link to other formal child protection processes.
- Making sure that looked after children who are placed out of the county receive the same response and level of intervention to instances of going missing, as those placed within Kirklees.
- Offering all children and young people who go missing high quality independent return interviews in a timely manner, undertaking quality assurance audits of these to cater for on-going service development that take into account the voice of the child.
- Care providers to satisfy the KSCB that sufficient training has been undertaken by their staff to look after children. This is to include what actions they can do to reduce escalation and manage risk related to children missing from care or those who are away from placement without authorisation.
- Care providers to satisfy KSCB they are meeting their statutory and obligatory functions in looking after children.

Provision

Objective

Provide children and young people who go missing & their families and carers with high quality response, support and guidance.

We are going to achieve this by:

- Providing an annual report outlining the 'picture' and context of 'missing in Kirklees, to identify what we are doing well, outstanding challenges and to inform future service delivery response.

- Creating agreed multi agency common risk assessment process, and referrals pathways; allowing for established and consistent responses to both missing and absent classifications.
- Providing high quality relevant multi agency risk assessed plans and interventions for children, carers and families, which are child focused and ensure that the safety and wellbeing of the child is paramount.
- Establishing an effective service(s) to respond to missing notifications for those children who do not have a social worker or other statutory worker.
- Providing a quality assured, local independent return interview programme for children known to social care.
- Working with national and local with third sector partner agencies, to provide children, young people, parents, carers, families and communities with information about how to keep children safe, report missing children and access local and national missing services.
- Endeavouring to train all local frontline staff to communicate effectively with children and young people in a positive and supportive way with children and young people.
- Create a missing resource and educational materials to notify, inform and signpost children young people and their families to local and national missing resources and helplines.
- Having an effective Out of hours social care response to meet the needs of children and young people.