



Missing families where there are concerns for children or unborn children

Procedures for Professionals

This document outlines procedures for all professionals in Suffolk regarding children and their parents where there are concerns about the children's safety and welfare (including where there are concerns about an unborn child) and whose whereabouts become unknown.

The Head of Safeguarding, Directorate of Health, Wellbeing and Children's Services, Suffolk County Council and the Detective Superintendent Protecting Vulnerable People, Suffolk Constabulary

Policy Version History

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3	March 2017	March 2020	Holly Boyd-Lambley, Missing Children Coordinator
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1. Recognition and Referral

1.1 Particular circumstances where there is uncertainty about the family's whereabouts and concerns raised include:

- The mother is herself a child.
- The unborn child is subject to a pre-birth assessment.
- Any of the children are subject to a Child Protection Plan or subject to enquiries under Section 47.
- There is a person in the household, or visiting the family, with previous convictions against children, or other person posing a risk of harm to children.
- There is reason to believe the expectant mother/family may be the victim of crime.
- An agency reaches the judgement that there are concerns about the child/family - this may include a child who is receiving services as a Child In Need e.g. a child with specific health needs.
- Parents go missing with a child subject to a court order.
- Child subject to private fostering arrangements.

1.2 The Children Missing Education Service may identify children who have stopped attending school, or failed to take up a school place following registration, where the family appear to have moved home. See Suffolk LSCB's [Children Missing from Education](#) procedures.

For any missing children, including those who are below school age, any **health professionals** actively working with the family would have a duty of care to notify the MASH via a MARF should the child(ren) be deemed to be vulnerable or at risk of significant harm.

1.3 Parents/carers may choose not to inform agencies that they have moved out of the area/overseas or where they have moved to, because they wish to prevent professionals from being involved with them, they wish to escape completely from pressures they are experiencing in their lives, or because things are going wrong for them. Such pressures may include perceived pressure from professionals as well as issues like debts or imminent evictions or escape from violence.

1.4 Where a child or young person goes missing alone, the LSCB procedures [Safeguarding Children Who Run Away & Go Missing from Home or Care](#) must be followed.

2. Actions to be Taken

- 2.1 Where parents go missing with children who are subject to a **public court order**, there must be an immediate report to the Police and legal advice obtained.
- 2.2 Professionals should take reasonable steps to ascertain the whereabouts of children thought to have gone missing with families but in situations where it becomes evident that the family is repeatedly unavailable for home visits and/or there is information suggesting they are no longer living at the given address, the lead agency involved with the family will report the child/ren missing to Suffolk Police (Operations: Tel 01473 613500) and to Children's Social Care through Customer First (Tel: 0808 800 4005) where the family is not already known to Children's Social Care.
- 2.3 Suffolk Police have primary responsibility for locating missing children. A COMPACT report will be created with the event scaled as high risk in accordance with Suffolk Constabulary procedures for missing children, and a formal referral notification, 'Protecting Vulnerable People' (PVP) form, sent to Children's Social Care.
- 2.4 Children's Social Care will convene a strategy threshold discussion/meeting involving the police and other involved professionals (e.g. members of the core group where the child has a Child Protection plan) within 24 hours. The purpose of this discussion is to obtain as clear a view as possible of the reasons for the child and family's disappearance, to evaluate risks in the context of Section 47 enquiries i.e. identifying and addressing any possibility that the child may be at immediate risk of harm and agree a course of action aimed at a) discovering the child's whereabouts b) taking whatever steps are possible and necessary to ensure the safety of the child, and c) addressing any likely media interest.
- 2.5 Notification should be made by the lead social worker/practice manager to the Safeguarding Missing Children's Coordinator so that other Local Authorities and agencies are alerted as agreed at the strategy meeting/discussion e.g. hospitals, medical centres, housing departments, probation services. The Missing Children's Coordinator can be notified via missing.children@suffolk.qcsx.gov.uk
- The Head of Safeguarding in Children's Services must be informed of any child missing with their parents where there are concerns of significant risk of harm to the child(ren).
- 2.6 Where the child is subject of a Child Protection plan a Review Child Protection Conference will be convened within 1 month to share information with agencies and review the plan, to include actions to be taken when the child/family is located.
- 2.7 Where a child is subject of a Child in Need plan, a CiN Review Planning Meeting must be convened within 1 month to share information with agencies and review the plan, to include actions to be taken when the child/family is located.

3 Children Who Are Thought to Have Been Taken Overseas

- 3.1 In addition to the procedures described, consideration will be given at the strategy meeting to contact the Consular Directorate at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office who may be able to follow up a case through their consular post in the country concerned. Contact details can be found at www.fco.gov.uk - 020 7008 1500. Suffolk Constabulary will conduct relevant enquiries overseas through appropriate channels e.g. Interpol, UKBA.
- 3.2 Particular consideration needs to be given to appropriate legal interventions where it appears the child may be removed from the UK by his/her family in order to evade the involvement of agencies with safeguarding responsibilities. The Child Abduction Section at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office should be informed immediately. Where there are concerns that children may be at risk of Forced Marriage or Honour Based Violence, Suffolk LSCB procedures must be followed.

[Safeguarding Children Who May be Forced into Marriage – Policy and Procedure](#)
[Safeguarding Children Who May be at Risk of Honour Based Abuse – Quick Guide](#)
[3](#)

4. If a Child who has a CP Plan, Subject to Section 47 Enquiries, CiN Planning or Public Court Order is not Located

- 4.1 The case will remain open as an active investigation into missing person/s by the police and will be subject to the COMPACT review process.
- 4.2 If the child and family continue to be missing, the child protection plan can only be discontinued following a Child Protection Review Conference where all efforts to locate the family are reviewed and the arrangements for police reviews are confirmed. In addition, the Head of Safeguarding must give approval for the child protection plan to be discontinued in these circumstances.
- 4.3 Where the child is subject to a CiN Plan, the case must be considered by the multi-agency group at a CiN Review meeting and decisions made about level of concerns and appropriate actions to be put in place.
- 4.4 The case will only be considered for closure by Children’s Social Care on the advice of the Head of Safeguarding following a final strategy meeting with Suffolk Constabulary where all efforts to locate the child and family have been reviewed.

5. When the Child/Family Are Located

- 5.1 Any agency/professional discovering the whereabouts of a child who are thought to have been missing with their parents, either from Suffolk or any other Local Authority area, must inform the Police immediately so that a Police Safe and Well Check can be conducted. Children's Social Care, either in Suffolk or the Local Authority from which the child and family went missing, must be informed.
- 5.2 An assessment will be undertaken by Children's Social Care of the child and family circumstances and consideration given to enquiries made under Section 47 Children Act 1989 to ascertain if the child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.
- 5.3 Where a child and family are located living in another Local Authority Area, Children's Social Care will make all necessary arrangements for the transfer of the case.
- 5.4 Where a child and family are located overseas, consideration must be given to the exchange of information with relevant authorities to ensure that assessment is undertaken and any action taken to address the needs of the children. Organisations such as International Social Services can be used for this purpose.