



Children's Safeguarding and Family Help

Children missing from care and from home: procedures for CSFH staff

Camden's Children and Learning Directorate uses relational practice as the foundation for all our work. Our integrative relational practice framework is based on our values, and is designed to help achieve the Directorate's purpose: to work with children, families and communities to make a positive, lasting difference to their futures, so they have the best start in life.

We recognise the impact of structural inequalities on the lives of the children and families we work with and as a service we will embrace inclusive, anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice based on our values and our mission to champion social justice.

Our practice framework centres on honest and compassionate relationships with those we serve and with each other. It is an expectation that all Directorate policies and procedures are implemented in line with our practice framework, and that any actions within policies and procedures reflect its ethics, values and practice expectations.

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Recording and notification guidance available at:
[missing-absence-reporting-guidance-version-1-draft-002.docx \(live.com\)](#)

Missing children social work procedures

1. Purpose and scope of procedures

- Camden has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, including children who go missing. The Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP) missing children protocol provides the multi-agency framework for working with missing children and social workers should be familiar with the guidance.
[Draft CSCB missing protocol](#)
- **It is essential that social workers read the CSCP protocol in addition to this local procedure.**
- This document contains the local procedures to be followed by CSFH staff whenever:
 - a Police MERLIN is received by the MASH team on a child unknown to CSFH who has gone missing **or**:
 - a child who is known to CSFH goes missing.
- The procedures apply to all workers in the MASH team, social workers and managers and Business Support staff.

2. Definitions

Camden uses the following definitions of missing, based on the level of risk to the child and which are aligned to Police definitions of missing. To establish the category of missing and the corresponding level of risk and appropriate response, it is imperative that social workers complete the missing response form, including an assessment of risk. Please see section 7 and the MOSAIC missing and absence guide available at:

[missing-absence-reporting-guidance-version-1-draft-002.docx \(live.com\)](#)

2.1 Missing (Police definition: high risk)

A *missing child* is defined as any child who is away from their home or placement and:

- their whereabouts and the circumstances of going missing is unknown; **and**
- their disappearance is out of character; **and**
- there are specific concerns or factors that make the child vulnerable, for example age, disability, mental health difficulties.

Children who are missing under these circumstances are considered to be at high risk and must be reported to the police as missing.

2.2 Concerning absence

A concerning absence is where a child who is known to be vulnerable for a variety of reasons is not at their home or placement as required but their whereabouts is known.

- **Low risk** concerning absence cases are those cases where the child is known to be or highly likely to be with family or friends and is contactable by phone. These cases ***should not be reported to the police.***
- **Medium risk** concerning absence cases are those involving CSE or CCE where the case has a Red RAG rating and an active CSE/CCE investigation is ongoing. The child will be at serious risk of exploitation whilst away and factors to consider are who they are with, whether they are contactable by phone and how long they have been away. These cases ***may be reported to the police.***

2.3 Unauthorised absence (no risk)

- An unauthorised absence is when a child is not at their home or placement as required but their **whereabouts is known and they are not thought to be at risk**. It is recognised that some children may absent themselves from home or placement without permission but their whereabouts are known by parents and carers, or they are known to be safe.
- These children are classed as *No apparent risk* by the police and ***should not be reported as missing.***

2.4 Absconded

If a child or young person is on bail or the subject of a criminal court order requiring them to remain at a particular address and they run away from that address, this will be a criminal matter and ***the child must be reported as missing to the police immediately.***

2.5 Abducted

If a child is unlawfully removed from the care of anyone who is legally looking after them, whether it is a parent or foster carer, ***the child must be reported as missing to the police immediately.*** This includes any child who is removed from placement by parents or others contrary to the care plan. Where the child is subject to a care order, emergency protection order or in police protection, social workers may consider seeking legal advice on obtaining a recovery order.

3. Missing children who are not known to CSFH

3.1 Referral

- Referrals for children who have been reported as missing to the police will be sent to the MASH team by way of a police MERLIN and will be dealt with under MASH procedures.
- Missing/Absence reports are recorded on Mosaic by MASH screening officers as a record of the missing episode. The missing episode is also referred for a Return Home Interview (RHI) at this stage.
- The MASH manager will allocate a RAG rating to the case and make a decision on whether to refer the child to the CSFH assessment team for a child and family assessment or on to the First Stop Early Help team for an early help service.
- When making this decision, the MASH manager will take the following into account:
 - the child's age
 - the number of missing episodes already recorded
 - any specific risk factors that make the child vulnerable, for example learning difficulties
 - the presence of any indicators of CSE or trafficking
 - the child's views on their situation
 - the outcome of the safe and well interview conducted by police.
- The MASH team will complete a missing response form only where this is a proportional response to the referral. This document can also be allocated to a newly allocated social worker if appropriate, for example where:
 - there are clear safeguarding concerns
 - there is a concerning pattern of missing episodes
 - the child's age raises the risk of potential harm
 - it is clear that the case will be referred on for a child and family assessment based on the information available
 - the child remains missing.

3.2 Return home interview (RHI)

- All children who are missing or who have a concerning absence will be offered an independent return interview within 72 hours of their return.
- On the child's return, the Missing outreach worker will contact the child and/or their parents to invite them to a return home interview.
 - All interviews will be offered by the Missing outreach worker.
 - If the child is of a very young age, individual consideration will be given as to whether it is appropriate to offer the RHI.
- The completed return interview template should be passed to the MASH manager to decide on what further action should be taken. The outcome of the return home interview may be:
 - no further action
 - re-refer the matter back into the MASH to reconsider whether the threshold has been met for a CSFH social work service, including whether any action needs to be carried out under CSE or CCE procedures
 - refer to the First Stop Early Help team for an early help service.
- In cases where the child was missing for a short time and there are no concerns and the young person does not engage in a RHI with the Missing outreach worker then the Missing Outlook Worker will notify MASH through MOSAIC.

4 Children known to CSFH who go missing

- It is an expectation that as soon as it is known the child has gone missing, the allocated social worker will liaise with parents or carers to decide on the best course of action, including notifying the police.
- A Police Merlin is received by the MASH to notify of a child's missing episode. MASH screening officers should use this form to create the Missing/Absence report on MOSAIC. This contains all the details from the missing episode.
- From the Missing/Absence Report, MASH screening officers should also trigger a Missing Response form, which is sent to the incoming work folder of the allocated social worker on MOSAIC. This response form captures any actions completed, risk assessments, communication with the family (or foster carer where appropriate) and the child.

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- Any Police MERLIN relating to a child who is known to CSFH will also be passed directly to their allocated social worker.
- When completing the Missing/Absence report, MASH screening officers should also trigger a Return Home Interview referral. This is tasked to the Missing Outreach Worker's incoming work folder on MOSAIC.
- Where possible, it is Camden's policy that the Missing outreach worker will carry out the interview with children aged 12 and over (or 11 and in secondary school) to ensure the child has the opportunity to speak to someone independent from their professional network; however, if the child declines, this interview will be carried out by somebody identified in the child's network by the social worker (for example the social worker or key worker).
- All return home interviews for children aged under 11 years will be carried out by their allocated social worker.
- A return interview will not be offered to a young person whose missing episode is classed as an unauthorised absence unless they have 3 or more unauthorised absences in a period of one month. However, the allocated social worker should follow up each unauthorised absence.
- The Missing Outreach Worker will complete the Return Home Interview form on MOSAIC and notify the social worker. If the child declines, the Missing Outreach Worker will reallocate the RHI to the allocated social worker to allow them to capture any information discussed with the child.

Consideration should be given as to whether return home interviews should be shared with the police. Where there is an open police CRIS report concerning risk of exploitation (CSE or CCE) the return home interview should be shared with the allocated child exploitation officer.

If the child is looked after, or resides in supported accommodation, consideration should also be given to the social worker sharing the return home interview, or key themes, with the child's foster carer or keyworker.

5. Preventative work

- Where CSFH is already working with a child it is important that social workers are able to identify those children who are at risk of running away. Social workers and the professional network will have an opportunity to work with the child to identify the factors leading to missing incidents and reduce the risk and plan for any missing incidents. Factors that should be considered are:
 - any previous history of running away and what contributed to this;
 - the child's views on their situation at home or in placement, including quality of relationships; for looked after children, whether they are happy with the current level of contact with their family;
 - the presence of any push/pull factors, including external factors such as involvement in exploitation, grooming or trafficking;
 - levels of supervision, care and support at home or in placement;
 - for children who are subject to criminal court orders, any assessment by the Youth Justice Service of their absconding;
 - parents views on the child's needs and the risk of them running away; for looked after children, whether parents are happy with current levels of contact; for children living at home, parental attitudes to the child running away;
 - degree of risk to the child if they go missing, including their level of vulnerability or evidence of possible abuse and exploitation whilst missing.
- This information can be obtained by completing a missing children response form and considering the child's voice shared within the return home interview. The following forums should be used to discuss risk and formulate plans:

Child in need	CIN review Network meetings
Child protection	Strategy meetings Case conferences Core group meetings
Looked After Children	LAC reviews Statutory visits Placement agreement meetings
All children	CSE/CCE response meetings

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- Where a risk is identified, the child's plan should contain details of any support to be provided to reduce risk and what actions will be taken in the event the child runs away. Information that needs to be shared by the network includes possible destinations and any factors that may make the child more vulnerable.
- The following information about the child can help the police locate them in the event that they go missing and should therefore be obtained by social workers if possible:
 - mobile telephone number
 - oyster card number
 - bank details
 - social media sites.
- Where possible, the child and their parents should be included in the planning process so that they are aware of the level of concerns held by agencies and what action will be taken if the child goes missing.
- Where it is known that a looked after child has a history of missing or absence episodes this information should be included in the placement request and the Resources team and Fostering Service should take this into account when selecting potential placements. The placement agreement meeting should be used to discuss risks and ensure foster carers and residential keyworkers are aware of and know how to use the "Grab pack" available at:
 - [missing-person-grab-pack-2020-v3.docx \(live.com\)](#)
- If the child is to be placed out of borough, a robust system for reporting missing incidents must be agreed with the receiving local authority and local police to ensure that Camden is kept informed of all incidents. Information about the child's history of running away should also be included on the notification to the host local authority.

6. Children missing together

- Where children known to CSFH go missing together, a social work staff member will be designated as the lead CSFH officer for the purposes of liaising with the police and carrying out investigations.
- If one of the children missing is looked after, the CLA team will take responsibility, otherwise, there will be rota for CIN managers to be the designated officer. The designated officer will be responsible for:

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- keeping other allocated social workers and managers and service managers informed of developments
- gathering all information and intelligence from investigations
- working with other local authorities (if applicable) to share information on the children who are missing together, and coordinating a joint response
- ensuring that appropriate action is taken as a result of information gathered, for example convening a strategy meeting (including a missing strategy meeting and/or a CSE/CCE response meeting), and passing information and intelligence on to relevant forums such as MACE group.

7. Action to be taken on missing incidents

Where child who is known to CSFH goes missing from home, parents will have the main responsibility for reporting the child and liaising with the police. However, the allocated social worker should:

- speak to parents about any information, people, locations or risk which could inform the missing response form and ensure the child is reported as missing to the police
- send out notifications as set out below
- support parents and liaise with the police to help in locating the child
- plan what actions may be necessary to meet the child's needs once they return, including updating the child and family assessment or bringing forward the CIN review and amending the young person's plan to ensure a strategy is developed to keep the young person safe and minimise further episodes of running away
- take any necessary action under child protection procedures as set out below.

Where a child goes missing from care, CSFH as corporate parent needs to take clear action to locate the child and ensure their safety and welfare. The allocated social worker should:


- liaise with the foster carer, residential worker or housing support worker in order to complete the missing children response form
- decide on the type of absence and take appropriate action; for unauthorised absences, repeat the risk assessment at regular intervals; for missing children, request that the carer reports the child as missing to the police
- notify as appropriate as set out in section 8
- liaise with the IRO and carer to plan for the child's return
- ensuring the care plan contains a strategy to keep the child safe and address their reasons for running away.

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Updating the Missing response form: Social workers should update the response form on a regular basis as agreed with the relevant manager (ie: daily as long as the child remains missing from home or placement). The update should be a brief sentence on each of the following:

- actions taken to locate the child
- any new information regarding the child's location or who they may be with
- details of any contact with the child or family/carer/placement staff
- changes in risk level or concern for the child's whereabouts
- comments from the professional network
- further plans for locating the child.

Social workers should share the (updated) missing response form with managers and may share with others in the professional network on a need to know basis.

NB The response form should be kept open on MOSAIC for ongoing recording whilst the child remains missing. Click on  then **Yes** to save information. Only click **Finish** when the child has returned. For more details see the MOSAIC missing and absence reporting guide.

[missing-absence-reporting-guidance-version-1-draft-002.docx \(live.com\)](#)

Children may be reported as missing online via the police portal at <https://www.met.police.uk/partner-services> or by phoning the police on 101. However **in an emergency please call 999.**

8. Notifications

- Where a child remains missing the missing response form, which includes details from the missing report, must be circulated to the list of individuals recorded on the form. This is to ensure the child is brought to the attention of senior managers and the episode monitored accordingly.
- The information on the notification records are used to update Camden's Missing Children Register.

8.1 Children in need cases

All incidences of children in need going missing or absent from home should be notified to:

- the CSFH Director (Rashida Baig)
- the Head of Service (Michelle O'Regan)

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- Service managers
- Exploitation and Missing Team Manager (Bryony Smith)
- Child exploitation analyst (James Cozens)

All agencies who have been working with the child and their family should also be informed as the professional network may have important information that can help to trace the child and their family.

8.2 Child protection cases

If the child is subject to a child protection plan or a strategy meeting will be convened in connection with the missing or absent incident, the social worker should notify:

- the CSFH Director (Rashida Baig)
- the Head of Service (Michelle O'Regan)
- Service managers
- Exploitation and Missing Team Manager (Bryony Smith)
- Child exploitation analyst (James Cozens)

8.3 Looked after children cases

Where a looked after child goes missing or absent from placement, the social worker should notify:

- the CSFH Director (Rashida Baig)
- the LAC Head of Service (Brenda Amisi-Hutchinson)
- Missing and CSE lead (Michelle O'Regan)
- the IRO service manager (Kurt Ferdinand)
- Service managers
- Team managers
- Exploitation and Missing Team Manager (Bryony Smith)
- Child exploitation analyst (James Cozens)

Further, the following notifications should be made and actions taken;

- The child's parents or anyone else with parental responsibility should be notified **only when the child is classed as missing** and only where this is consistent with the child's welfare. Any decision not to inform parents must be recorded in the child's case record stating the reasons for this.

Missing children social work procedures

- The fostering service and the child's IRO should be notified of any missing incidents or periods of unauthorised absence and consideration given to the child's return to the placement.
- If the child has been remanded into local authority care and has consequently absconded whilst subject to a criminal court order, the Youth Offending Service should also be notified so that they can deal with any youth justice issues.
- If the child has been removed from their placement contrary to their care plan and there are concerns about their welfare as a result of this, social workers and their managers should consider convening a legal planning meeting and seeking advice on obtaining a recovery order.

The allocated social worker should consult with the child's IRO and convene a planning meeting to consider the following:

- whether the child should return to the placement
- whether the child's current care plan is appropriate
- what extra resources should be made available to better support the placement, including training
- what strategies can be put in place to reduce the risk of further incidents
- whether an early statutory review should be held to amend the care plan.

9. Missing strategy meeting

- A missing strategy meeting *must* be held in any of the following circumstances:
 - where a child is missing for 3 days or more;
 - where there is an emerging pattern of missing episodes;
 - where child protection concerns arise as a result of a child going missing or their circumstances once they return.
- For children residing in Camden or Islington, the local Missing Person Unit (MPU) must be invited to attend; they can be contacted on 07881 330963 to request updates/availability to attend.
- Children with an open Child Exploitation police report, and allocated CET officer, will be allocated to the MPU at the point of being reported missing. Children without an open Child Exploitation report will be allocated to the MPU after 48 hrs. If a child resides outside of Camden, the CAIT police can support with current contact details for the appropriate borough/county Missing Person Unit (MPU)

Missing children social work procedures

- The meeting should develop a plan to try and locate the child, return them home and to reduce the chance of future missing episodes. The professional network, including the police, should also be invited to the meeting to inform the plan. Missing strategy meetings should normally be reviewed weekly whilst a child remains missing.
- The purpose of the meeting is to consider:
 - any immediate safety issues
 - whether and/or how the child should be returned home
 - if a section 47 investigation should be started and how this will be conducted
 - if the case should be dealt with under other procedures, for example CSE, CCE or MAPPA.
- If the strategy discussion is being held in connection with a missing young person where it is thought that they are also at risk of exploitation and extra-familial harm, the meeting should consider whether information from the young person's social media account may help to locate them.
- If it is agreed by the meeting to access accounts, this will be carried out by the Exploitation and Missing team in line with CSFH procedures on surveillance of social media accounts: <https://ascpractice.camden.gov.uk/media/3290/social-media-surveillance-guidance.pdf>

10 Philomena protocol

- This is a London-wide police initiative designed to deal with missing episodes from residential and semi-independent accommodation to ensure there is a balance between allowing young people more freedom, building trusting relationships with young people and recognising when missing episodes may involve safeguarding issues.
- Social workers should work with keyworkers in residential placements and Pathway accommodation to gather relevant information about the young person for the "Missing Grab pack" that keyworkers will hold. In the event of the young person going missing, keyworkers will use this information to inform whether or not to report the young person as missing.
- [missing-person-grab-pack-2020-v3.docx \(live.com\)](#)

11 National alerts

- The Quality Assurance Unit will send out a national alert to other local authorities and hospitals requesting help in locating a missing child who is looked after by Camden or subject to a child protection plan or section 47 investigation. Alerts are sent out after a child has been missing for 5 days or immediately in child protection cases where this is warranted.
- Social workers should discuss the matter with their manager or supervisor and obtain authorisation from the Head of Service for a national alert to be sent out and contact the LADO & QA Support Officer to make arrangements.
- Social workers should record a brief summary of the missing child and their circumstances on the Alert pro-forma (available on MOSAIC) and send this to the LADO & QA Support Officer for action.

12 Missing children and extra-familial harm

- Extra-familial harm describes the forms of harm and exploitation arising from young people's community or peer group or on-line, rather than from their home environment. Sources of harm and exploitation can include:
 - child sexual exploitation
 - child criminal exploitation including county lines
 - modern slavery and trafficking
 - gang activity and youth violence
 - radicalisation.
- Frequent patterns of going missing are a strong indicator that a young person may be at risk of extra-familial harm; it may indicate that they are being groomed by exploiters or already involved in exploitation.
- Whenever there are any indications that the young person's missing episodes may be linked to possible exploitation, the MASH team or allocated social worker should follow the relevant procedures and complete a risk assessment in order to decide on the best intervention.

Child exploitation procedures are available at:

[child-exploitation-policy-and-procedures.pdf](#)

13 Actions when the child returns

In order to ensure that records are kept up to date and accurate information is shared with partner agencies, social workers should record this on MOSAIC by going back into the Missing/Absence report and completing the 'Date child returned' field then click 'Finish'.

Written notification (email) that the child has returned must also be sent to all agencies who were notified when they went missing (see section 8).

14 Recording and management information

- All return home interviews are recorded on MOSAIC using the Return Home Interview form. This form is used to capture information shared by children regarding their experience of being missing and the drivers which trigger missing episodes. Professionals can also capture the push and pull factors which impact on missing episodes. In addition, information is captured on contact attempts, methods of engaging with young people and feedback from children and parents.
- The Missing and Exploitation team collects and collates the following information about children who are missing or are absent from home, care and education and children from other boroughs who have been placed in Camden:
 - name of child
 - dates of episodes and duration
 - services currently working with the child
 - whether the child was missing from home or care
 - whether the child is at risk of CSE or CCE
 - whether a return home interview has been carried out.
 - push and pull factors which have triggered the missing episode.
- This information is collated and analysed to drive a data informed response to missing young people. The Child Exploitation Analyst produces monthly, quarterly, and annual reports which identify key themes and trends.
- They also explore the drivers behind missing episodes and engagement with RHIs. Within monthly reporting, they also identify frequently missing young people to ensure a tailored response to missing episodes.

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- Reporting is shared with senior managers and key partners, with annual reports presented to the Vulnerable Adolescent Strategy Group. In addition, key themes and trends are shared through the monthly MACE panel, as well as through front line practitioner training sessions.

15 Resources

Missing people

www.missingpeople.org.uk

116 000

Works with young runaways, missing people and their families. Advice and information for professionals working with young people who run away or go missing.

New Horizons Youth Centre

www.nhyouthcentre.org.uk

68 Chalton Street

NW1 1JR

0207 388 5570

Help, advice and support for young people aged 16-21 in the Kings Cross area who have housing issues.

Muslim Youth Helpline

www.myh.org.uk

0808 808 2008

18 Rosemont Road

NW3 6NE

Childline

www.childline.org.uk

0800 1111

Reunite

www.reunite.org.uk

01162 556234

Advice and help for parents whose children have been removed from the UK.

Railway Children

www.railwaychildren.org.uk

01270 757 596

Advice, support and outreach work for young people on the streets and advice for adults working with them.

Missing children social work procedures

Appendix 1 Social worker actions and forms

Police Definition	Category of absence	Definition	Action/forms
No apparent risk	Unauthorised absence	The child is not at home or placement as required but their whereabouts is known and there is no apparent risk of harm.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Missing/Absent report created on Mosaic and recorded as an Unauthorised absence Following 3 separate episodes of Unauthorised absence child is referred for a return home interview
Missing- Low risk (risk of harm is possible but minimal)	Concerning absence- Low	Low risk cases are those cases where the child is not at home or placement as required, but despite vulnerability /risk of exploitation, is known to be or highly likely to be with family or friends and is contactable by phone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social workers complete the Missing response form from their incoming work folder If the child remains missing, the Missing response form is circulated to the list on the form. On return home, social worker sends an email to let those notified of the return and completes and finishes the Missing Response form RHI is undertaken by Missing Outreach Worker when child returns. If declined, this is referred to the allocated social worker.
Missing- Medium risk (risk of harm is likely but not serious)	Concerning absence- Medium (Red or Amber RAG rated CCE and CSE)	Medium risk cases are CSE and CCE cases where the case has a Red or Amber RAG rating and an active CSE/CCE investigation is ongoing and the child is suspected of being with exploiters, is not with family and is not contactable by phone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social workers make sure the child has been reported as missing by parent/carer/keyworker. Social workers complete a Missing response form from their incoming work folder If the child remains missing, the Missing response form is circulated to the list on the form. On return home, social worker sends email to let those notified of the return and completes and finishes the Missing Response form. RHI is undertaken by Missing Outreach Worker when child returns. If declined, this is referred to the allocated social worker.

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			<p>For young people in residential/pathways accommodation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keyworkers to notify the social worker and carry out the Philomena protocol checklist using the Missing Grab pack • Keyworker to report the young person as missing to the police
<p>Missing- High risk (Risk of serious harm very likely)</p>	<p>Missing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child's whereabouts and the circumstances of going missing is unknown; and • their disappearance is out of character; and • there are specific concerns or factors that make the child vulnerable, for example age, disability, mental health difficulties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social workers make sure the child has been reported as missing by parent/carer/keyworker. • Social workers complete the Missing response form in their incoming work folder. • If the child remains missing, the Missing response form is circulated to the list on the form. • On return home, social worker sends an email to let those notified of the return and completes and finishes the Missing Response form. • RHI is undertaken by Missing Outreach Worker when child returns. If declined, this is referred to the allocated social worker. <p>For young people in residential/pathways accommodation the actions listed above should be followed.</p>

