

Early Help and Children's Social Care

Missing Protocol

May 2022



CROYDON BOROUGH COUNCIL WORKING WITH CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE AND FROM HOME

Please note:

This protocol considers and is additional to:

London Child Protection Procedures: children missing from care, home and education
[3. Children Missing from Care, Home and Education \(londoncp.co.uk\)](http://londoncp.co.uk)

DfE Statutory Guidance on 'Children who run away or go missing from home or care',
January 2014 [Children who run away or go missing from home or care - GOV.UK
\(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

The following process is for children who are reported as missing to the police by a family member or carer.

If you are concerned about a **missing family** where there are concerns for children or unborn children, the guidance can be found at [5. Missing Families for whom there are Concerns for Children or Unborn Children \(londoncp.co.uk\)](http://londoncp.co.uk)

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Introduction

This missing protocol is to be used within Croydon Social Care when children and young people are missing from home or care. To achieve consistency in language and reporting, definitions of 'missing' have been provided.

Contextual safeguarding is an approach to understanding and responding to young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognizes that the different relationships that young people form in their neighborhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships. Therefore, Children's Social Care practitioners need to engage with individuals and sectors who do have influence over/within extra-familial contexts, and recognize that assessment of, and intervention with, these spaces are a critical part of safeguarding practices. Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that young people are vulnerable to abuse in a range of social contexts. (Firmin, 2017).

1. Purpose and scope of procedures:

This document contains the local procedures to be followed by Children's Social Care staff, whenever a police MERLIN or EDT notification is received by the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) regarding any child. The procedures apply to all workers in SPOC, social workers, adolescent workers, managers and business support staff.

2. Definitions and Guidance:

Missing *A child reported as missing to the police by their family or carer*

Missing from Home *A child or young person reported as missing to the police by their family, carer or an involved professional e.g., social worker.*

Missing from Care *A looked after child or young person who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g., school) and their whereabouts is not known.*

A child or young person must be reported missing when their whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests they may be at risk of harm.

Any decision not to record a child or young person 15 years or older as missing should be made by the Team Manager, Missing Lead and Senior analyst. The decision should then be recorded on CRS with a rationale, expectations and next steps.

After a missing status has been made, the Performance Team (Missing Children and Child Exploitation) will update the status. **In no circumstances should the Social Worker or Team Manager change the missing status of a child or young person.**

Authorised absence *is an absence which is preplanned and the whereabouts of the child or young person are known.*

Unauthorised absence *is an absence which is not preplanned and the whereabouts*

of the child or young person are unknown.

In a situation where a child or young person has not returned from an authorised absence when expected, whereabouts are unknown and contact cannot be made, this becomes an unauthorised absence.

Away from Placement without Authorisation *is when a looked after child or young person who have absented themselves for a short period, with their whereabouts known or unknown to the carer.*

A looked after child 14 years old or under who absented themselves from their placement without authorisation is categorized as 'missing'.

If a child or young person has not been seen or their whereabouts independently verified for longer than 2 days, they are no longer Away from Placement without Authorisation and they should be reported as missing.

If the assessment from the carer at the time is that there is no apparent risk for the child's immediate safety, but they are away from the placement without permission, this should still be recorded, and the social worker informed. After 24 hours this categorisation should be reviewed by the social worker with the carer with a view to the child becoming 'missing'.

Late returning home *A child who is missing from home or care for a short period i.e., up to 3 hours.*

This is assessed on a case-by-case basis. The Team Manager, Missing Lead and Senior Analyst will make any decision on updating the status of a Late Returning Home child or young person after 3 hours.

For example

- *Child A has not returned home from school and is now 2 hours late. They are 16 years old and have not been reported missing before. They return just before 3 hours after their expected return time. In this instance, this would be classified as late returning home.*
- *Child B has left the family home, following an argument. They are 10 years old and have never been reported missing before. They are located within 2 hours of having last been seen. They share that they feared being away from home and that they wanted to run away. In this instance, this should be seen as a missing episode.*

Abduction is where a child or young person has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence. The police must be contacted immediately via **999**.

This includes children and young people who have been taken from their place of residence by unknown adults, even if the child or young person appears to have gone willingly.

It also includes any child or young person who is removed from their placement by parents or others contrary to the care plan. Where the child is subject to a care order, emergency protection order or in police protection, social workers may consider seeking legal advice on obtaining a Recovery Order.

Children may go missing from home or care for several reasons. Parents and carers are expected to undertake several actions to try and locate a child who is missing before reporting them to the Police, as long as it is safe to do so:

- Fully search the accommodation and surrounding area
- Search the home for any important leads e.g., mobile phones, diaries, letters, notes explaining absence, email and website activity etc., which may inform the investigation and / or assist in protecting or recovering the child
- Speak with other children / young people in the family or others who live in the home to obtain relevant information about the missing child
- Make all appropriate enquiries with regards to the whereabouts of the child. This will involve trying to contact the missing child, friends, family, associates, appropriate locations, local hospitals and the local police custody office.

When referring a child or young person to the Police, any relevant information that might help to find or support the child should be shared, including:

- Description of the child and their clothing
- Details of where the child was last seen and who are the child or young persons' peers and family networks
- Recent photograph of the child
- Relevant addresses, known associates and addresses frequented
- Previous history of absenteeism and circumstances of where found
- Circumstances under which the child is absent / missing
- Any factors that increase the risk to the child

3. Responding to a Report of an Unknown Child Missing from Home (children & young people not open or known to Children's Social Care):

- Alerts for children who have been reported as missing to the police will be sent to the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) by way of a police MERLIN and/or an EDT Alert.
- The SPOC social worker will check CRS to determine if the child is known and open to another team. If unknown, the below process is followed.
- All Merlin reports and CAD numbers relating to the missing episode for the missing child or young person should be uploaded and or recorded on CRS. Timescales for recording will be

in line with the RAG rating.

- On receipt of a missing EDT notification and or MERLIN, a SPOC social worker will review and triage the information, assign a 'RAG' rating recommendation (Red, Amber or Green) according to the level of risk and share it with the Child Exploitation/Missing Intelligence Officer and the Missing Lead to their respective email address: CSEMissing@croydon.gov.uk & MissingLead@croydon.gov.uk

Red: High risk or complex risk - Child or young person appears to be at risk of immediate and / or serious harm - As soon as possible but within 4 hours.

Amber: High or complex risk - Child or young person appears to be at risk of harm that is not imminent and moderately serious - As soon as possible but within 1 working day.

Green: Low to vulnerable risk – Child or young person appears to be vulnerable, which, if not addressed, may lead to poor outcomes - As soon as possible but within 3 working days.

- The Child Exploitation/Missing Officer will then place a missing marker on the child or young person's case file, which is automatically shared with the SPOC Team Manager, creating a new SPOC Episode.
- Alerts will be sent to the social worker, team manager & Missing Lead and SPOC on day 1 when a child or young person has gone missing and on day 3 to prompt social workers to complete an 87a referral if not already completed. This is to ensure we meet the statutory responsibilities.
- A SPOC assessment form will be created and allocated by the SPOC manager to a SPOC social worker. The social worker will review the information and any known early help or social care history, speak to the parent(s) and where appropriate, the young person, and gather additional information from SPOC and other partner agencies. This information is recorded on the SPOC assessment form.

All enquires relating to missing episodes, including requests to chair strategy meetings, case discussions and support and invites to other meetings should be sent to MissingLead@croydon.gov.uk. Service managers and other professionals have access to the Missing Lead's email address to **avoid losing important information**. The Missing Lead's **personal work email should not be used to make missing requests**, as other professionals involved with missing children and young people will not be able to access this inbox.

When making the decision on the level risk, the SPOC manager will consider the following:

- The child's age
- The number of missing episodes already recorded e.g., 3 missing episodes within 30 days
- Any specific risk factors that make the child vulnerable e.g., learning difficulties, links to gangs, previous history of missing episodes, previously known to MACE to include dates opened and closed, open to YOS, and what specific order and offences committed, previous history of abuse and trauma, if the child or young person is NEET, known mental health difficulties and being known to CAMHs
- Noting the hazard markers already known on CRS, for example MACE, NRM, YOS involvement

- The presence of any factors of child exploitation or trafficking
- The child's view on their situation
- The outcome of the Police debriefs within the Police Missing Merlin PAC
- The SPOC manager will then make a decision based on the best interest of the child or young person:
 - No further action needed
 - No further action but advice, guidance and signposting provided
 - Referral for Family Solutions Services (targeted early help) (Early Help episode)
 - Referral for Parenting support (Early Help episode)
 - Referral for Croydon Local Intervention Programme (CLIP-Early Help episode)
 - Strategy Discussion
 - Child & Family assessment
- If the decision made by the SPOC Manager is No Further Action, this should be shared with the Missing Lead via the email address. At no time should the SPOC Episode be closed whilst it is believed that a child or young person is missing or until the RHI has been offered by an adolescent worker (or identified professional who has a positive relationship with the child or young person), and then accepted or declined by the child or young person and their family or carer.
- The Adolescent Worker will alert SPOC and the Missing Lead of the outcome of the RHI. At this point the SPOC Episode can be closed if it is safe to do so.
- According to the outcome above, the SPOC manager will direct the referral to the right team or service for the child or young person
 - Family Solutions Service (targeted early help)
 - Support & Interventions (parenting support)
 - CLIP (CLIP referrals)
 - Family Assessment Service (statutory assessment)
 - Adolescent Service (statutory assessment)

If the child or young person has yet to be assigned to one of the above teams, then it remains the responsibility of the SPOC manager to ensure that an 87A referral is made to the missing police at 72 hours of the child or young person having been reported missing from home.

- The allocated social worker should notify all suitable professionals involved with the child or young person e.g., school
- If a child or young person has been missing for 72 hours and not assigned to a team, the SPOC social worker will complete an 87a referral immediately and a strategy meeting is to be arranged within 24 hours. The Missing Lead will chair these missing strategy meetings. The Missing Lead should be included in the email request to the Police and all

other agencies for a Strategy Meeting. The team that the child will be allocated to should also be invited to the Strategy Discussion.

- If a child or young person has been assigned to a team it will be the receiving social worker's and team's responsibility to complete the 87a referral to the police.
- The allocated social worker should notify all suitable professionals involved with the child or young person e.g., school
- For any child or young person living in Croydon the 87a referral needs to be sent to SNMailbox.SafeguardingMISPER@met.police.uk
- If SPOC's recommendation is that the child or young person requires a service, then a missing risk assessment must be completed within 24 hours of the referral being received, and then recorded within the child or young person's missing episode on CRS.

The purpose of the missing risk assessment is to inform professionals including the police of the specific risks to the child or young person whilst missing from home, it also informs the Return home interview/ conversation. It must be completed whilst the child or young person is missing and not retrospectively upon the child or young person return home.

- The risk assessment and child or young person's information page on CRS must have an up-to-date contact number for the child or young person and a contact number for the parent/carer. It should also include full names and addresses where known. It is vital to include key information including:
 - The time and date the child or young person was last seen and who they were with. Include the address of where the child or young person was last seen.
 - A description of the child or young person, preferably with an up-to-date photograph
 - The specific known risks to the child or young person whilst missing, including health and disability vulnerabilities, e.g., any medication needed and impact of it being taken, if they have a disability which makes them unable to ask for help, such as being nonverbal
 - Mental health concerns and/or diagnosis and risk of self-harm or suicide
 - Known peers and family networks that could pose a risk to them
 - The push and pull factors linked to Child Exploitation, such as sexual, criminal or financial exploitation and possible signs of domestic servitude (Modern slavery)
 - Any history of having been trafficked internationally into the UK or risk of internal trafficking within the UK
 - The risk of having been radicalized

If the Child or young person was found to be in another Borough or Local Authority, where other Children/YP are thought to be together it is expected that contact is made with that Local Authority and the other Children/YP Local Authority in order to gather intelligence and

understand risk. Where appropriate joint strategy meetings and working in partnership can be agreed.

- If a child or young person has been missing for 72 hours, the SPOC social worker will complete an 87a referral immediately and a strategy meeting is to be arranged within the first 24 hours of the 72 hours that the child or young person has been missing.
- Criteria for a Child or young person to be referred for a missing strategy meeting includes:
 - Missing for 72+ hours
 - Missing for 3 separate occasions within a 1-month period
- The Missing Lead should be included in the email request to the Police for a Strategy Meeting. The Missing Lead will chair and record missing strategy meetings for children or young people not currently open to Children's Social Care or are open to Early Help. Where a case has not yet been transferred to Children's Social Care, it the responsibility of the SPOC social worker to attend the Strategy meeting, to update the professional network what actions have been taken to locate this child or young person and share intelligence they have gathered through their SPOC enquires.
- If a child returns home before 72 hours and has not been transferred to another social work team within Children Social Care/ Early Help then a decision should be made between the SPOC Manager, the Missing Lead to the convening of a network meeting to explore factors contributing to the missing episode. For example, the first missing episode for the child or young person, or where the child has been missing for less than 72 hours. The decision to arrange a network meeting will be on a case-by-case basis.

The purpose of the network meeting is to respond to the missing episode and offer targeted and preventative advice and guidance to the family and the professional network, to hopefully prevent further missing episodes and reduce risk to the child or young person.

The introduction of network meetings is an opportunity for the family and the professional network to identify risks at an earlier stage in the hope of preventing the child or young person having further missing episodes and may reduce significant future harm.

- The Missing Lead will arrange and chair all network meetings, record the meeting discussion including details of who will be the lead professional for the child or young person should there be no need for the child or young person to be referred to Children's Social Care or Early Help.
- If risk has been identified within information shared at the network meeting, the SPOC Manager and the Missing Lead will escalate which could lead to a missing strategy or a Section 47 investigation. There is an expectation that the family or carer with the child or young person will attend the network meeting.
- The Missing Lead will chair all initial missing strategy meetings regarding children and young people who are not open or known to Children's Social Care, including Early Help Services. The Missing Lead will continue to chair the Review Missing Strategies until the child or young person has been assigned into a team.

- Attendees of the strategy meetings should include Police, Children's Social Care, Education, and Health and any other organization involved with the child or young person e.g., YOS. If the Police are unable to attend, the strategy meeting will still go ahead, and the Missing Lead/Team Manager/Assistant Team Manager (if transferred) will follow up the actions with the Police as soon as possible and record the view of the Police and any additional actions.

During a Strategy Meeting, consideration will be given to the following, but this is not an exhaustive list:

- Completion of the National Referral Mechanism
 - Referral to the Complex Adolescent Panel
 - Completion of the Need to Know/Missing Briefing to be sent to the HOS who will share with the Director
 - Missing Risk Assessment & Trigger Plan to be updated weekly
 - Safety Plan for the child or young person's return
 - Seek consent from Parent to publicize photo of child or young person's photo to be uploaded onto their file and included in the Trigger Plan
 - Complete National Alerts – hospitals, other LA's, other Police Forces
 - Adolescent Worker to be assigned to contact the child or young person on a daily/weekly basis
 - Check movement on oyster card
 - Check bank account activity
 - Social Media to be checked
 - Press release if required
 - The professional best placed to complete the RHI when the child or young person has returned.
- If a Child or young person continues to be missing for over a week, a Review Strategy Meeting should be convened within 5 working days of the last Missing Strategy Meeting date. The Missing Strategy Meetings are to continue to be held every 5 working days whilst the child or young person remains missing for the first month. Thereafter, Missing Strategy Meetings should be held within 14 days.
 - When the child or young person has been missing for over a month the Service Manager and Missing Lead should be invited to the Missing Strategy Meetings at regular intervals for oversight.
 - When assigned into a team the Team Manager or Assistant Team Manager should chair all Missing Strategy Meetings going forward. The expectation is for the Manager to write up the Missing Strategy Minutes within the current Missing Episode on CRS and distribute.
 - The Head of Service and Director should be notified if a child is missing for three days, this should be communicated via the Missing Briefing Slides. The Director will exercise discretion in highlighting to the Lead Member and Corporate Director those children who have been missing for seven days or more.

4. Responding to a Report of a Known Child or Young Person missing from

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Protocol reviewed and updated by Liz Fatcher Service Manager and Hannah Franklin Missing Lead

home (children known to Children's Social Care):

- If a child or young person has been missing for 48 hours the 87a referral should be completed immediately by the allocated social worker and sent to SNMailbox.SafeguardingMISPER@met.police.uk
In order for the missing strategy to take place within 72 hours of Child or young person being reported missing.
- Alerts for children who have been reported as missing to the police will be sent to the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) by way of a police MERLIN and/or an EDT Alert.
- The SPOC social worker will check CRS to determine if the child is known and open to another team. If known, the below process is followed.
- All Merlin reports and CAD numbers relating to the missing episode for the child or young person should be uploaded and or recorded on CRS within 24 hours.
- When notified that a child or young person is missing, social workers must complete a Missing Risk Assessment within the missing episode on CRS. For a repeat missing child or young person it is the expectation that the Missing Risk Assessment is updated at least once a month. If the child or young person is at risk of child exploitation, the Missing Risk Assessment should be followed by the development of a Trigger Plan/Grab Pack which should be reviewed at each future episode.
- If the child or young person is living in another local authority and goes missing from that local authority, the allocated social worker should work within that local authority's missing protocols. All information needs to be recorded on CRS within the child or young person's missing episode.
- A strategy meeting must be arranged within 24 hours, to be convened within 72 hours of the child or young person being reported missing. The Missing Lead should be kept informed of the details of strategy meetings and any new developments.
- The Team Manager/Assistant Team Manager will chair all missing strategy meetings regarding children and young people who are allocated to a social worker in Children's Social Care. Requests can be made for the Missing Lead to attend missing strategy meetings to give advice and support and in some instances to chair complex missing strategy meetings, requests should be sent via the Missing Leads email address.
- Attendees of the strategy meetings should include Police, Children's Social Care, Education, and Health and any other organization involved with the child or young person e.g., IRO, CP Conference Chair and YOS. If the Police are unable to attend, the strategy meeting will still go ahead, and the Missing Lead/Team Manager will follow up the actions with the Police and will also have a discussion with the police and record their views on the strategy meeting minutes.

- If a child or young person continues to be missing for 5 days, a review strategy meeting should be convened within 5 working days of the last missing strategy meeting date. The missing strategy meetings are to continue to be held every 5 working days of the first month that the child or young person remains missing. Thereafter, missing strategy meetings should be held within 10 working days.

Consideration to be given to the following but this is not an exhaustive list:

- Completing the National Referral Mechanism
 - Referral to the Complex Adolescent Panel
 - Completion of The Need to Know/Missing Briefing to be completed and sent to the HOS who will share with the Director
 - Missing Risk Assessment & Trigger Plan to be updated weekly
 - Safety Plan for the child /YP's return
 - Consent sought from Parent to publicize photo of child or young person– photo to be uploaded onto the child or young person's file and included in the Trigger Plan (
 - If the child or YP does not have a parent or carer who holds PR, in the UK consent from HOS)
 - Complete National Alerts – hospitals, other LA's, other Police Services
 - Adolescent Worker to be assigned to contact the child or young person on a daily/weekly basis
 - Check movement on oyster card
 - Check bank account activity
 - Social Media to be checked
 - Press release
 - Consideration to be given to who is best placed to complete the RHI when the child or young person has returned
- When the child or young person has been missing for over a month, the relevant Service Manager and Missing Lead should be invited to attend the missing strategy meetings at regular intervals for oversight.
 - If a child returns home before 72 hours, then a decision should be made by the Manager and the Missing Lead as to the best way forward, either to request a missing strategy meeting or to have a network meeting.
 - If risk has been identified within information shared at the network meeting, then the Manager will escalate and a strategy discussion is to be held, which could lead to a missing strategy or a Section 47 investigation. There is an expectation that the family or carer and child or young person will attend the network meeting to share their views. The meeting will be chaired by the Team Manager or Assistant Team Manager.
 - The Head of Service and Director should be notified if a child in care is missing for three days, this should be communicated via the Missing Briefing Slides. The Director will exercise discretion in highlighting to the Lead Member and Executive Director those children who have been missing for seven days or more.
 - The child's social worker and adolescent worker (if allocated the RHI or completing an intervention) should work together to evidence ongoing communication during any missing period with the police, the carer, home and the authority where the child lives (if out of borough).

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Protocol reviewed and updated by Liz Fatcher Service Manager and Hannah Franklin Missing Lead

- The parent or carer should inform the police and their child's social worker when their child has returned home from their missing episode.

5. Responding to a Report that a Child/Young Person is missing from care

- Children who go missing from care are to be reported missing at the time to the Police and EDT by the Foster Carer or Placement.
- The social worker or EDT worker (out of hours) and police should agree an immediate plan for locating the child or young person and the social worker or EDT worker should complete the missing risk assessment. If the child or young person is known to be a frequent missing child or young person and are thought to be at high risk of harm, the social worker should complete a Trigger Plan.
- All Merlin reports and CAD numbers relating to the missing episode for the child or young person should be uploaded and recorded on CRS within 24 hours.
- Foster Carer's are expected to report all missing children to the fostering supervising social worker as well as the child or young person's allocated social worker.
- The social worker must inform the IRO and the child and young person's parents and any other adult with parental responsibility (unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so or would be inconsistent with the child's welfare).
- The allocated social worker should notify all suitable professionals involved with the child or young person e.g., school
- Foster Carers and Placements are expected to undertake several actions to try and locate a child who is missing before reporting them to the Police and EDT if it is safe to do so:
 - Fully search the accommodation and surrounding areas
 - Search the home for any important leads e.g. mobile phones, diaries, letters, notes explaining absence, email and website activity etc.), which may inform the investigation and / or assist in protecting or recovering the child.
 - Speak with other children / young people in the family or others who live in the home to obtain relevant information about the missing child; and
 - Make all appropriate enquiries with regards to the whereabouts of the child. This will involve trying to contact the missing child, friends, family, associates, appropriate locations, Local hospitals and the Local police custody office.
 - When referring the child/young person to the Police, any relevant information that might help to find or support the child should be shared, including:
 - Description of the child and their clothing.
 - Details of where the child was last seen and with whom, who are the Child and YP's peers and family networks.
 - Recent photograph of the child.
 - Relevant addresses, known associates and addresses frequented.

- Previous history of absenteeism and circumstances of where found.
 - Circumstances under which the child is absent / missing; and
 - Any factors that increase the risk to the child.
- The child's social worker should evidence on going communication during any missing period with the police, the carer, home and the authority where the child's lives (if out of area). This information is to be recorded on the child or young person's missing episode.
- Foster carers and placements are expected to inform EDT, the child's allocated social worker and the police when a child or young person has returned to their care.
- If a child or young person has been missing for 72 hours the 87a referral should be completed immediately by the allocated social worker and a strategy meeting to be arranged immediately, to be convened within 72 hours of the child or young person being reported missing).
- The Missing Lead should be kept informed of any developments. The Missing Lead is available for support and guidance.
- The Team Manager/Assistant Team Manger will chair all missing strategies. The Missing Lead is to be kept informed of the child or young person who is missing. The expectation is for the Manager to write up the missing strategy minutes within the missing episode on CRS and distribute.
- Attendees of the strategy meetings should include Police, Children's Social Care Education, and Health and any other organization involved with the child or young person e.g., IRO, Virtual School and YOS. If the Police are unable to attend, the strategy meeting will still go ahead, and the Missing Lead/Team Manager will follow up the actions with the Police and record their views.
- If a child or young person continues to be missing for 5 days, a review strategy meeting should be convened within 5 working days of the last missing strategy meeting date. The missing strategy meetings are to continue to be held every 5 working days of the first month that the child or young person remains missing. Thereafter, missing strategy meetings should be held within 10 working days.
- Consideration to be given during the Missing Strategy Meeting to: –
 - Completing the National Referral Mechanism
 - Referral to the Complex Adolescent Panel
 - The completion of The Need to Know/Missing Briefing to be completed and sent to the HOS who will share with the Director
 - Missing Risk Assessment & Trigger Plan to be updated weekly

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- Safety Plan for the child /YP's return
 - Seek consent from Parent to publicize photo of child or young person– photo to be uploaded onto the child or young person's file and included in the Trigger Plan
 - (IF the child or YP does not have a parent or carer who holds PR, in the UK consent from HOS)
 - Complete National Alerts – hospitals, other LA's, other Police Services
 - Adolescent Worker to be assigned to contact the child or young person on a daily/weekly basis
 - Check movement on oyster card
 - Check bank account activity
 - Social Media to be checked
 - Press release
 - Consideration to be given to who is best placed to complete the RHI (Return check in) when the child or young person has returned.
- When the child or young person has been missing for over a month the relevant Service Manager and Missing Lead should be invited to attend the Missing Strategy Meetings at regular intervals for oversight.
 - If a child returns to their placement before 72 hours, then a decision should be made by the Manager and Missing Lead as to the best way forward, either to request a missing strategy meeting or to have a network meeting.
 - If risk has been identified within information shared at the network meeting, then the Manager will escalate and a strategy discussion is to be held, which could lead to a missing strategy or a Section 47 investigation. There is an expectation that the family or carer and child or young person will attend the meeting to share their views. The meeting will be chaired by the Team Manager or Assistant Team Manager.
 - The HoS and Director should be notified if a child in care is missing for three days, this should be communicated via the Missing Briefing Slides. The Director will exercise discretion in highlighting to the Lead Member and Executive Director those children who have been missing for seven days or more.
 - The child's social worker and Adolescent worker, if completing the RHI or interventions, should work together evidence on going communication during any missing period with the police, the carer/s, home and the authority where the child's lives (if out of area). All communication should be recorded in the Child or young person's missing episode.

6. Return Home Interviews (Return Check Ins)

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The purpose of the Return Home Interview is to have a conversation to understand and address the reasons why a child or young person has run away; it should identify harm; help the child feel safe; provide them with information on how to stay safe; and allow professionals to identify actions to help them. Although called an interview, the person completing the RHI should approach it as an opportunity to have a conversation, showing the child or young person that they care for them.

- All missing children will be offered an independent return home interview within 72 hours of their return.
 - Consideration should take place within the missing strategy meeting, to the professional network identifying who is best placed to offer the child an RHI e.g., Teacher, YOS Worker, Designated Safeguarding Lead in School, Social Worker, Personal Advisor etc.
 - Depending on whether a child/yp has had a missing strategy meeting during a missing episode, consideration as to who is best placed to offer and complete the RHI will take place at the time of assigning the closed missing episode. In the first instance it is felt that RHI's should be completed by the allocated social worker, who is likely to have the better relationship with the Child or Young Person. However, there will be times where an RHI is offered by an Adolescent worker, who already has an established relationship with the Child or Young person, or on a duty basis, where it is not possible for the social worker to have offered and completed.
 - In these instances, the Missing Lead will record the justification as to why the RHI has been assigned to the Adolescent worker or another professional who is not the social worker.
- Upon notification that a child or young person has returned to the placement, the Missing Lead will allocate an RHI to the allocated social worker or an adolescent worker within the 16+ Young People Service 2 or the Adolescent Support Team. At the time of allocation of the RHI the Missing Lead will notify the Social worker, Adolescent worker and their line manager.
- The RHI should be undertaken by an independent professional who does not provide a caring role within the child or young person's placement. Unregulated placement (those not inspected by OFSTED) providers should not be completing RHI's with children or young people.
- Only in exceptional circumstances should an RHI be completed by a child or young person's placement. However, it is recognised that the child or young person may only have a relationship with their key worker and therefore, in these circumstances, it is to be agreed within the missing strategy meeting.
- There will be other professionals that have a trusted relationship with the child young person who are better placed to complete the RHI. It is therefore expected that if an external professional is completing the RHI, they follow the standardised form and upon completion, it is to be sent to the Missing Lead who will then review and upload onto CRS.
- The Adolescent worker will also attend any relevant meetings where required to disseminate

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information.

- When contacting the child or young person and family or carer, the person conducting the RHI should take a bespoke approach to each child and young person, and not automatically ask if they would like an interview. Instead, begin rapport building with the child or young person.
- All RHIs will be inputted onto the RHI form on CRS by the assigned worker.
- If the person conducting the RHI has identified any further safeguarding concerns after contact with the child or young person, they should contact the Missing Lead via the email address for a discussion as to whether a referral to SPOC should be made or an intervention should be offered to the child or young person.
- If a child goes missing regularly over a short period of time, (e.g. three times within a week) then one interview can be completed to address all of the missing episodes. However, all efforts should be made to speak to the child after each period that they are missing.

7. Emergency Duty Team

When EDT are notified of a child who goes missing out of hours, it is the responsibility of the out of hours EDT social worker to review the risk and need and liaise with Police and the professional network as needed to ensure appropriate risk management plans, information sharing and recording. Whilst each missing episode will be different, the general principles for EDT action should be:

- Contact the foster carer to discuss the missing episode and actions taken or required and keep the foster carer updated of any EDT and/or Police actions
- Review CRS record to identify any key risk factors or safety plans that may need to be reported to the Police
- Liaise with the Police to coordinate any necessary safeguarding actions and safety plan
- Consider anyone within the child's network that need to be notified out of hours
- Consider needs of any siblings that could also be impacted or placed at risk from the missing episode
- Consider if on-call Service Manager or Head of Service needs to be informed (high risk missing incidents only)
- Consider if a missing Strategy Discussion is needed

- Record details of the missing episode and any actions taken, including the risk assessment and any safety plan on CRS and an alert to go to the social worker and manager.

8. Out of Borough placements

- External providers are expected to report all missing episodes to the child or young person's allocated social worker.
- No unregulated placements (those not inspected by OFSTED) should be carrying out Return Home Interviews.
- Where a decision has been made to place a child outside of the borough, consideration at the placement planning meeting should be given to who will complete RHI's where the child or young person may go missing.
- If the child or young person requires an RHI, then the regulated placement can arrange for an independent professional to complete via a spot purchase arrangement. The placement will need to email the Missing Lead, with details of who will be completing the RHI and the cost. The Missing Lead will then seek approval from the Head of Service. Without the Head of Service approval, these arrangements cannot be undertaken.
- The allocated social worker may also be able to contact the host local authority to see if they would be willing to undertake the RHI, which could lead to reciprocal arrangements. The Missing Lead should be informed if these arrangements are being made, via the Missing Lead email address.
- For reciprocal requests from the host local authority, where they would like Croydon to undertake RHI's for their looked after children, requests should be made to the Missing Lead, providing the child or young person's details and missing details of the missing episode.

9. Work with children who repeatedly go missing or those missing for long durations

- If a child or young person is regularly going missing from home (3 episodes within 30 days) or for long durations (7+ days) then the allocated social worker for the child or young person should complete a child adolescent exploitation risk assessment, trigger plan/Grab pack and safety plan on CRS. This form allows the social worker to assess a child's level of risk in relation to a wide range of issues including education, housing and frequency of missing episodes etc. At the end of the form, a decision can be made whether a child meets the threshold for MACE and should be presented to the Complex Adolescent Panel (CAP) for discussion.
- CAP is a multi-agency forum for discussing children at risk of going missing, exploitation and serious youth violence. At CAP, decisions will be taken based upon level of risk whether a

child or young person requires any form of targeted intervention to mitigate the risk of going missing again or reduce exposure to forms of exploitation or serious youth violence. At this panel, a decision will also be taken on whether the child needs to be added to the Croydon MACE Protocol (Multi-Agency Child Exploitation panel) for senior management oversight.

10. Recording

- All missing episodes received via Police and Emergency Duty Team (EDT) will be processed via SPOC and sent to the Children's Improvement team via the CSE Missing and Missing Police Merlin inboxes so they can create/start missing episode flags on CRS.
- Once a missing episode flag is created, the Performance Team (Missing Child and Child Exploitation) will send an alert to the allocated social worker, Team Manager, Missing Lead, and in some instances the service duty tray notifying them that the child is actively missing.
- The performance team will produce weekly and monthly performance and intelligence data to highlight outstanding missing processes, and provide strategic oversight, to Senior Management, Service Managers, Team Managers and the Missing Lead.
- They will also ensure that Missing Children with the following are flagged for complex Adolescent Panel/ MACE Consideration:
 - Repeat Missing Children and Young people
 - Children and Young people missing for a long duration
 - Missing episodes involving an arrest or where a child or young person is identified as at risk of exploitation (Child Criminal Exploitation, including county lines or Child Sexual exploitation)
- Allocated social workers are also required to send the missing briefing slides to the missing lead by 10am on Thursday morning. These slides will inform the weekly missing briefing report which will be shared with the Head of service and Director on Friday afternoons. The missing briefing slides should detail work that has been undertaken to locate a child/YP who has been missing for 72 hours or more.
- Social workers should record all missing work via the missing pathway on CRS.
- By clicking inside a finalised missing episode, the social worker or professional dealing with missing episodes can access a range of forms including missing risk assessment (Trigger plan/Grab pack and safety plan) missing strategy meeting and return home interview form.

If you require further assistance with the process and recording for missing children, please contact the CRS team, or Missing Lead who will be able to assist.

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