

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

This Quick Guide and the full Policy Safeguarding Children who Run Away and Go Missing from Home or Care must be used together with the Suffolk Safeguarding Children Board Procedures and Guidance found at www.suffolkscb.org.uk.

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

Most children and young people who go missing return the same day and some incidents concern children who are late home and for whom there are no other concerns. However, very often running away/going missing is **an indicator of underlying problems** which need further intervention such as:

- Problems at home/family conflict.
- Abuse or neglect.
- Mental health problems, bullying.
- Pressure from friends/associates.
- Sexual exploitation/trafficking.

Young people who run away may be at risk of **significant harm whilst away** from home or care placement e.g. those who remain missing overnight or for several days, sleeping rough and in contact with people posing a risk to them.

Police will lead efforts to locate children who are missing, working closely with Children's Social Care when children are missing from care placements.

When the child is located the Police will carry out an immediate **Safe and Well Check** to identify 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.

Police, Children's Social Care and any agency involved with a child who has run away/ gone missing, will share information and where necessary take action to safeguard or offer support to the child and family.

Arrangements will be made to see the young person whenever there is any indication of concern about a child or young person and to offer them an independent interview. This will build on information gained from the Police Safe and Well Check and serve to identify any harm the child may have suffered, understand and address the reasons why the child ran away and consider preventive measures regarding further running away.

This interview should aim to take place within 72 hours of the young person being located or returning from absence and will be carried out by:

- Children's Social Care where the child is in care.
- Children's Social Care where the child is already subject to Child Protection or Child in Need Plan.
- Children's Social Care, if the child is not currently receiving services, where there are concerns about a child's safety or health and development.
- Children's Social Care, as part of Sec 47 Enquiries where there are concerns about significant harm, either in respect of new referrals or where children are receiving services.
- An Early Help worker as part of a Common Assessment. (Further concerns arising from the return interview may result in a referral to Children's Social Care).
- An independent return interview can also be undertaken by Suffolk's commissioned service, Anglia Care Trust. This service can be accessed through the missing children inbox – missing.children@suffolk.gcsx.gov.uk

Where the child has a care plan (in care, Child Protection or Child in Need), the plan will be reviewed to reflect the needs of the child.

For all other young people who have run away/gone missing and their families, support will be provided through Team Around the Child (TAC).

Referral

Many young people who go missing are not reported missing to police by parents/carers. If an agency becomes aware of a child who has run away from home or is missing, a referral should be made to Police or Children's Social Care.

Suffolk Police: Main Switchboard	01473 613500
Customer First	0808 800 4005
Out of Hours Emergency Duty Service	0808 800 4005
MASH professionals line (for information & guidance during office hours)	0345 606 1499

Child Exploitation Strategic Sub Group - Suffolk Safeguarding Children Board

The LSCB has a Child Exploitation strategic sub group that ensures work on Missing Children, Child Sexual Exploitation and Gangs and Groups moves forward to safeguard children and young people. This sub group meets on a quarterly basis to monitor the work of the three work streams and ensure that there is accurate data, procedures and actions to issues related to services for children and young people who run away.

Further information about all Suffolk Safeguarding Children Board publications can be found on our website. www.suffolkscb.org.uk