

SES KITE

Supported Accommodation

Young People Missing From Care Policy and Practice

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1 INTRODUCTION

The following policy and practice guidance has been reviewed in relation to the DfE document, "Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home and care" (January 2014), Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Constabulary, "Guidance for Providers re Missing Children and when to respond" (November 2018) and Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership "Safeguarding Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care" (reviewed November 2021).

2 RATIONALE

There may be occasions when young people who are living at SES establishments will leave the premises without permission. This may result from impulsivity, distress, anger, frustration or any other emotion or life event that the young people find difficult to manage. We know from experience that because many of the young people in our care have social, learning or communication difficulties they can respond to events in a very reactive manner, sometimes resulting in flight behaviours.

3 CULTURE

Young people are less likely to run away, become missing or absent themselves without consent where they feel secure and safe, able to express their feelings and wishes, make appropriate choices and develop positive relationships with the adults and their peers, which are free from bullying. Young people should feel that their plans are being progressed, that they have a positive future and that staff are working enthusiastically to support, advise and listen to them.

They should also have a clear understanding of expectations upon them, the routines of the home and house rules; to this end, they should know whether it's acceptable, or not, to leave the home without permission or consent and they should be counselled and informed of the risks that are posed to them if they become missing, abscond or absent themselves, of the agencies that may be able to help them, such as their Individual Social Worker, Personal advisor, the **Children's Rights Director or Childline** - and of the consequences.

High levels of absence, running away or incidences of young people being missing, indicate the need for the Registered Service Manager to 'take stock' - they should undertake a formal review of the culture and strategies being used in the home and take steps to reduce the incidents.

The Appropriate and Suitable Location Review for the supported accommodation should be read in conjunction with this policy as it details any potential risks or triggers that may lead to young people going missing.

4 **DEFINITIONS**

Missing

A missing young person is a young person absent without consent to a degree or in circumstances where the absence causes concern for safety of the child or there is potential danger to the public, and their whereabouts are unknown.

Absent Without Consent

Some young people absent themselves for a short period and then return, often their whereabouts are known or thought to be known, they may be simply late or have left to cool off. They are not considered at risk and usually they are testing boundaries. Sometimes young people may stay out longer than agreed either on purpose or unwittingly. Their Risk Assessment, circumstances of age, previous behaviour, and information known at the time does not yet give cause for concern. This "boundary testing" is not within the definition of "missing"; these children should be well within the range of normal teenage behaviour and should be regarded as children whose absence is unauthorised.

Absconded

A child or young person who has gone missing who is subject to an order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process (e.g. remands, curfews, tagging, conditions of residence, or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings). This category would apply to a child for whom the Police have the power to arrest e.g. where bail conditions have been breached. It should be recognised that children who fit this criteria may also be vulnerable and at risk.

5 ASSESSING LEVELS OF CONCERN

The following criteria will help to inform whether a child who is absent or missing should be considered as high or medium risk:

HIGH RISK

A Young Person is automatically High Risk in the following circumstances

- If the young person is **Remanded** or otherwise **Lawfully Detained**, s/he is Absconded;
- The young person's death may occur;
- The young person may be at risk of serious injury or harm, e.g. from adverse weather conditions or the child's inability to stay safe;
- The young person requires essential medication/medical attention;
- The young person is likely to suffer Significant Harm;
- The young person may come into contact with a person who may pose them a risk. The young person may be injured, including self injury, and require medical attention;
- There is a warrant for the child's arrest;
- The young person may commit a violent or criminal offence;
- The young person may be abducted;
- If the young person's name is on the list for a child subject to a Child Protection Plan;
- The young person is subject to Police Protection;
- The young person is subject to an Emergency Protection Order or Recovery Order.

OTHER RISK FACTORS

These are risks/indicators that should be considered when assessing other Children, who do not automatically fall into the High Risk Category

Time Factors:

Risks must be (re) assessed every two hours or if circumstances change;

If a young person categorised as **Low Risk** has been Absent or Missing for 6 Hours s/he is automatically categorised as **Medium Risk**;

If a young person categorised as **Medium Risk** has been Absent or Missing for 6 Hours s/he is automatically categorised as **High Risk**.

Other Risk Factors that must be considered when assessing the risks to the Young Person or others:

- Any guidance agreed within the young person's Risk Assessment, Care Plan or Placement Plan;
- Vulnerability due to age, maturity, level of understanding;
- Particularly vulnerable (e.g. Child subject to a Child Protection Plan);
- In need of regular medication (e.g. diabetic);
- Previous history of being missing;
- History of self harming;
- Possible involvement in crime;
- Health, including mental health;
- Weather (e.g. severe cold or heat), or geography (e.g. remote area);
- Dependency on drugs and/or alcohol;
- Known vulnerability of the young person, raising concern that they may have been led into danger, including sexual exploitation;
- Known associates that give rise to heightened concerns over the missing Child's safety (e.g. associates known to be involved in criminal activities);
- Degree of risk to the public;
- Recent significant events, contributory factors and the child's state of mind at the time of the absence; immediate antecedents
- Time of day/night;
- Weather conditions
- Length of time at the establishment
- Legal status.
- Access to technology/mobile phone
- Access to money/debit card

6 PROCEDURES

Young people aged 16 and 17 are still children and can face risks, particularly of extra familial harm, sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation or involvement with gangs. Staff should maintain good and consistent communication with young people and be familiar with the young person's patterns, routines and mental health needs. Staff should be alert to concerning situations and take swift action if they cannot locate or make contact with a young person if that young person hasn't returned to the setting as expected.

SES expect that it would not be appropriate for young people who are known to be at risk of going missing or frequently go missing to be placed in supported accommodation as their needs are such that they would likely require a greater level of care and supervision. As a result of developing strong and trusting relationships and effective communication with young people, staff should encourage young people to keep staff informed of their whereabouts, where appropriate, and maintain good communication about their wellbeing. Where there is a possibility that a young person will go missing from a supported accommodation setting, their care/pathway plan, arranged by their accommodating authority and agreed with SES Kite, should include a strategy to minimise this risk.

Once it is certain that a young person has left the home and hasn't returned as expected, the Registered Service Manager or on call senior staff member should be notified immediately and they will decide how best to respond. Above all else staff should respond in a calm and professional manner, presenting the RSM (or designate) with any required information.

In some circumstances it may be advisable to allow the young person some space and a period of reflection in order to calm or to regain their composure. In other instances, if the young person is deemed to be at risk of significant harm, staff may need to intervene to ensure the safety of the individual. The intervention may include arranging for staff to search the immediate and/or local area, if it is safe to do so. Searches beyond that considered to be "local" should only be undertaken with the approval of the RSM. Staff should only follow a young person when there is a reasonable chance of returning them safely, without undue commotion and without leaving the other young people inadequately supervised.

If the decision is taken that the level of concern regarding the child's welfare is significant (e.g. medium or high risk - factors outlined in section 5 above will all inform this decision), the staff member in liaison with the RSM (or delegate) will notify the police and the young person's placing authority.

6.1 PHOTOGRAPHS

Two recent (dated) photographs of the young person (face and full body length) should be held on the young person's electronic and casework record. Digital photographs are preferable and they should be regularly updated at a minimum frequency of six months. Should a young person go missing it is vital to the safe recovery of the young person that a recent photograph of the child is made available.

On admission to care, the consent of a person with **Parental Responsibility** will be sought for a photograph to be used in any subsequent missing person investigation. If possible the consent of the young person should also be gained.

The Registered Service Manager will consider the most appropriate ways to meet the above requirements without stigmatising the young person and should ensure that the young person is made aware of what will happen if they go missing, including their right to be interviewed by an independent person on or prior to their return, and be given a choice as to who that may be. They should be given information leaflets and contact details of advocacy services/other services that they can access or that can be accessed on their behalf.

Unless it is in the best interests of the welfare of the young person, the photographs should not be used for any other purpose without the young person's consent.

7 ACTIONS ON A YOUNG PERSON'S RETURN

Once the young person has returned safely to the home and if they have been reported as "missing", the police, the young person's placing authority and parents (where appropriate) must be informed of the circumstances of their return by the member of staff on duty. **The decision on whether a young person is formally classified as 'missing from care' can only be established in consultation with the RSM or First Port of Call.**

The young person will be offered food and a hot drink if they have missed a meal or have been absent for a number of hours and staff will attempt to establish with the young person the reason for their absence.

Staff must complete an SES Kite Serious Incident form on Clearcare and record all facts associated with the absence.

Recording must cover:

- actions taken by staff
- circumstances of the child's return
- reasons for running away
- action taken in light of those reasons
- evidence that a missing from care meeting with the child's social worker has taken place or been requested where the incident has been recorded as 'missing from care' (see below).

Following a 'missing from care' episode, the young person's social worker will be contacted and requested to visit the young person, in line with the Supported Accommodation regulations 2023, so they can discuss the absence with someone independent of the home. The social worker could delegate this responsibility to a suitable professional such as a Police Officer, PCSO or another voluntary agency.

Details of this visit should be recorded on the SES Kite Serious Incident Form.

If this visit does not take place a record should be made of the reasons why and any actions SES adults have taken to facilitate the visit.

Where a young person is persistently absent from the establishment, or if they are at risk of significant harm, the RSM may call for a placing authority to convene for a risk management meeting to develop a strategy for managing risks. This strategy should be agreed by the accommodating placing authority, the local authority and the police.

If it is apparent, upon the return of the young person, that they have been the victim of a crime whilst absent, or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person arising from the circumstances that have occurred whilst absent, the Police must be called and asked to attend without delay. This is vital for the protection of the young person and the speedy recovery of evidence. In these circumstances Ofsted must be notified.

Any report from a young person that they were missing because of abuse must be referred immediately to the local social services department for consideration under Safeguarding Procedures, and Ofsted must also be notified.

Other than in the case of a safeguarding referral, notification to Ofsted only becomes necessary if the child is missing from care for an extended period with extensive Police involvement. Decision making in these circumstances will always result in discussion with the RSM or the 'first port of call'.

Police support in returning children who have been absent promptly to the home does not count as a missing episode and will not require a notification to Ofsted. This also applies to the follow up welfare checks where police have been informed but the child returns by some other means. The only exception to this would be individual circumstances in which the child has been at unknown risk. The decision to notify will be made in discussion with the First Port of Call.

Return Interviews

Every young person who has been reported as missing from care must be offered a return interview and actively encouraged to take up the offer. The details of this must be recorded as part of the accompanying SES Kite Serious Incident Form.

A "return interview" must be requested from the placing authority for each "missing from care" episode. The purpose of this interview is:

- To identify the factors leading to the missing episode.
- To inform efforts to prevent further missing episodes.
- To inform any future missing person investigation should the young person go missing again.
- To learn of the activities, associates, risks and victimisation involved in the missing episode and where possible, to address those risks.

As already outlined, the decision on categorising a young person's absence as 'missing from care' can only be taken in full consultation with the First Port of Call.

8 PREVENTION OF IMPROPER ABSENCE

SES Kite establishments provide a safe and stable environment that supports young people in developing social interaction skills and positive self worth, thus reducing the potential desire for missing from care incidents. Some examples of this are:

- Highly personalised care tailored to individual needs
- Regular young person mentoring sessions
- PAN (My Journey) documents
- House meetings
- Promotion of family relationships through systemic practice
- Individual therapeutic approaches as appropriate to the young person
- Opportunities to discuss concerns with key adults in privacy
- Proactive measures for dealing with any occurrences of bullying
- Access to advice and guidance from staff.

9 SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO SEEK HELP IF MISSING

Despite all preventative measures, there may be occasions where young people experience periods of missing from care. Where there is a risk that a young person may go missing, staff should do everything they can to help them understand the risks and dangers involved and make them aware of how to seek help if they do go missing. This will form part of formal mentoring sessions, with all young people provided with details of the “Missing People Safe Care Service”. Missing People provide a free confidential service to children and young people who may have been involved in gangs or county lines and have regular missing episodes. They accept self-referrals from children and young people and referrals from external professionals and agencies (police, social services, schools, charities, youth organisations etc). Contact details for Missing People are:

- SafeCall Telephone: 020 8392 5710 SafeCall
- E-mail: SafeCall@missingpeople.org.uk
- 24/7 Helpline: 116 000
- 24/7 Helpline E-mail: 116000@missingpeople.org.uk