



**SEND CARE**

SENDING SPECIALIST CARE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SEND

# Missing Persons Policy

## Purpose

- 1.0 Whilst some children or young people (CYP) are able to leave their home or community setting without risk to themselves or others, some may be at risk due to their Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and/or Mental Health.
- 1.1 This policy provides guidance to staff to ensure that there is an accurate assessment of risk should a CYP go missing, or be at risk of absconding, plus a thorough, prompt and sufficient response to the situation.

## Scope

- 2.0 This policy covers all CYP who are deemed to be vulnerable in the community and/or subject to a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard (DoLS) authorisation
- 2.1 The definition of a missing person is *“anyone whose whereabouts is unknown whatever the circumstances of disappearance. They will be considered missing until located and their well-being or otherwise are established”*.

## Equality & Diversity

- 3.0 SENDCARE is committed to the provision of a service that is fair, accessible and meets the needs of all individuals.

## Categorisation of Risk

- 4.0 This list is not exhaustive and bearing these categorisations in mind, certain cases may vary, based on the person specific risk assessment that is carried out.

### 4.1. High Risk

- 4.1.1. Those CYP's who are an immediate risk and have a significant likelihood to suffer harm to them as an individual or as a threat to others.
- 4.1.2. A CYP who is dependent upon the assistance of another responsible person (e.g. parent or carer) and is likely to face immediate and significant harm in the absence of that person.
- 4.1.3. A CYP who is assessed as likely to attempt significant self-harm or suicide. This assessment will be based on all relevant information indicating the individual's state of mind eg, medical history, current mental health management plan
- 4.1.4. A CYP who does not have the mental capacity to make a decision regarding Their care arrangements and who could be classified as vulnerable adult eg. A person with a significant learning disability.
- 4.1.5. A CYP that is assessed as likely to come to harm without medical assistance. This Category includes service users who go missing without their medication and who are then in immediate risk to themselves or are a risk to others.
- 4.1.6. A CYP that may be at risk of abduction.

## 4.2. Medium Risk

4.2.1. These are CYP who may normally be responsible and able, who through injury or impairment of their reasoning may abscond from their home or community setting.

4.2.2. A CYP that is assessed as likely to come to harm without medical assistance. This category includes people who go missing without their medication and who are then potentially at risk themselves or are a risk to others. Please note that the risk may escalate over time.

4.2.3. A CYP who is known to be personally vulnerable due to previous associations with Individuals' who potentially may cause the person harm, e.g. drug and alcohol dependent persons, physical assault victims. Please note that this may escalate depending on individual circumstances.

## 4.3. Low Risk

4.3.1 These are CYP's who are willingly absent but are able to function adequately without assistance and are unlikely to come to harm under normal circumstances. It would also cover cases where despite consideration of known risk factors, there are still no grounds for believing the missing person is likely to come to harm.

## Procedure

5.0 For all persons rated as High and Medium risk, an incident form should be completed and kept on file in case of need. Permission and best interest decisions may be required around the sharing of certain information contained such as mobile phone or other details. It is important to have a sense of which areas/locations or individuals a high or medium person may try to get to if they go missing. High risk persons should be identified by practitioners during the support planning stage of assessment. A photograph of the patient should be obtained as soon as possible to assist staff and police with identifying the service user should they abscond or go missing.

- Before any photographs are taken, service users should be asked to give informed consent. The service user must be asked to sign a photograph consent form which should be organised by SENDCARE.

## Missing Persons where their location is known or suspected.

6.0 Sometimes a CYP at risk may leave a safe setting unaccompanied and professionals believe that they know where the individual has gone – in these cases, they may not be technically missing but may be at risk and need to be returned to the safe setting. If possible, SENDCARE staff (ideally staff that have previously worked with the individual) should endeavour to contact or go to the location and ask the individual to come home with them. The use of discussion and personal relationships should always be the first option in these circumstances; however, it may be that either discussions have broken down or that the risks are so great that other options need to be considered.

6.1 An immediate risk assessment should be done to identify what the risks may be and what the relevant timescales may be. The initial assessment may lack detail and come from the provider if the adult has left a formal placement. Multi-disciplinary support may be required – for example to identify the consequences of missed medications and the

timescales around these; as well as if there are ways that medication could be provided in the new environment. A more formal risk assessment should be completed (by a social worker, if involved) from the relevant team within 24 hours of the CYP leaving their safe placement.

6.2 If the CYP will not return with SENDCARE staff or their parents – either because they are physically resisting this or because there are problems gaining access to them – (or, if relevant) there is a reason that social care and/o staff do not feel safe attending the address then it is appropriate to look at involving the Police.

6.3 Staff can request a welfare check by Police on the basis of risk to life and limb (if this applies). A joint visit may be requested so that social care staff, if involved, can assess well-being at the same time.

6.4 Please note that Police are not able to use restraint to remove an individual to a place of safety if they are within a private home using a DoLS authorisation. They would only be able to physically remove someone against their will if there is an order from the Court of Protection in place (over and above a previously existing DOLS) or if they applied sections 5 and 6 of the Mental Capacity Act in their efforts to return someone to their home (restraint being used in someone's best interests).

6.5 Before applying to the Court, staff should ensure that they have taken proportionate steps to inform the CYP, and any individuals preventing access to them, that Court action is being considered, and the reasons for this, in an accessible way. Risks to the welfare of the individual must be clearly explained.

6.6 However, it may also be necessary to take immediate legal action to mitigate risk and Court of Protection applications must not be delayed if necessary. The Court of Protection can make emergency orders where proportionate.

6.7 Any order from the Court of Protection should be requested with the principles of Best Interests and Least Restrictive Option in mind – for example, if the concern is that the individual requires medication then it may be proportionate to request the Court mandate a medical assessment and allowing a nurse to visit to give medication rather than a return to a nursing placement. More long-term planning can take place once immediate risks have been addressed.

6.8 Once the CYP at risk has returned to the safe setting, then there should be an immediate review of their situation and any DOLS or Best Interests decisions in place around that placement to check that the placement is meeting need and any restrictions are proportionate and appropriate.

### **Useful contacts:**

<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/care-children-and-families/child-protection-and-safeguarding/>

<https://www.met.police.uk/foi-ai/metropolitan-police/d/august-2022/adult-missing-persons-policy/>

<https://www.college.police.uk/app/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons/strategic-responsibilities>

<https://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/ro/report/mp/v2/report-missing-person/>

