

Slough Local Safeguarding Children's Board (SLSCB)
Multi-Agency Missing Strategy
2015 – 2017

Working Together to Safeguard Children who go Missing from Home or Care, including children reported missing during school hours.

Identify, Prevent, Protect and Provide Support



APPENDIX 3

This strategy relates to Slough children missing from home or care who are under 18 years old. The strategy also addresses reported patterns of absences from home or care. Where another local authority child is placed in Slough, there will be collaborations with the respective local authorities to ensure that intelligence is shared.

Children and young people missing from home or care is a safeguarding issue; although the majority of children and young people who go missing return or are found quickly, all children and young people who go missing irrespective of the amount of time that they are missing for, are at risk.

The reasons behind why children and young people go missing are varied and complex, these *push-pull* factors, may include the child or young person running away because of problems at home or school, such as abuse, neglect, or bullying, or they may be pushed out of their home by parents /carer. Alternatively a child or young person may go missing because they want to be somewhere other than their home, or because they want to be with someone they are unable to be with, unless they run away. Moreover a child might be coerced to run away and go missing by someone who has power or control over them; Whatever the reason, at the time, children and young people often feel that they have no choice other than to run away.

Children and young people whilst missing from home or care may experience physical and /or emotional abuse, additionally they are more likely to engage in risk taking and self-harming behaviour, and they may find themselves sleeping rough, often committing crime in order to survive, whilst also feeling fear and loneliness. As a consequence of being missing, their education, family and social relationships and life chances often suffer. Missing children and young people are particularly vulnerable to trafficking, violent crime, drug and alcohol misuse and exploitation, including sexual exploitation, as either a cause or consequence of going missing. Significant evidence highlights that children and young people who go missing from home or care are at increased risk of being at risk of, or experiencing sexual exploitation. It is therefore essential that all partner agencies act rigorously to reduce incidents of children going missing, to locate a missing child ensure that they return the child to a safe environment. Agencies must ensure that they have processes in place to assess why a child / young person went missing, what they experienced whilst missing and how any future risk of that child /young person going missing could be reduced.

Children in care are over represented in the statistics for children reported missing and are considered particularly vulnerable; especially in terms of being vulnerable to grooming and exploitation. Whilst children in care go missing for a variety of reasons, it is important for professionals to understand the reasons why, in order to assist with minimising risk and frequency, effectively safeguard, and achieve placement stability. Information gained from return interviews is therefore invaluable.

The majority of children and young people, who go missing, do so from their family home, these children and young people are equally vulnerable, and require the same level of protection and response from professionals and service as children looked after. Whilst there are recognised difficulties in the reporting of the exact number of children and young people who actually go missing each year, current research suggests that approximately 100, children go missing annually. However many children remain hidden from professionals, and the Children's Society notes that only a third of children who go missing are reported as such to the police. Whatever the push or pull factors are that

influence a child or young person to go missing from home or care, approximately one quarter of those who do, are believed to be at risk of serious harm.

The issue of missing children is therefore significant, and to ensure that children and young people in Slough can live free from the feeling they have no other choice other than to go missing, and also live free from the risks associated with being missing, this strategy has focused on three overall strategic objectives; prevention, protection and provision, which demand child-focused, co-ordinated, and effective multi-agency responses.

How we will achieve our objectives?

The SSCB Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Strategic Subgroup will monitor progress against the strategic objectives, by working in accordance with an agreed detailed action plan, taking into account new legislation, research, policy and guidance.

The lead officers for this group are the dedicated Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Co-ordinator and the Neighbourhood Policing Inspector, whose roles are to support the multi-agency work required. The strategic planning and collaborative multi-agency working will enable effective leadership and progress our understanding and practice, which in turn will improve the lives of children and young people at risk of harm from going missing from home or care.

The missing strategy will be reinforced by local practice guidance and a LSCB Missing action plan, will complement the Pan Berks Procedure for Children Missing from Home and from Local Authority Care. This Strategy will be driven by the CSE & Trafficking Strategic Group. Progress and impact will be measured through the SLSCB Multi-Agency Action Plan. Progress and Impact Reports will be presented to the CSE & Trafficking Strategic Subgroup on a quarterly basis

This strategy should be read in conjunction with:

- LSCB Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy, procedure, policy and protocols, and the Pan Berkshire procedures for safeguarding children who may have been trafficked.
- Reference can also be made to the Pan Berkshire joint procedure for forced marriage.
- For guidance relating to children missing from education, children who are home education and children with attendance issues, please refer to the [Safeguarding Protocol: Children not in School](#)
- Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care. Department of Education, 2014

Key Strategic Priority: Identify and Prevent

Objective

To reduce the number of children, who go missing whilst also ensuring that children and young people understand the risks associated with going missing.

We are going to achieve this by:

- Ensuring effective information sharing, and promoting the importance of intelligence sharing with the police amongst partner agencies, including arrangements for information sharing between different local authorities when a child runs away to another area.

- Complete a CSE screening tool on every child who has been reported missing or absent overnight or 3 times in 90 days. This should commence at the point the Return Home Interview is completed.
- Creating systems to effectively collate and analyse data relating to children who go missing, to provide an understanding of the 'picture' and context of 'missing in Slough and identify patterns that indicate particular concerns. Including analysing patterns and monitoring outcomes and of children placed in the area by other local authorities and for Slough children placed in other local authority areas, who go missing from care or are away from placement without authorisation.
- Implementing clear referral and assessment processes, which identify children and young people at risk at an early stage across all partner agencies, ensuring children have full assessment and referrals to relevant services for intervention and support are made.
- Proactively raise awareness of the risks associated with children going missing, with children, young people, parents, carers, local communities and businesses. Including providing child friendly materials and undertaking a wider public facing campaign.
- Train front line practitioners to identify risk factors associated with children going missing and to provide a knowledgeable, consistent response to assessment, intervention and risk management
- Develop young people's participation groups, with children who have experienced being missing so that children's voices inform knowledge, understanding and future service delivery
- Signing up to the Children's Society Missing Children Charter and the Barnardos 'Cut Them Free' Campaign'
- Establishing professional links with national agencies such as CEOP, UKHTC, UKBA, Missing People, Missing Person's Bureau and NWG.

Key Strategic Priority: Protect and Provide Support

Protect

Objective

To reduce the risk of harm to those children and young people who go missing from home or care and during school hours.

We are going to achieve this by:

- Developing an agreed inter-agency framework for assessing and classifying the degree of risk for when a child goes missing from home or care, or when a missing child comes to agency attention.
- Ensuring that robust multi-agency risk assessments and management plans, that involve specialist support services, are in place for all children for children and young people who have been missing from home or care, whilst also ensuring that risk assessments and management plans are coordinated, effectively executed and link to other formal child protection processes.
- Making sure that children in care who are placed out of the county receive the same response and level of intervention to instances of going missing, as those placed within Slough.

- Offering all children and young people who go missing high quality independent return interviews in a timely manner, undertaking quality assurance audits of these to cater for on-going service development that take into account the voice of the child.
- Providing a high quality training programme to care providers, to assist their understanding of what actions they can do to reduce escalation and manage risk related to children missing from care or those who are away from placement without authorisation.
- Working with parents whose children are reported missing/ absent and providing support, to enable their understanding of the risks associated

Provide Support

Objective

To provide children and young people who go missing and their families and carers with high quality response, support and guidance.

We are going to achieve this by:

- Providing high quality relevant multi agency risk assessed plans and interventions for children, carers and families, which are child-focused and ensure that the safety and wellbeing of the child is paramount.
- Providing a quality assured, local independent return interview programme for children known to social care and children not known to social care.
- Establishing an effective independent service(s) to respond to missing notifications for including children who do not have a social worker or other statutory worker.
- Working with national and local third sector partner agencies, to provide children, young people, parents, carers, families and communities with information about how to keep children safe, report missing children and access local and national missing services.
- Endeavouring to train all local frontline staff to communicate effectively with children and young people in a positive and supportive way with children and young people.
- Providing an annual report outlining the 'picture' and context of 'missing in Slough, to identify what we are doing well, outstanding challenges and to inform future service delivery response.
- Creating agreed multi agency common risk assessment process, and referrals pathways; allowing for established and consistent responses to both missing and absent classifications.
- Create a missing resource and educational materials to notify, inform and signpost children young people and their families to local and national missing resources and helplines.

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