

MPS Missing Persons Process & Partnership
Local Policing & Childrens' Care Home – Joint Responsibility Agreement

Introduction

Reports of missing children from residential, care homes or placements are a significant source of demand and concern for the MPS. It is right that we are mindful of the risks and vulnerabilities associated with these children, and seek to manage concerns wherever present, however we must do so through proportionate and sustainable measures.

A child will not automatically be missing simply by virtue of not being where they are supposed to be. In addition to the unnecessary demand created for police, inappropriately reporting as missing can be extremely damaging to a child; it can erode their trust in care givers and police, risk unnecessary criminalisation, create a social stigma for them, or possibly put them at risk from their peers or others, including those who may seek to exploit them.

Children in care are disproportionately likely to be reported as missing. There may be risks and concerns that make this a necessary measure in certain cases, but a significant factor in dictating the reporting behaviour of care home is often an internal blanket instruction to do so at all times, which staff feel obliged to follow. It is necessary to move away from this practice.

There are of course instances in which the reporting as missing to police will be the most appropriate course of action. However, to find the right balance, careful consideration and sound judgement should be demonstrated in all cases.

To achieve the best working practice, and in the best interests of all children residing in care, it is necessary that the joint responsibility expectations between care givers and local police are outlined, understood and fulfilled.

Intention

- To safeguard each child in care or resident in supported accommodation
- To manage risk appropriately in accordance with the needs of the child
- To reduce missing episodes for children
- To minimise unnecessary involvement of police
- To manage demand and support a more effective service overall
- To develop understanding of the joint responsibility held by care givers and local police
- To ensure that our joint response is sustainable and that emerging best practice is identified and appropriately developed



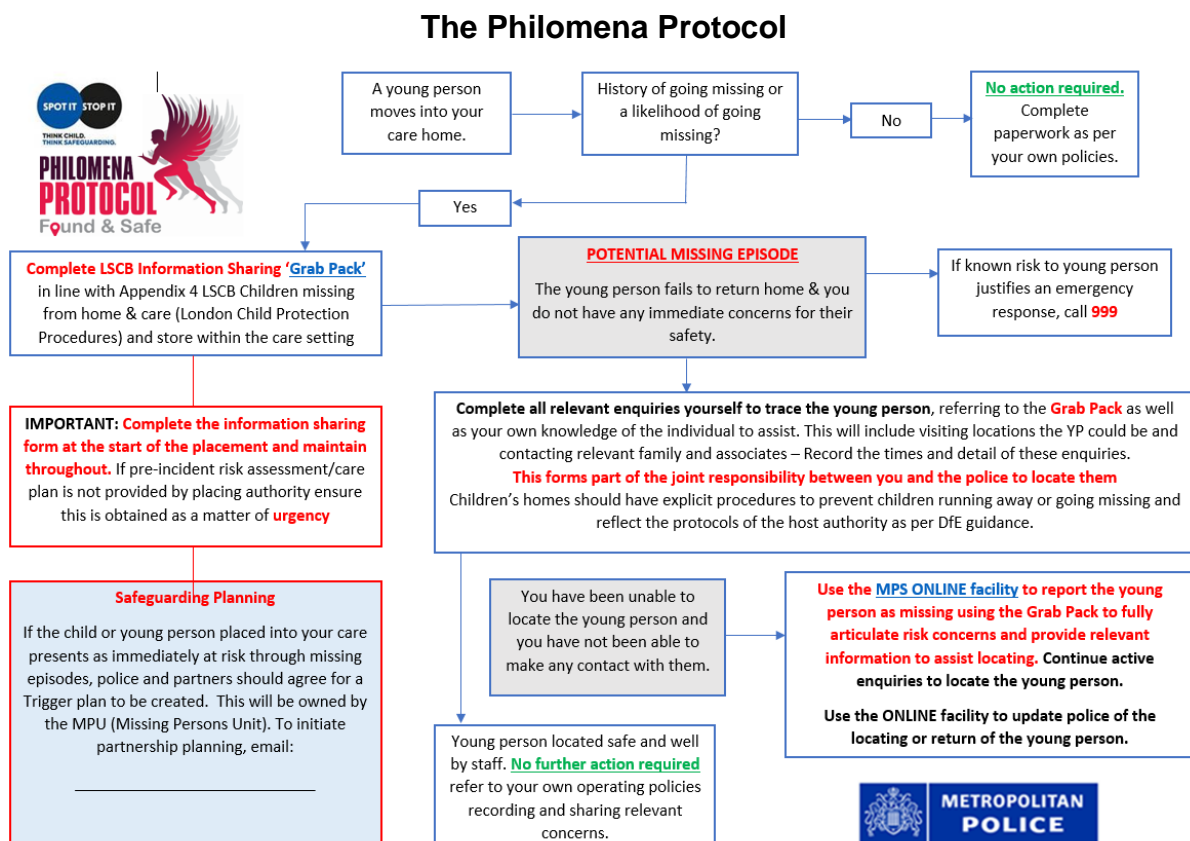
Joint Responsibility

It is important to recognise that reporting a child missing to police does not reduce or remove the ongoing professional/corporate parenting role of carers. The expectation is that corporate parents will respond with the same level of care and concern for a missing child as any good parent.


Joint, or shared responsibility reflects this ongoing expectation. Police will fulfil an investigative and safeguarding role for all children reported missing when necessary, but in turn will expect relevant and appropriate support from corporate parents prior to, and for the duration of, any reported incident, as well as ongoing preventative measures for such incidents.

It is fair that these expectations are sufficiently developed, well communicated, and ultimately sustainable for all care homes and placements across London. You can expect police to support staff with advice and training (where necessary), while also to be challenged if the expected responsibilities are not undertaken.

A clear process to guide reporting behaviour and decision making is essential. The Philomena Protocol has been created to outline a clear pathway for the reporting of missing children in care.



The Philomena protocol outlines the process to take when a young person is being reported missing.



Managers and agencies overseeing care homes and placements should ensure that their internal missing policies reflect the joint responsibility expectations in the best interests of risk management and sustainable reporting behaviour. It is vital that all staff, in daytime or night-time roles, are suitably trained to meet these expectations and fulfil their responsibilities.

Risk, Vulnerability & Concern

Going missing can often be symptomatic of an underlying issue. It may be unhappiness in the home or the need to be with family and friends, or worse, there could be a personal source of potential harm or a damaging external influence (e.g. criminal or sexual exploitation).

Risks and vulnerabilities are many and it is essential that knowledge of each child is available to care home staff and continuously developed while they remain in the placement.

Prior to the commencement of a child's placement, all records must be transferred by the allocated social worker or another responsible professional. It is not acceptable for these records to arrive after the child, or not at all, and care home/placement managers must ensure that any breach is challenged with the relevant Local Authority, particularly with out of borough placements in which there is a statutory requirement that local authorities are notified by the placing authority.

In order to act appropriately in the event of a child going missing the information held will be crucial in the decision making process.

The following should be in place and the care home manager must ensure that they are accessible to all staff day and night:

- The Care Plan – should include strategies to avoid unauthorised absences and/or a child going missing. It should also include strategies to reduce the duration and risks associated if the child does have unauthorised absences/going missing;
- The Placement Plan – should include strategies for preventing the child from taking unauthorised absences/going missing;
- Looked After Child information Sharing Form (Grab Pack) – should be accurately maintained for all children where there is concern that they may go missing.

Looked After Child Information Sharing Form

The form is titled 'Missing Person Reporting Pack' and is divided into four main sections:


- Section 1 (Top Left):** Contains the title 'Missing Person Reporting Pack', a 'SUBJECT PROFILE' section with a 'NAME' field, and a 'SENSITIVE - STORE SECURELY' warning.
- Section 2 (Top Right):** Contains instructions on 'Reporting a person missing' and 'Reporting a person missing online', along with a 'Living Abroad?' section.
- Section 3 (Bottom Left):** Titled 'PART ONE - GENERAL INFORMATION AND RISK', it includes a 'PERSONAL ABOUT OTHER' table, a 'RESIDENTIAL' section with checkboxes for various housing types, and a 'REPORTING' section with checkboxes for reporting methods.
- Section 4 (Bottom Right):** Contains a 'PART TWO - RISK ASSESSMENT' section with a table for 'RISK ASSESSMENT' and a 'PART THREE - RISK MANAGEMENT' section with a table for 'RISK MANAGEMENT'.

The Missing Persons Grab Pack records all information from the child's care plan which includes all their details. This is in line with the LSCB appendix 4.

Prevention

There is a responsibility on care homes/corporate parents to work with all children in their care to understand the risks associated with missing, what will happen if they are not where they are supposed to be, and to agree preventative steps.

There should be solid and supportive engagement with the child, at point of placement, to explain any expectations on them around times to return home and to establish any factors that may trigger a missing episode from the outset (e.g. being unhappy with the placement or proposed curfew, or wishing to see family or friends). All appropriate steps should be taken to mitigate any concerns raised and if possible an agreement made with the child.



Where a child already has an established pattern of going missing, the care plan should include a strategy to keep the child safe and minimising the likelihood of the child running away in the future. This should be discussed and agreed as far as possible with the child and with the child's carers and should include detailed information about the responsibilities of all services, the child's parents and other adults involved in the family network.


Care homes and placements with high volumes of reporting can expect police to monitor reporting behaviours and liaise with managers, staff and Local Authorities, to problem solve and develop best practice, in order to reduce missing episodes and safeguard children in care.

Expectations Prior to Reporting a Child as Missing from Care

Police should not be routinely informed in all instances when a child does not return when expected, for example, a breach of curfew. Although it may be appropriate if the circumstances imply that there is an immediate significant risk and there are concerns about the child's welfare or safety.

Carers/corporate parents should think carefully about what their concerns are when a child is not where they're supposed to be. The Philomena Protocol should be followed to develop an appropriate response.

It is expected that prior to any report to police that all reasonable and practical steps, which any good parent would take, are taken to secure the safe and speedy return of that child.



Outlined below are some actions that should be completed. This is not an exhaustive list and knowledge held about a specific child should inform additional actions. As outlined in the Philomena Protocol all reports to police should be made using the MPS Online facility.

All parties should be minded that if the incident is believed to be an emergency or threat to life a call to 999 would be appropriate at the earliest possible stage.

Expectations When a Child is Missing from Care

It is expected that carers/corporate parents maintain a level of care and responsibility during any incident. All appropriate and relevant efforts to locate the child should continue throughout.

Any new information on the child's whereabouts, welfare or emerging concerns should be passed to police immediately using the MPS Online facility.

A call to 999 should be made in the event of immediate threats to life or emergencies

Expectations When a Child Returns Home

Carers/corporate parents should complete a detailed assessment when the child returns and a written record should be made. The purpose is to ensure firstly that they

EXPECTED ACTIONS PRIOR TO POLICE INVOLVEMENT


TICK

- Attempt to contact the young person (repeat)
- Contact all known family members
- Contact all known friends and other relevant persons
- Contact local hospitals
- Check any known Social Media
- Search home and immediate outdoor areas wherever possible
- Check locations known to be frequented
- Oyster Card (if can be viewed online or by a social worker with access)
- Talk to other young people in the home
- Inform child's social worker
- Ensure social services risk assessment for the child available and viewed

The result of all actions completed should be recorded and provided to police if it becomes necessary to report the child as missing.

are safe and well. After which, efforts should be made to establish as much information as possible about the episode. This of course relates to what the child might say, but should also focus on non-verbal indicators. For example:

- How would you describe the child's general appearance?

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- How would you describe the child's general mood?
 - Are there any signs of harm or injury?
 - Are they tired or otherwise not completely alert?
 - Do they appear to be, or have been, under the influence of alcohol or drugs?
 - Have they returned without items they left with or different clothes?
 - Do they have any new property? (e.g. clothes, trainers, jewellery, mobile phone)

All relevant information should be provided to police at the point of return using the MPS Online facility.

Agreement

This local agreement forms part of an ongoing strategy to manage the handling of missing incidents and to minimise the necessity of police interventions in the life of a looked after child. The Metropolitan Police will ensure ongoing engagement with this care placement to support any necessary improvement as agreed.

This will be determined between the care placement and police.

Signed.....on behalf of Care Provider
Signed.....on behalf of XX BCU
Date.....