

Safeguarding Children Who Run Away and Go Missing from Home or Care

Policy, Procedures and Practice Guidance

Service Director – Children’s Service Jersey and the Detective Superintendent Crime Services, Jersey.

1. Introduction

This document provides guidance to professionals and volunteers from all agencies in Jersey working to ensure a collaborative response when:

- A child is at risk of running away
- A child runs away and goes missing from home or care.

It aims to provide guidance for assessing both the risk to the child or young person and the support needs on return and should be read in conjunction with the Jersey Safeguarding Partnership Board procedures. Email Address safeguarding@gov.je or telephone number [REDACTED]

The framework for the procedures is based on:

- > Multi-Agency Child Protection Procedures
- > ACPO Guidance on missing people can be found at
- > The Children (Jersey) Law 2002
- > Working Together to Safeguard Children (2013)

2. Arrangements for Monitoring Arrangements and Outcomes for Missing Children

The Head of Safeguarding, Children & Young People's Jersey and the Detective Superintendent, Crime Services are responsible for the policy and procedures.

The multi-agency Missing Children Panel is a sub group of Jersey Safeguarding Children Board Performance & Quality Assurance Board meeting on a quarterly basis, with the purpose of:

- Ensuring consistent reportage of all missing children and young people in accordance with SCB procedures.
- Collating data on missing children, identifying trends and actions required
- Risk- assessing outstanding missing children and young people, including evaluation of possibilities of trafficking.
- Sharing information on outcomes for children who are found.
- Considering actions in relation to children who repeatedly go missing/ run away.
- Promote and safeguard the welfare of children and young people.

The Missing Children Panel is chaired by the Det. Superintendent Crime Services, States of Jersey Police.
Terms of reference **Appendix 1 (Work in Progress)**

3. Definitions

The term '**Missing**' refers to children and young people up to the age of 18 years who have run away from their home or care placement, have been forced to leave, or whose whereabouts are unknown.

Unauthorised absence is where a Looked-After child's whereabouts is known or thought to be known but unconfirmed, they are not missing and may instead be considered as absent without authorisation from their placement.

Child Abduction: where a child has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence, this is a 'crime in action' and should be reported to the police immediately.

4. The Legal Framework

- The law does not generally regard young people under the age of 16 as being able to live independently away from home
- Where a child/young person under 16 (or 18 if disabled) stays with a person (other than a person with parental responsibility or a close relative), for 28 days or more, the person caring for them is acting as a 'private foster carer' within the meaning of Article 58 Children (Jersey) Law 2002 and therefore they must notify the local authority that they are privately fostering the child/young person. Failure to notify the Local Authority may be an offence
- Anyone who has care of a child without parental responsibility may do what *is reasonable* in all the circumstances to safeguard and promote the child's welfare (Children (Jersey) Law 2002). It is likely to be 'reasonable' to inform the police, or Children's Social Care, and, if appropriate, their parents, of the child/ young person's safety and whereabouts.
- Anyone who 'takes or detains' a runaway under 16 without lawful authority may be prosecuted under Children (Jersey) Law 2002. The enforcement of this provision might be problematic, however, if the young person has chosen to stay with an adult of his or her own free will.

5. Causes of Running Away

The Children's Society's 'Still Running' 2005 survey estimates that around 100,000 young people under the age of 16 run away from home or care each year across the UK. Many of these young people stay with friends or family members but there are some who end up in harmful situations such as sleeping rough. 52% of young runaways returned to their home or care placement after 1 night away. 1 in 12 is hurt or harmed whilst away.

Running away is often a sign that something is wrong in the child's or young person's life. Main reasons for running away are:

- Problems at home - ranging from arguments with parents to long-term abuse or maltreatment
- Family break-up where young people are drawn into their parents' conflicts.
- Mental health problems
- Bullying, racial harassment, homophobia
- Teenage pregnancy
- Wanting to be near friends or family - especially when a young person is in care and there are problems in contact arrangements with family and friends
- Grooming for sexual exploitation - evidence suggests that 90% of children subject to sexual exploitation go missing at some point. See guidance on Children Abused Through Sexual exploitation
- Forced Marriage- some young people run away because they are at risk of or in a forced marriage. See guidance on Forced Marriage and Honour- Based Violence
- Child Trafficking- young people may go missing when they are being trafficked. See Guidance on Safeguarding Children from Trafficking

6. Children Missing Education

Children and young people who run away and go missing are clearly likely to be missing from education. Some children missing from education may be missing from home. Information will be exchanged with the Attendance Officers and Education Welfare Officers - see First Day Response Procedures.

7. Emergency Duty Service

Procedures are set out to include occasions when children and young people go missing/ are located out-of-office hours and the involvement of the Duty Child Care Officer is required. The Out of Hours Duty Childcare Officer has established protocols for working with other agencies where there are concerns about children. The Out Of Hours Duty Child Care Officer has a system for monitoring incidents of children who run away and go missing and ensures that these cases are sampled as part of the quality assurance process.

8. Services to Young People who May Run Away

All agencies will be alert to the needs of children who may run away and such services can be identified according to the specific needs of a young person through the Team Around the Child Process/ targeted Youth Service. This will help to identify cases of running early and provide the opportunity to address these issues and prevent escalation.

Information for young people will be available through the local Youth Service – jsy@youthservice.yc.je

Children with mental health needs, learning and physical disabilities are particularly vulnerable when going missing. They may have communication difficulties and they may have fewer opportunities to disclose reasons for running away. Practitioners should be alert to the particular needs of disabled children, making sure they know how to raise concerns and receive whatever additional assistance and support they require. Practitioners should be aware that young people may run away because of issues of sexuality and may need support and access to specialist youth or advocacy services. Information on national telephone

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Children Who Go Missing From Home

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Some children go missing for short periods and there may be good reason to believe that they are not at risk/ have not run away. They may return home quite quickly. Police are required to record the child as a Missing Person but may decide that there are no concerns for the welfare of the child and a referral to Children's Services is not required.

In some circumstances it will be appropriate to regard a child as missing even though their whereabouts are known.

Running away should be seen as an indicator of underlying problems which may need further intervention by agencies supporting children and families.

In most cases a parent/ carer will report a child missing from home. However, in situations where a runaway/missing child comes to the attention of an agency/ member of the community who has not been reported to the Police e.g Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child, this must be reported to:

States Of Jersey Police: Force Control Room: 01534 612612

Police Actions: On receipt of a report of a runaway/ missing child the States of Jersey Police Force Control Room will institute a plan to locate the child. All missing children enquiries will be recorded on the MISPER database which includes all details, photographs, risk assessment and tasks to be completed. Reviews of the investigation are monitored by the supervisor. The notification of concerns about a child will automatically generate an email warning to the Public Protection Team (Police) who will make a referral within 24 hours to Children's Services or inform the nominated Social Worker for that young person.

Children's Services and Police will undertake a telephone discussion, share information and assess the risks to the child *whether still missing or returned*, using the agreed risk factors guidance. Particular attention will be paid to the child's age and vulnerability and ascertaining if the child has:

- Gone missing / run away on more than one occasion
- Been missing / run away for more than 24 hours
- Been involved as a victim or perpetrator of criminal behaviour whilst missing / running way
- Known mental health issues
- Known risk of sexual exploitation
- Known risk of contact with persons posing risk to children
- Incidents that have resulted in child protection/ children in need assessments
- Domestic abuse / forced marriage / honour- based violence

This discussion will be informed by the Police Safe and Well Check/ Return Interview if the child has returned home and by information from other agencies.

Agreement will be reached and recorded by Police and Children's Services about the course of action to assist or protect the child and may include:

- > Completion of a Common Assessment (CAF) and consideration of a team around the child Team Around Child (TAC) approach. It may be appropriate for a professional already involved with the child to conduct a return interview e.g. a Social worker, or Youth worker.
- > Initial Assessment of need by Children's Services. The views of the child gained in the return interview will be of great importance and will inform the assessment and decision - making. The arrangements for this will be co-ordinated by Children's Services and recorded as part of any assessment. An initial assessment may result in signposting child/ family for a service, consideration under Common Assessment Framework (CAF) Process, Core Assessment or other relevant support services.
- > Enquiries to be undertaken jointly with Police or singly by Children's Services where there is reason to suspect the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. These enquiries will be started as soon as possible and in any event within 48 hours. A Strategy Discussion will be considered to plan any joint investigation and must be considered if the child has not been found, may be harmed or has been persistently running away.
- > Actions identified for Police only resulting from information sharing with Children's Services or other agencies.

Duty Child Care Officer (DCCO)

Where Police have immediate concerns about the circumstances of a child who has been reported missing from home out of office hours e.g if there is concern that the child may be at risk if returned home, they will contact Duty Child Care Officer (DCCO) to assess their needs and make appropriate arrangements for their accommodation. This will include young people who may be at risk of honour-based violence/ forced marriage.

Should the DCCO have any involvement with a missing child they will inform Children's Services or the responsible social worker, for action as soon as day time service resumes.

Social Care teams will send an alert to the DCCO where a child with whom they are working has run away/ gone missing from home, with specific plans on location.

Police Safe & Well Checks

Police Safe & Well Check: This will be carried out as soon as possible after the young person has returned home. The purpose is to check for any indications that the young person has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them.

Return Interviews

This interview should take place within 72 hours of the young person being located or returning from absence and will be especially important if any risk factors are in evidence e.g. the child has been missing overnight, may have been involved in criminal activities during absence, has mental health issues or may have been hurt or harmed.

Children's Services will be responsible for ensuring that this takes place for children and young people referred by police. Where the young person and family is being assisted through the CAF (Common Assessment Framework) process, or a referral is made for CAF process, it will be undertaken by the lead professional and will update the CAF and plan for the child.

Where Children's Services are undertaking an Initial Assessment it will be an essential part of the assessment and decision-making process. It should be recorded in the 'Wishes & Feelings' as well as included in Initial Assessment Form. This interview will:

- Identify any harm the child may have suffered- including harm that might not have been disclosed as part of the Safe and Well Check. Any need for medical attention should be assessed
- Understand and address the reasons why the child ran away
- Consider preventive measures regarding further running away

Children Who Have Not Been Found

Police and Children Services will monitor the progress of efforts to locate children who have gone missing. If a child has not been found within 72 hours of receipt of referral and earlier depending on the age and circumstances of the child, the Social Worker or Social Care Manager must inform the Head of Safeguarding and the Head of Children's Services who will need to satisfy themselves that everything is being done to locate and safeguard the child. Media assistance may be required in some cases and this decision will be taken at a Strategy Meeting.

Support for 16 and 17 Year Olds

16 and 17 - year olds who run away or go missing are not necessarily any less vulnerable than younger children and are likely to need as much support to get their lives on track and make a successful transition into adulthood. However, as young people over 16 can choose to leave home it may be necessary to involve other services such as housing officers in the assessment of their needs. There are inter-agency arrangements for 'Young People of 16 & 17 years who are homeless' which must be used in these circumstances. Vulnerable young people need to be in a secure housing setting. No 16 or 17 year old should be placed in Bed & Breakfast accommodation by housing or children's services,

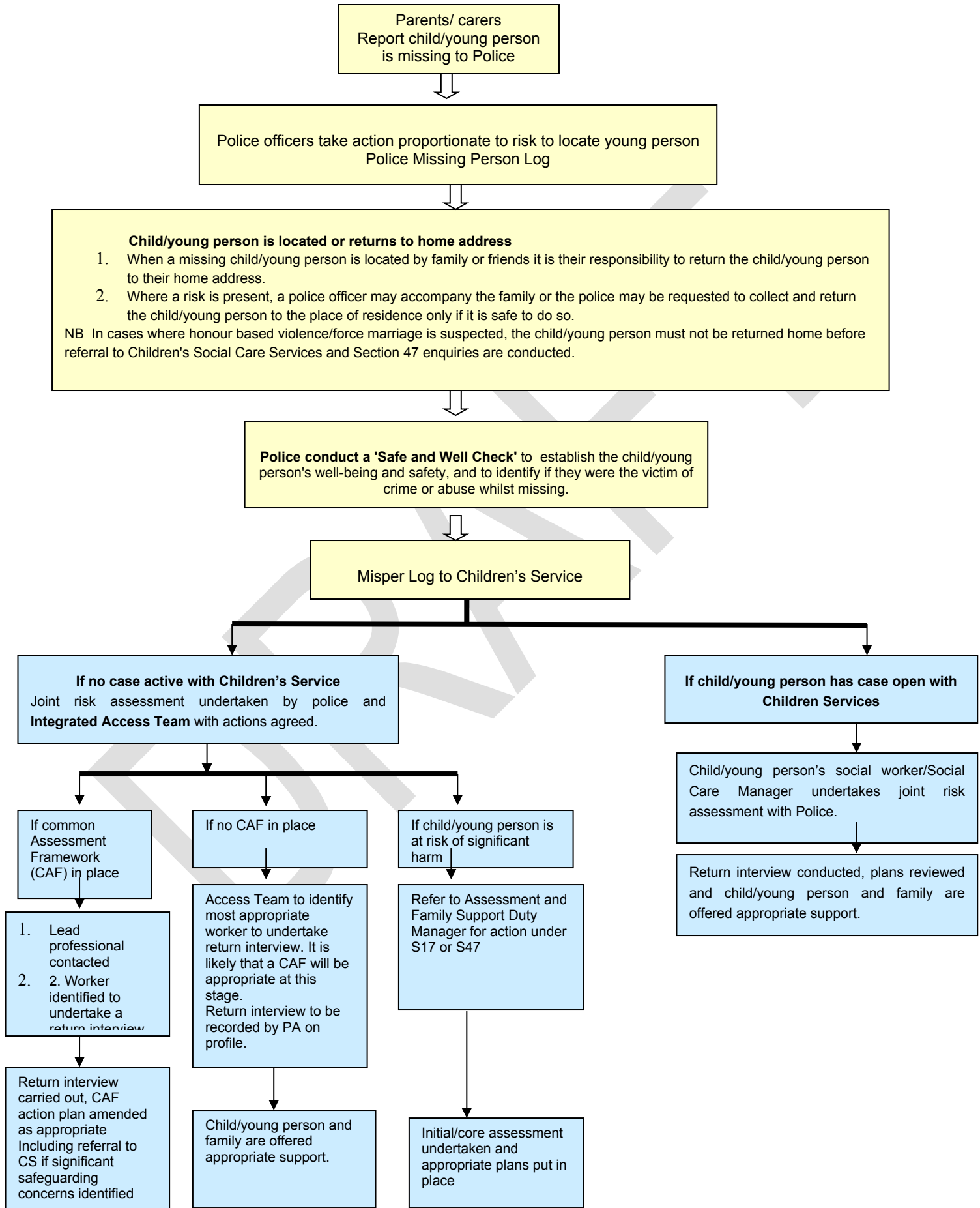
except in an emergency and for the shortest time possible, where B&B is the only available alternative to rooflessness.

Children Who Repeatedly Go Missing From Home

For those young people who repeatedly go missing and place themselves at risk of serious harm consideration must be given to conducting enquiries under Children (Jersey) Law 2002 with a Strategy Discussion to consider holding an Initial Child Protection Conference, or in some cases where the young person is placing themselves at a high level of risk, a Vulnerable Young People: Risk Management Multi-Agency Meeting. Chronologies will be kept up to date for children who repeatedly go missing to assist in identifying patterns of absence. Considerations must also be given to an Emergency Protection Order.

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Young People Missing From Home Process Flowchart



Children Who Go Missing From Care

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The Local Authority has the same duty of care towards all children who are Looked After i.e. children accommodated under the Children (Jersey) Law 2002 and children who are subject of Care or Interim Care Orders.

It is important to be concerned for the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person who goes missing from care in terms not only of what might happen to them whilst missing, but also because of their reasons for doing so.

Unauthorised Absence

Some children go missing for short periods e.g. stay out longer than agreed. Young people may be accidentally or deliberately late home to their placement/ their whereabouts are known and their safety or wellbeing is not necessarily jeopardised. The States of Jersey Police and Children's Services have an agreed procedure for unauthorised absence:

Within day- time hours, the Residential Worker, in conjunction with the Residential Home Manager and child's social worker if necessary, will assess whether the incident should be reported as missing or approached as unauthorised absence. Out of hours, the residential worker will contact the Duty Child Care Officer. The risk will be assessed and agreement reached whether the event should be reported as an Unauthorised Absence or Missing. Where Unauthorised Absence is agreed then this will be reported to Police and entered onto Police system and Police units notified for information purposes in order that, if the child is seen, he/she can be advised to return home and the Children's Home notified.

While the child remains absent the circumstances will be constantly reviewed and the absence upgraded to 'missing' depending on a review of risk which would include last known contact and time factors.

Similarly the foster carer and social worker will assess the situation for a child in foster care and, if occurring out of hours, the DCCO (Duty Child Care Officer) will assist the carer in reaching a decision about whether a child is absent without authority or is missing.

Children's Service will be responsible for notifying the Police Force Control Room of any change of status, for example, the child remains absent and the care workers upgrade the report to missing, or the child returns home.

Reporting a Child Missing From Care

Information That a Child has Gone Missing from Care

The Police or any agency receiving information that a child is missing from care must alert Children's Services.

Child Missing from Residential Care

The Residential Homes staff will notify the child's social worker once a decision has been made as to whether to report a child as absent without authorisation or is missing.

Before reporting a child as missing residential carers should, following consultation with the social worker or DCCO, take all steps a responsible parent would take, to locate the child.

Where the child's location or reason for absence is unknown and/or due to the circumstances, there is cause for significant concern for the child, the child must be reported missing to the police.

Detailed information will be provided to the police, in particular the risk assessment for the child including any reason to suspect that the child is at risk of significant harm in terms of abuse, self-harming behaviour, drugs, sexual exploitation or criminal behaviour and previous missing episodes. The Police have primary responsibility for locating children who are missing and will work in partnership with Children's Services. A record will be placed on Misper Log (Police System) as HIGH RISK and active search will commence.

Child Missing from Foster Care

Foster carers will report the situation to the child's social worker/Social Care Manager or Duty Child Care Officer (DCCO), if out of hours, and take all steps a responsible parent would take, to locate the child.

Where the child's location or reason for absence is unknown and/or due to the circumstances there is cause for significant concern for the child then the child must be reported missing to the police.

Detailed information will be provided to the police, in particular the risk assessment for the child including any reason to suspect that the child is at risk of significant harm in terms of abuse, self-harming behaviour, drugs, sexual exploitation or criminal behaviour and previous missing episodes. The Police have primary responsibility for locating children who are missing and will work in partnership with Children's Services. A record will be placed on Misper Log (Police System) as HIGH RISK, and active search will commence.

Young People who are supported by the 16 + Service - Leaving Care Team (LCT)

The provider of this service in Jersey, Leaving Care Team will follow the SCB procedures and work with any associated partner providers such as Youth Services; to ensure that procedures are in place to respond to situations where a young people they are supporting goes missing. Many of these young people are living in supported or independent settings and whilst the service has a duty to maintain regular contact there may be no 'on-site' carer. Staff will need to be alert to any risk factors which indicate a young person is likely to go missing and make plans on an individual case basis.

Some young people continue to be Looked After, others are no longer Looked After but the same attention will be given to each young person in terms of risks of going missing. Some young people may want to disengage from the service but where contact is lost completely and there are concerns, then the 16 + Service will liaise with Police and other colleagues.

Out of Hours Service

There is an established decision- making process for responding to children for whom there are concerns out of hours. The Duty Child Care Officer will liaise with and support carers in the decision regarding reporting a child missing to the Police. The Duty Child Care Officer will be informed and become involved when required e.g. if there is concern that an alternative placement is required for the child.

Should the DCCO have any involvement with a Looked After Child who has run away, they will inform Children's Service or the responsible social worker for action as soon as day time service resumes.

Social Care teams will send an alert to the DCCO where a child with whom they are working has run away/ gone missing from home, with specific plans on location.

Informing Parents

Parents and any persons with parental responsibility must be informed as soon as possible that their child is missing unless there are good reasons connected with the child's welfare for this to be inappropriate. Agreement must be reached about who will be responsible for informing the parents where the child is placed away from the family's home - this will normally be the child's social worker. A record must be made as to when parents have been informed and what information has been given to them.

Actions following reporting a child missing

Police and Children's Services will work together in efforts to locate the child. The Head of Safeguarding and Director of Children's Services will be informed if the child is missing for more than 72 hours. Consideration must always be given to convening a Missing Child Strategy Discussion, to include Police.

Notification of Central Safeguarding Service

Children's Services will notify the Safeguarding Board of any children who have gone missing if information or intelligence suggests that the child has left the island, so that alerts can be sent to other Local Authorities. The Safeguarding Board must be kept informed and advised should the child be located.

Children Who Go Missing From Care who are placed in another Authority Area

The Manager of the Children's Home, or the fostering service, is responsible for ensuring that the Accountable Manager has received the notification that a looked- after child is missing and has initiated the appropriate actions. Children's Services will receive notification from Jersey Police and forward the notification within 1 working day to the Social Worker responsible for the child.

Children Who Go Missing From Care who are Placed in another Authority Area

Children's Services will ensure that the child's Placement Information Record is as detailed as possible, including specific behaviour management strategies, the provider's role in meeting the child's health, education needs and particular requirements for supporting contact with the child's family and info on any restrictions.

The care provider - residential or fostering service will be responsible for following the Missing from home and Unauthorised Absence Procedures and contacting the child's social worker/ Social Care Manager in Jersey who will consider the need for a Missing Child Strategy Discussion to include police and ensure that a return interview is conducted within 72 hours. An early LAC Review may be convened to address issues for the child and placement.

Planning For the Return

Where a child goes missing from their care placement, plans must be made to respond promptly once the child is located. If the child is located but the professionals involved are unable to establish meaningful contact with the child, perhaps because they are under duress or being harboured, then Children's Services will consider whether an application for an Emergency Protection Order is required.

Children's Services will consider whether the child should be returned to their placement. Care staff or foster parents will need to continue to offer warm and consistent care when they return.

An early LAC Review may be convened to address issues for the child and placement.

Risk Management Meetings

The care provider must convene a multi-agency risk management meeting when young people run away persistently or engage in risky behaviour such as leaving the placement to meet with unfamiliar or inappropriate adults. These meetings will be particularly important when groups of young people run away together. The purpose of this is to develop a strategy with all relevant agencies for managing the risks which should be recorded in the care plan.

Safe and Well Check

Police Safe & Well Check: This will be carried out as soon as possible after the young person has returned home. The purpose is to check for any indications that the young person has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them.

Return Interview

This interview will take place within 72 hours of the looked -after young person being located or returning from absence to the care placement - whether this is in Jersey or the child is placed in another Local Authority.

This interview will:

- Identify any harm the child may have suffered- including harm that might not have been disclosed as part of the Safe and well Check. Any need for medical attention should be assessed
- Understand and address the reasons why the child ran away
- Consider preventive measures regarding further running away

This interview will be arranged by the child's social worker - efforts will be made for an independent person e.g child's advocate to conduct this interview but if this is not possible then the social worker will undertake the interview. It should be recorded in the 'Wishes & Feelings 'and inform an updated Care Plan.

Children Who Repeatedly Go Missing From Care

For those young people who repeatedly go missing and place themselves at risk of serious harm consideration must be given to conducting enquiries with a Missing Child Strategy Discussion, or in some cases where the young person is placing themselves at a high level of risk, a multi-agency risk management meeting. Chronologies will be kept up to date for children who repeatedly go missing to assist in identifying patterns of absence or concerns about care arrangements.

Care Planning for Children who go missing from Care

Statutory Reviews will provide the opportunity to ensure that the care plan is amended to address reasons why the child was absent and the Independent Reviewing Officers will ensure that this includes a strategy to prevent re-occurrence. Where there is evidence that a child is vulnerable to sexual exploitation consideration must be given to convening a review to consider whether the placement is able to put in place a strategy to minimise risk to the child or whether an alternative placement needs to be sought to keep the child safe.

Children's Service ensures that all providers of fostering services and residential care have policies and procedures for when children go missing from their care placement and is compatible with these procedures.

Safeguarding Managers who conduct visits to residential establishments will ensure that records of children being absent without authority or going missing are updated and are that procedures for each child have been followed.

Young People Missing From Care Process Flowchart

