

SES KITE

SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION

Missing Child Policy and Practice

Date created or revised: 0726

Date of next review: 0727

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1 INTRODUCTION

This policy outlines the arrangements in place at SES Kite to safeguard and protect young people who are missing.

This policy has been created with reference to the following legislation and guidance:

- The Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023, including regulation 21 – Missing Child Policy
- Guide to the Supported Accommodation Regulations including Quality Standards
- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026
- Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care
- Suffolk Safeguarding Children Partnership procedures and Suffolk Constabulary Philomena Protocol

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear direction for all staff to ensure that any absence or missing episode is managed promptly, proportionately and with full regard to individual rights, welfare and safety.

2 RATIONALE

There may be occasions when young people who are living at SES Kite establishments leave the premises without staff awareness, or do not return at an expected time. 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 we support may have social, learning or communication difficulties, they can respond to events in a very reactive manner. This can sometimes result in flight behaviours or lead them to underestimate risks in the community.

Our response must balance each person's right to independence, privacy and freedom of movement with our safeguarding responsibilities and the need to take reasonable steps to protect them from harm. All staff share responsibility to act swiftly and in accordance with this policy whenever there is a reason to believe a young person may be at risk.

Young people aged 16 and 17 are still children in law and may face risks of extra-familial harm, exploitation, unsafe relationships or other safeguarding concerns while developing greater independence.

3 CULTURE

Young people are less likely to run away, become missing or absent when they feel

safe, respected, listened to, and able to express their feelings and wishes, make appropriate choices and develop positive relationships with the staff who understand and respond to their needs.

They should clearly understand what is expected of them, their rights to make choices about going out or leaving the home, and the importance of letting staff know where they are so that their safety and wellbeing can be supported, if appropriate and proportionate. Staff must support autonomy and independence while ensuring welfare and safeguarding duties are met.

Supported accommodation is not a secure setting. Any restriction on movement must only occur where it is necessary to safeguard the young person, and must be reasonable, proportionate and lawful. Staff will encourage communication and responsible decision-making while respecting their right to freedom, choice and independence.

If patterns of absence or missing episodes develop, the Registered Manager will review culture and strategy within the home, update risk assessments, and consult with relevant professionals. The appropriate and suitable location review for the provision must be read in conjunction with this policy, as it identifies potential risks or triggers that may lead to a person going missing.

4 DEFINITIONS

Missing

A young person whose whereabouts are unknown and whose absence gives cause for concern for their safety or wellbeing, or where there may be danger to others.

Whereabouts known

A young person who is absent for a short time, where their location is known or thought to be known, and where there is no immediate concern for safety. Such absence should still be recorded and monitored.

Absconded

A young person who is missing while subject to a legal order or requirement, such as bail, curfew, remand conditions or another relevant legal requirement, the breach of which may require police or placing authority involvement.

5 **ASSESSING LEVELS OF CONCERN**

The following criteria will assist staff in determining whether a young person who is absent or missing should be considered as high risk or medium risk. Judgements must always take account of individual support, personal history and current circumstances:

HIGH RISK

A Young person should be treated as High Risk in the following circumstances

- If the young person is **Remanded, Lawfully Detained**, or subject to another legal requirement and leave without authorisation, they are considered to have absconded;
- There is reason to believe that death or serious injury may occur;
- There is an immediate risk of serious harm, e.g. from adverse weather conditions or the inability to stay safe;
- The young person requires essential medication or urgent medical attention;
- There is evidence or likelihood that the young person will suffer Significant Harm;
- The young person may come into contact with a person who may pose them a risk or who may exploit or coerce them;
- The young person may be injured, including self-injury, and require medical attention;
- There is a warrant for the young person's arrest, or they are subject to bail or license conditions that have been breached;
- The young person may commit a violent or criminal offence while absent;
- There is an indication of abduction or unlawful removal;
- Or where a child protection plan, safety plan, risk assessment, court order, bail condition or placing authority plan indicates high risk;

OTHER RISK FACTORS

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

Time Factors:

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

The length of time a young person has been absent or missing is an important factor, but it must be considered alongside the young person's individual risk assessment, support plan, known vulnerabilities, circumstances, time of day, likely whereabouts, contact with staff, emotional presentation, previous missing history and any immediate safeguarding concerns. A young person's risk level may need to be escalated at any point, including immediately, where there are concerns for their safety or welfare.

Where a young person remains absent or missing for a prolonged period, the Registered Manager or on-call senior staff must review the risk level and consider whether further action is required, including police involvement, placing authority notification, wider searches or a multi-agency response. **A fixed period of absence must never delay action where there are immediate concerns for the young person's safety or welfare.**

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 assessments and support plan;
- Vulnerability due to age, maturity, level of understanding;
- Particularly vulnerable young person;
- In need of regular medication (e.g. insulin dependent diabetes);
- Previous history of being missing;
- History of self-harm, suicidal thoughts or mental-health crisis;
- Possible involvement in, or exposure to, crime;
- Current physical or mental health concerns;
- Environmental factors such as severe weather, isolation or unsafe locations;
- Dependency on drugs and/or alcohol;
- Known vulnerability of the young person, raising concern that they may be at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE), child criminal exploitation (CCE), county lines activity, online exploitation, trafficking or other forms of abuse;
- Known associates who present risk through offending, exploitation, county lines activity, gang affiliation or substance misuse;
- Degree of risk to the public;
- Recent significant events, contributory factors and the young person's state of mind at the time of the absence;
- Time of day/night;
- Length of time living in the supported accommodation;
- Legal status or current orders;
- Access to technology, transport or mobile phone;
- Access to money, debit or credit cards;

6 PROCEDURES

All young people supported by SES Kite are entitled to freedom of movement and to make their own choices wherever this can be done safely. However, some may face risks if they leave without informing staff – including exploitation, harm from others, or deterioration in their physical or mental health. Staff must therefore maintain consistent communication with every individual, understand their patterns, routines and emotional needs, and respond quickly if contact cannot be made.

Any response must respect the young person's rights, independence and freedom of movement while ensuring SES Kite meets its safeguarding responsibilities under the Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023, Working Together to Safeguard Children and local safeguarding children procedures.

Once it is certain that a person has left the home and not returned or made expected contact, the RM or on-call senior staff must be informed immediately. They will decide how best to respond based on the known facts and risk indicators. Above all, staff must act calmly and professionally, providing accurate information and avoiding panic or blame.

In some circumstances it may be advisable to allow a short period for the young person to have space or regain composure before intervening. In others, if the young person is believed to be at risk of significant harm, staff may need to take immediate action to ensure their safety. This may include searching the immediate or local area, where it is safe to do so. Searches beyond the local vicinity must only occur with the approval of the RM. Staff should only follow a person when there is a reasonable chance of returning them safely, without creating distress or leaving others unsupervised.

If the decision is made that the level of concern is medium or high risk (as outlined in section 5), the staff member, in liaison with the RM, must contact the police and inform the placing authority, allocated social worker, personal advisor and/or emergency duty team.

When reporting a young person as missing, staff should provide as much relevant information as possible, including: the young person's full name and date of birth, when and where they were last seen, what they were wearing, any belongings, phone, money or travel card they may have, known associates or places they may go, relevant medical information, current risk factors, recent photograph and any immediate safeguarding concerns.

6.1 PHOTOGRAPHS

Two recent (dated) photographs of the young person (face and full body length) should be held on the young person's support plan (including electronic and physical copies). 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 them is made available.

When the young person moves into supported accommodation, SES Kite will seek consent for a recent photograph to be held and shared with police or relevant safeguarding professionals if the young person is reported missing. Where the young person is looked after, this should be discussed with the placing authority and those with parental responsibility as appropriate.

The RM will ensure this requirement is met in a way that avoids stigma and protects dignity. Every young person must be made aware of what will happen if they are reported missing, and will be offered access to advocacy if they wish to discuss concerns or influencing factors related to the absence. Information leaflets and contact details for advocacy and support services must be available and explained as part of admission.

Photographs must not be used for any other purpose without the individual's informed consent, unless required by law or in the person's best interests for safeguarding reasons.

7 ACTIONS WHEN A YOUNG PERSON RETURNS

Once the young person has returned safely to the home or supported accommodation, staff must respond in a calm and supportive manner. The priority is to re-establish a sense of safety and belonging and to ensure they are not made to feel blamed or punished for their absence.

If the young person had been reported as missing, the police, the placing authority, allocated social worker, personal advisor, emergency duty team and any other relevant safeguarding professional must be informed immediately that they have returned. The final decision as to whether a missing person notification should remain open, or be closed, rests with the RM or First Port of Call.

The young person must be offered food and a hot drink if they have missed a meal or have been absent for a number of hours. Staff should undertake a brief welfare check to establish whether they require medical attention or other immediate support. If there are any signs they have been harmed or are in distress, staff should immediately seek medical advice or assistance from emergency services.

Where police have been involved, staff should support any police Safe and Well check following the young person's return. A return conversation or independent return interview should be requested in line with local procedures and should usually take place within 72 hours of the young person returning or being located.

Staff should take time to speak with the young person, in a calm and non-judgemental manner, to understand what led to the absence, what happened while they were away, and whether they feel safe to remain in the home. This discussion should be recorded accurately, and any safeguarding concerns must be reported without delay.

All facts associated with the absence must be documented in detail. The record should include:

- Actions taken by staff during the absence;
- The circumstances of the young person's return;
- Any reasons offered for leaving;
- Action taken in light of those reasons;
- Evidence that a follow-up meeting, return conversation, and independent return interview has taken place or been requested;

This conversation should allow the young person to talk freely about the reasons for leaving and any ongoing worries they may have. Where appropriate, an advocate or other professional may be involved at the young person's request. All details of the visit must be recorded on the Serious Incident Form. If this does not take place, a record must be made of the reasons why and of any steps taken by SES Kite staff to facilitate it.

Where a young person is persistently absent or at continuing risk of significant harm, the RM should request a risk management meeting with the placing authority and other professionals to agree a multi-agency strategy for reducing risk. Where missing episodes are repeated or escalating, the meeting should also consider whether supported accommodation remains suitable and whether the young person requires a different level of support, supervision or safeguarding response.

If it becomes apparent the young person has been the victim of a crime, or they may be in danger from any person or situation that occurred while they were missing, the police must be informed immediately. This is essential for both protection and for securing any evidence.

Any disclosure or concern that the young person went missing because of abuse, neglect, exploitation, bullying, coercion, fear, unsafe relationships or feeling unsafe in the accommodation must be referred without delay in line with local safeguarding procedures. This may include referral to the placing authority, children's social care, the LADO where staff conduct is involved, and/or the police.

The RM must consider whether Ofsted or any other relevant body needs to be notified in line with SES Kite's notification procedures. This may include a missing episode where the young person has been at significant risk of harm, where there has been serious police involvement, where the incident raises safeguarding concerns, or where the young person's safety, welfare or placement suitability is significantly affected. The decision and rationale must be recorded.

Police assistance in returning a person safely to the home does not, by itself, count as a missing episode requiring regulator notification, unless the individual was believed to be at unknown risk. Such decisions should always be discussed with the manager on duty.

Every person who has been reported missing must be offered an opportunity for a return conversation. This is a chance for them to talk about what happened, to identify any issues that contributed to the absence, and to agree what support might help prevent recurrence.

The purpose of this discussion is to:

- Identify the factors leading to the missing episode;
- Inform future support and risk-management planning;
- Learn about any activities, contacts or experiences that placed the young person at risk;
- Build understanding and trust between the young person and the staff supporting them;

Wherever possible, the conversation should be conducted by someone with whom the young person feels comfortable, and a record of outcomes must be made on the young person's support record.

Following every missing episode, the young person's support plan and risk assessment will be reviewed and updated where necessary to reflect any new or emerging risks, protective factors or agreed strategies. The Registered Manager will also consider whether the incident identifies any wider learning for the service, including changes to practice, staff guidance, training or governance arrangements.

8 PREVENTION OF MISSING EPISODES

SES Kite provides safe and stable environments that support young people to develop positive relationships, confidence and a sense of belonging. Preventing missing episodes begins with understanding each young person's story, strengths, vulnerabilities and ensuring they feel respected and heard.

Preventative practice includes:

- Highly personalised support tailored to individual needs;
- Building trust through consistent keywork and mentoring sessions;
- PAN (My Journey) documents;
- Holding regular house meetings to encourage open communication;
- Promotion of family and community links wherever safe and appropriate;
- Individual therapeutic approaches as appropriate to the young person
- Opportunities to discuss concerns with key staff in privacy
- Proactive measures for dealing with any occurrences of bullying, conflict or isolation are addressed quickly and sensitively;
- Access to advice and guidance from staff when needed;
- Clear agreements with young people about keeping in touch when out in the community;
- Reviewing missing episodes to identify patterns, triggers, relationships, locations or safeguarding concerns;

Staff should take every opportunity to support young people to understand how to manage risk, make safe choices, and seek help when they are worried. Positive, trusting relationships between staff and young people remain the most effective means of preventing people from going missing.

The RM will monitor incidents and trends as part of quality assurance and will take action to address any emerging patterns, training needs or environmental factors that may contribute to missing persons.

9 SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO SEEK HELP IF MISSING

Despite the best preventive efforts, there may be times when a young person becomes missing. Staff must ensure that everyone supported by SES Kite understands the risks of being missing and knows how to seek help if they feel unsafe or unable to return.

All young people should be given information about support services during their admission and reminded of these whenever appropriate. These include:

Missing People Helpline – 116 000 (Free, 24/7, Confidential)

Email: 116@missingpeople.org.uk

Local safeguarding children and emergency duty team contact information:

Police 999/101

Local Advocacy service, including children's advocacy where applicable

Where appropriate, SES Kite will use the Suffolk Constabulary Philomena Protocol to assist with the prompt location and safe return of a young person who is missing.

Staff must ensure that information about these services is clearly displayed in communal areas and that everyone understands how they can access help if needed. Discussions about personal safety and available support should form part of regular keywork sessions.