

Absence and Missing Children Policy:

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Regulations and Standards:

The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015:

- Regulation 6 - The quality and purpose of care standard.
- Regulation 12 - The protection of children standard.
- Regulation 34 - Policies for the protection of children.
- Regulation 40 - Notification of serious event.

Working Together To Safeguard Children 2023

Policies for the protection of children

34.—(1) The registered person must prepare and implement a policy which —

(a) is intended to safeguard children accommodated in the children's home from abuse or neglect; and

(b) sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect. (2) The procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect must, in particular—

(a) provide for liaison and co-operation with any local authority which are, or may be, making a child protection enquiry in relation to a child accommodated in the home;

(b) provide for the prompt referral of an allegation about current or ongoing abuse or neglect in relation to a child to the placing authority and, if different, the local authority in whose area the home is located; (c)

provide for the prompt referral of an allegation about past abuse or neglect in relation to a child to the placing authority and, if different, the local authority in whose area the alleged abuse or neglect occurred;

(d) provide for records to be kept of an allegation of abuse or neglect, and the action taken in response; (e) describe the measures which may be necessary to protect children following an allegation of abuse or neglect; and

(f) describe how and to whom staff are to report, without delay, any concern about abuse or neglect of a child.

(3) The registered person must prepare and implement a policy for the prevention of bullying in the home, which must in particular set out the procedure for dealing with an allegation of bullying. (4) The registered person must prepare and implement a policy ("the missing child policy") setting out— (a) the steps taken, and to be taken, to prevent children from being absent without permission; and (b) the procedures to be followed, and the roles and responsibilities of persons working at the home, in relation to a child who is, or has been, so absent.



*(5) Before implementing, or making an amendment which the registered person considers to be substantive to, the missing child policy, the registered person must—
(a) consult, and take into account the views of, each relevant person; and
(b) have regard to any relevant local authority or police protocols on missing children. (6) The registered person must keep under review and, as necessary, revise the home's child protection policies.*

Related Guidance:

[Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care \(DfE, January 2014\)](#)

where the child is, or has been, persistently absent from the HND Children's Care Ltd placement.

This policy is to be read and interpreted in conjunction with: Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018, National protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers (Nov 2018) Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Act 2004, Children's Home Regulations (Quality Standards) 2015, and the Statutory Guidance on Children Who Runaway or Go Missing from Home or Care (Jan 2014).

[Greater Manchester Police – Philomena Protocol.](#)

Please also refer to the following internal policies and procedures:

[Safeguarding – Child Protection Policy.](#)

[Positive Behaviour Support Policy.](#)

It is expected that this policy is shared with the local Police and /or missing from care co ordinator for agreement.

1. Definition of Missing Children:

As can be referred to in the statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care:

Missing from Care - A Looked After child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g., school) and their whereabouts are not known.

Away from Placement Without Authorisation - A Looked After child whose whereabouts are known but who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be, and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.

The Police categorise children as either Missing or absent.

Missing: Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.



Absent: A person is not at a place where they are expected or required to be.

Each child who comes into HND Children's Care Ltd care will have their own missing from home procedure / risk assessment that is specific to them. This will be an informative document that will inform the reader of specific protocols to follow if the child were to go missing from home /away from the home without authorisation.

2. Planning and Prevention:

The home's manager must ensure that all the children in the home are educated regularly in the dangers and risks to leaving the home without permission. Children should be provided with information on where they can access help if they consider running away, e.g., from by contacting their Independent Person and / or an advocate.

It is important to remember that our home / s, provide regulated care for children with emotional and / or behavioural difficulties and / or Learning Difficulties; they are often very vulnerable as a consequence of this.

All HND Children's Care Ltd, ensure children have a placement plan and a detailed risk assessment, and this must take account of any likely risk of the child becoming absent / missing. If there are known / likely risks, the placement plan and risk assessment should incorporate measures to reduce or prevent the child becoming absent, and information that would help facilitate the location of the child should they go missing.

The child's placement plan and risk assessment should be reviewed regularly and after any period of absence.

All children should have a completed 'Philomena Protocol Form' completed at the point of admission, as per the guidance from Greater Manchester Police. This should be reviewed and updated regularly, and / or where any changes occur.

In the absence of an agreed plan, staff are responsible for taking all reasonable steps to prevent children from becoming absent and placing themselves or others at risk.

3. Leaving without Permission:

If a child indicates that they intend to leave the home without permission, staff should remain aware that a child might want an adult to stop them or at least give them a good excuse for not going; staff are expected to use behaviour support strategies to encourage the child to remain safe. It is crucial that staff always show care and concern, even if they are sure that a child is going to go anyway. It is important to make a point of showing care and concern both for the child's benefit and for other children in the home.

4. Immediate Actions if a Child is Absent:

In the absence of any agreed strategy the following must apply if it is apparent or suspected that a child is absent. In such circumstances, staff should take what actions are immediately



necessary to recover the child, in the context of risks posed to the child or others.

4.1 Immediate Actions:

If it is safe to do so, staff should undertake enquiries locally and with the other children in the home (if appropriate) as to the whereabouts of the child to establish that he / she is absent. This must include a thorough check of the local area and the home and include contacting people who know the child and going out to look for them. If the child has become absent during an activity away from the home, staff should conduct a search of the vicinity, if it is safe to do so. Staff are also expected to continually search for children, whilst this remains safe to do so. If staff are satisfied that the child is absent, but they are aware or suspect the whereabouts of the child, they should consult a manager or senior member of staff on call with a view to recovering the child. This may include attempting to communicate with the child on his / her mobile phone, searching for the child and / or obtaining information from others about the possible whereabouts of the child.

It is our policy to continually search for children when they are missing from our care, so long as this remains safe to do so.

Staff should follow the guidance identified within each child's risk assessment and / or missing from care procedure in regard to actions to take to locate a child and to manage the risk – each individual child's plan will identify thresholds and / or timescales of informing and notifying:

- The Police
- The child's social worker / children's social care services
- The child's family (where appropriate)
- Other multi-agency professionals involved in the care planning of the child
- Philomina Protocol to be shared with the Police

4.2 Consulting the Manager:

Having taken any immediate actions to recover the child, the manager or senior member of staff on call must be consulted and should undertake an assessment to determine the level of risk that is posed to the child.

Furthermore, each child must have a missing from care protocol / procedure in place, and their risk of being missing from care must be included within each child's individual risk assessment – these documents will discuss concerns if a child is missing from care and will also identify control measures and the approved reporting and recording procedures.

The level of concern would include a dynamic assessment of:

- Vulnerability due to the age of the child.
- Child considered, due to various reasons, to be particularly vulnerable (e.g., Learning / Physical disability, on Child subject to a Child Protection Plan)
- Child in need of regular medication (e.g., diabetic)



- Previous history of the child (e.g., previously missing, previous self-harm).
- Circumstances (e.g., debts, drug and alcohol concerns, family problems, possible involvement in crime).
- Health, including mental health.
- Weather (e.g., severe cold or heat), or geography (e.g., remote area).
- Possessions and / or money (or lack of them) believed to be in the missing child's possession giving cause for concern.
- Known vulnerability of the missing child, raising concern that they may have been led into danger, including sexual exploitation and involvement in criminal activities).
- Length of time the child has been missing.
- Is the child perceived to be running to someone or from a situation?
- Degree of risk to the public.
- Recent significant events, contributory factors, and the child's state of mind at the time of the absence.
- Time of day / night.
- Possible location of the child.
- Legal status
- Any guidance agreed within the child's Care Plan.

5. Monitoring / Notifications:

There are different monitoring and notifications procedures for those who are 'Missing' or 'Absent without Authority'.

Please follow the child's individual missing from care risk assessment / missing from care procedure, for clear instructions and strategies.

It may also be necessary to inform the home's regulator, Ofsted, via a Regulation 40 notification if a child has been reported as missing from care. Guidance regarding notifications to Ofsted is available below:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-ofsted-means-by-a-serious-incident> The online reporting form is available below:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tell-ofsted-about-an-incident-childrens-social-care-notification#online-form>

6. Children who continue to be absent over 24 hours:

If the child remains absent / missing for 24 hours, the manager of the home should ensure that the social worker and Police are consulted to decide what strategies can be implemented to locate and return the child.

The other measures that may be appropriate are listed in the 'Section 7, Longer Periods of Absence'.



Unless otherwise agreed, the manager of the home should ensure the social worker and Police are consulted every 24 hours as a minimum, as circumstances change, or new information becomes available.

7. Longer Periods of Absence:

If the child is still absent after 7 days, multi-agency input and strategies must be resumed; this may include:

- The convening of a Strategy Discussion
- Use by the Police of their powers to recover the child, for example, placing a child in Police Protection.
- An application for a Recovery Order.
- An application for a Secure Accommodation Order.
- The use of publicity; in the media for example.

If the child remains absent for 14 days, the Police will likely notify the National Missing Persons Bureau if this has not already done before this time.

8. Returning Children:

If a child's whereabouts become known, staff should decide what actions are necessary to return the child to the home, preferably in consultation with the social worker and or police.

Any actions taken should preferably be with the co-operation or by negotiation with the child.

Staff are expected to have been continually active in searching for / locating the children and must be available to collect the child/ren if required.

9. Upon Return of the Child:

The Police, Social Worker and others notified of the absence must be informed when the child returns. The child must be welcomed back and must have the opportunity to talk about the reasons for leaving.

An Independent Return Interview should be carried out by an independent professional (e.g., a return to care worker, a social worker, or an independent agency such as NYAS who does not usually work with the child and is trained / competent to carry out these interviews). Children sometimes need to build up trust with a person before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they ran away.

In normal circumstances, the local authority will arrange for the independent return to care interview to be completed, however, in instances where this is likely to be more than 72 hours from the time of the child's return, the home will source an independent body at our expense to undertake this return to care interview.



The purpose of this meeting is to give the child an opportunity to talk about the reasons for their absence and follow up on any concerns or complaints.

The outcome of the meeting with the child should be discussed with the social worker and manager of the home with a view to deciding what strategies can be adopted to prevent further absences and these should be incorporated into a recorded plan.

If the child is absent for three days or more or the absence was one of three episodes reported to the Police in the previous four weeks, the Police should be asked to contribute to these discussions. The Police may wish to carry out a 'Safe and Well' check, to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm; where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them. However, where the child goes missing frequently, the Police are likely to see them every time they return. However, a reasonable decision will be taken with regard to the frequency of such checks.

10. Recording and Review:

Staff should record Absences on the following:

- Daily Log
- Childs Daily Records
- Missing From Home Log

The home's manager will review the child's placement plan and risk assessment as part of their analysis and evaluation of the missing from care incident, to include strategies to reduce or prevent future occurrences - it must be reviewed if there have been persistent absences or there are serious concerns e.g., if the child was placed at serious risk.

END.