

# Policy and Procedure on Missing from Care or Absent

Cambian Dilston College

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This policy deals with what to do when an individual in our care goes missing without permission. You may at some time be involved in such an incident and it is important that you know the procedures which must be followed.
- 1.2. It affects all staff.
- 1.3. Make sure that you are familiar with the detail and what is expected of you under the policy.

## 2. Monitoring and Review

- 2.1. The Proprietor will undertake a formal review of this policy for the purpose of monitoring and of the efficiency with which the related duties have been discharged, by no later than one year from the date of approval shown above,

or earlier if significant changes to the systems and arrangements take place, or if legislation, regulatory requirements or best practice guidelines so require.

- 2.2. The local content of this document will be subject to continuous monitoring, refinement and audit by the Head of Service.

Signed:



Marie Flatman  
Principal

### 3. Terminology

- 3.1. Our aim is to use consistent terminology throughout this policy and all supporting documentation as follows:

'Establishment' or 'Location'	this is a generic term which means the Children's Home/school/college. Cambian Dilston College is a college.
Individual	means any child or young person under the age of 18 or young adult between the ages of 18 and 25. At Cambian Dilston College we have young people attending and/or residing between the ages of 16 and 25.
Service Head / Head of Service	This is the senior person with overall responsibility for the Location. At Cambian Dilston College this is the Principal who is Marie Flatman.  The Head of Care / Registered Manager is Rick Johnson
Key Worker	Members of staff that have special responsibility for Individuals residing at or attending the Establishment.
Parent, Carer, Guardian	means parent or person with Parental Responsibility
Regulatory Authority	Regulatory Authority is the generic term used in this policy to describe the independent regulatory body responsible for inspecting and regulating services. At Cambian Dilston College this is Ofsted/DfE/CQC.
Social Worker	This means the worker allocated to the child/family. If there is no allocated worker, the Duty Social Worker or Team Manager is responsible.
Placing Authority	Placing Authority means the local authority/agency responsible for placing the child or commissioning the service
Staff	Means full or part-time employees of Cambian, agency workers, bank workers, contract workers and volunteers.

## 4. Definitions

### Police definitions

- 4.1.** Since April 2013 police forces have been rolling out new definitions of 'missing' and 'absent' in relation to children and adults reported as missing to the police. These are:
- 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; and
  - absent: a person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.

## 5. Legislation

- 5.1.** This policy is underpinned by the following legislation, regulations and national guidance governing safeguarding, care practice, and the response to children and young adults who go missing from home or care.

### 5.2. Primary Legislation

- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR

### 5.3. Regulations

- Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015
- Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014 (CQC)

### 5.4. Statutory Guidance

- Working Together to Safeguard Children (latest edition)
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (latest edition)
- Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care
- Prevent Duty Guidance

### 5.5. National Frameworks

- Missing Children and Adults Strategy (Home Office)
- National Referral Mechanism (NRM) Guidance for suspected trafficking or exploitation
- Ofsted publications relating to missing children
- NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre (CTAC)

## 6. Purpose

- 6.1. To ensure that Cambian Group complies with all the relevant current legislation and other National Standards which govern this area of our work.
- 6.2. To assist in ensuring the welfare and safety of individuals in our care in all Group Establishments.
- 6.3. To give clear guidance for staff in dealing with incidents in which individuals in our care are absent without authority.

## 7. Policy

- 7.1. Each establishment shall ensure that all staff are aware of the guidance and procedures as set out in Section 8 which must be followed in the event of an individual in our care missing without authority.
- 7.2. In following the guidance and procedures it is essential that a log of events must be kept using the Individual in our care [Missing from Site Form](#)
- 7.3. Head/Registered Managers shall ensure that a final report is made on the Individual Missing from Site Form when dealing with an individual missing without authority.
- 7.4. Heads/Registered Managers are responsible for ensuring that the relevant agencies are informed within the timescales set out in the local [RMFHC protocol](#) (appendix I)
  - the local police;
  - the authority responsible for the Individual's placement – if they have not already been notified prior to the police being informed; and
  - parents and any other person with parental responsibility,

## 8. Procedures

### Risk Assessment

- 8.1. At the beginning of each placement the issue of missing from care must be considered and preventative/incident management strategies agreed. The preventative strategy should include consideration of:
  - Completing the initial risk screening forms, baseline assessment, and impact assessment report between Days 1-5 of the placement. Where placements are planned, these should be completed as part of the placement consideration and matching process and be accompanied by detailed risk management plans

that are agreed by all stakeholders and known to all the staff working in the home prior to the young person being admitted into the home.

- Where it is an emergency placement, the homes manager must complete the above within 24 hours of the admission and agreed by all stakeholders by the 72 hours review meeting and copies of the agreed plan circulated
  - An understanding of the likelihood of a young person going missing and their degree of vulnerability in such circumstances
  - Information about past history of going missing including triggers, known associates or places where the young person usually goes
  - The level of support and supervision to be given by carers
  - The young person's views about going missing
  - Parental views and advice about what action should be taken if the young person goes missing and when they wish to be informed
  - The level of risk presented to both themselves and others if the young person goes missing
  - Associated impact of young people being placed 'out of area'
- 8.2.** An up to date **Missing from Care protocol** should be in place for each individual which hold key information relevant to a missing child; a copy of which is held in the individual's file as well as a central file in the

location office to allow quick access to information about the individual should the Police or staff searching require this.

### When a young person goes missing

- 8.3.** Instructions for senior members of staff on site/venue and subsequent action by the Head of Service in dealing with missing or absent Individuals are set out below:
- 8.3.1. Ensure that a log is begun immediately news is brought to you, including when the person was first noticed missing and in what circumstances. Times of actions are essential for the final report and the police, if they are involved.
- 8.3.2. Immediately inform the Head of Service or senior member of staff on call.
- 8.3.3. Notify all houses and units and ask for staff assistance with the search. Instigate a thorough search.
- 8.3.4. If the individual is known to have gone off site then consult with staff from the appropriate house/unit as to the usefulness of a staff search off the site (is the direction taken known? Light levels, etc.). If it is believed that this is likely to be successful then deploy some staff in buses or cars to search.
- 8.3.5. Allow half an hour for a result (e.g. the individual returns or is located). Longer may be allowed if it is expected that the individual is likely to return on his/her own and has done so before.
- 8.3.6. If the individual is not located within half an hour - call the police. Where it is expected that the individual is likely to return home on his/her own, this may be extended to an hour with the agreement of the senior member of staff involved.
- 8.3.7. If the senior member of staff considers, because of weather conditions, or the particular risk posed to the individual concerned, that the police should be called before half an hour has elapsed, then he/she should do so.
- 8.3.8. When the police have been informed a senior member of staff should tell the parents/carers of the individual concerned. Do not alarm them unnecessarily with conjecture and speculation. Stick to the facts and inform the Head/Registered Manager if not on site. The Local Authority should be informed.
- 8.3.9. When you call the police you need to:
- have the running log ready to show the police
  - refer to the individual [Missing From Care Protocol](#)
  - have a photograph of the individual concerned
  - have a description of what he/she is wearing
  - have any medical details/concerns ready if these are relevant
  - have ready any facts concerning the best way to approach him/her.
  - Have date of birth and home address of individual ready
- 8.3.10. Once the police are involved you should remain as their link person, keep the log going and record anything to do with the search, telephone calls etc. Keep the parents informed and provide them with a telephone contact number.
- 8.3.11. Stay on site yourself.
- 8.3.12. An independent return interview should be offered when a missing looked after child is found. Where possible, the child should be given the opportunity to talk before they return to their placement.
- 8.3.13. Once the individual is found notify:
- police, if they did not find and return him/her
  - parents

- placing authority
- Head/Registered Manager, or senior staff on call
- all houses/units
- anyone else involved in the search or informed that the individual was missing.
- CQC Regulated Locations only – complete a Reg 18 – Individual reported or investigated by the police

8.3.14. Once found or returned, make sure they are safe and well. Check if they need medical attention, comfort, calm, warm and feed the individual involved, as required. However, it is important to establish as soon as possible from the individual why he or she went missing. Any report from the individual that he or she went missing because of any form of abuse at the establishment must be referred immediately to the local Child/Adult Safeguarding Authority, in accordance with the procedures laid down **Child and Adult Safeguarding**, and the details shall also be recorded in the report on the Individual **Missing from Site Form**. The Head of Service is to state in their report what action is to be taken in light of the reasons given by the individual. In addition appropriate action must be taken to protect the individual concerned and other individuals as necessary.

8.3.15. The Head of Service is to state in his/her report what action is to be taken in the light of the reasons given by the individual.

8.3.16. Where an individual goes missing without authority and is at risk if not supervised, staff may take reasonable measures to prevent the individual leaving the establishment again. If such measures are not already agreed in the individual's care plan or Individual Behaviour Risk Assessment the Head

of Service must indicate in the report that such agreement will be reached with the parents and placing authority as soon as possible.

- 8.4.** In completing the Individual Missing from Site Form, ensure that all the points listed below are covered fully in the report before sending it to the [ Director / Managing Director]:
- 8.4.1. Name of establishment
  - 8.4.2. Name of individual(s) in our care
  - 8.4.3. Date of incident
  - 8.4.4. Name of member of staff writing this report
  - 8.4.5. Time and location and weather conditions when individual in our care was first noticed as missing
  - 8.4.6. Who reported the incident?
  - 8.4.7. What action was taken to locate and return the individual?
  - 8.4.8. Which staff were involved?
  - 8.4.9. What means of transport was used?
  - 8.4.10. Who was informed and when involved (Head/Registered Manager, police, parents, placing authority)?
  - 8.4.11. When was the individual returned?
  - 8.4.12. What reasons were given for going missing?
  - 8.4.13. Was it necessary to inform child safeguarding authorities?
  - 8.4.14. Were arrangements made for the individual to be seen by social worker or independent person/listener?
  - 8.4.15. What was the time and date when completed report was given to the Head/Registered Manager?
  - 8.4.16. Any other details.
- 8.5.** Heads of Service should also note that the unexplained absence of an individual from the establishment or an organised activity off-site is a Notifiable Incident. Heads of Service will need to agree with the Managing

Director whether the persons/agencies concerned are also to receive a copy of the relevant report submitted to him on the Individual Missing from Site Form.

## 9. Standard Forms, Letters and Relevant Documents

### This Policy

- 9.1. Missing From Care Risk Protocols
- 9.2. Missing from Site Form

### Other Cambian policy

- 9.3. Child and Adult Safeguarding
- 9.4. Child Sexual Exploitation
- 9.5. Police Liaison

### Further Reading and Guidance

- 9.6. Working Together to Safeguard Children – latest statutory version
- 9.7. Keeping Children Safe in Education – latest statutory version
- 9.8. Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care
- 9.9. Missing Children and Adults Strategy (Home Office)
- 9.10. National Referral Mechanism (NRM) Guidance
- 9.11. NSPCC: Child Trafficking Advice Centre (CTAC)
- 9.12. Local Northumberland RMFHC Protocol (Appendix I)

## 10. Appendix I Northumberland RMFHC (Runaway and Missing From Home and Care) Protocol

10.1. The procedures below align with the **Northumberland County Council "Missing Children Protocol" (July 2022)**, which covers children missing from home, education, foster care, and residential settings within the Northumberland area. This protocol outlines the shared responsibilities of Children's Services, Northumbria Police, carers, residential staff, and partner agencies when a child or young person goes missing or is absent from where they are expected to be.

### 10.2. Purpose of the Northumberland RMFHC Protocol

- This protocol provides a coordinated multi-agency response to:
- Children missing from home
- Children missing or absent from foster placements or residential care
- Looked-after children placed within Northumberland by other authorities
- It establishes consistent definitions, risk assessment requirements, and expected actions by all agencies. The guidance must be followed in conjunction with the most up-to-date procedures issued by **Northumbria Police**, including their definition of "missing" and "absent." [[northumber...and.gov.uk](https://www.northumbria.gov.uk)]

### 10.3. Key Definitions (summarised for policy use)

- **Missing:** A child whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances suggest they may be at risk or may be the subject of a crime.
- **Absent:** A child who is not at a place where they are expected to be, but where there is no immediate risk identified.

These definitions are consistent with Northumbria Police guidance and must be used when making decisions about reporting.

#### 10.4. Responsibilities

##### 10.4.1. 3.1 Carers / Residential Staff

- Undertake initial checks and searches
- Inform the police immediately where risk is high
- Provide all relevant information including risk factors, triggers, and the child's history
- Report the child missing using the procedures set out in the protocol

##### 10.4.2. Local Authority (Northumberland Children's Services)

- Ensure risk assessments are completed and updated
- Notify parents and those with parental responsibility
- Participate in strategy discussions for repeat or high-risk missing episodes

##### 10.4.3. 3.3 Northumbria Police

- Determine risk level and coordinate the search
- Conduct "safe and well" checks when a child is found
- Share relevant intelligence to support safeguarding actions

#### 10.5. Return Interviews

- An **independent return home interview** must be offered when a child is found. Return interviews help identify push/pull factors, safeguarding concerns, and potential exploitation risks.

#### 10.6. Risk Assessment Expectations

- Before and during any missing episode, staff must consider:
- Known triggers
- Previous missing history
- Vulnerability indicators (e.g., exploitation, mental health, substance use)
- Locations the child is known to frequent
- Influence of peers or adults
- Risk levels should inform timescales for police notification and the level of searching conducted by staff. [\[northumber...and.gov.uk\]](#)

#### 10.7. Planning for Return

- The protocol requires:
- A coordinated response between carers, social workers and police upon return

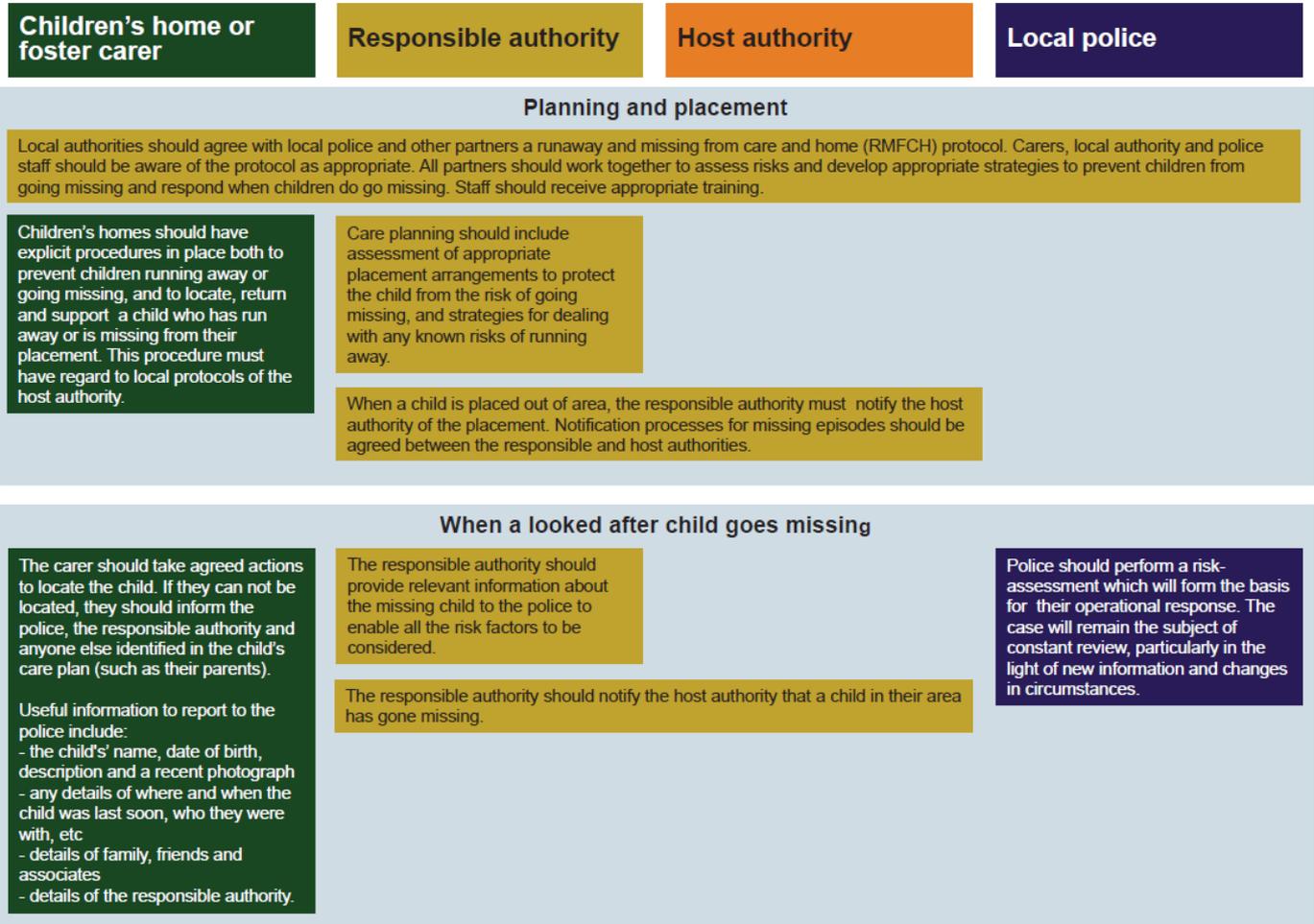
- Consideration of whether the child requires medical attention
- Review of risk assessments and placement planning
- Updating the child's care plan where patterns of missing behaviour are identified
- These procedures support safeguarding and reduce repeat missing episodes. [[northumber...and.gov.uk](#)]

#### 10.8. Further Local Guidance

- The full **Northumberland Missing Children Protocol (July 2022)** can be accessed via Northumberland County Council and should be available to all staff. It includes:
  - Detailed police processes
  - Checklists for carers
  - Information-sharing expectations
  - Flowcharts for planning before and after a missing episode
  - Staff must consult this protocol alongside Cambian Group procedures to ensure compliance.

## 11. Appendix II – Flowchart of responsibilities

The following chart shows the main steps that need to be taken when a child goes missing from local authority care, and where responsibility lies for those steps. It should be read alongside the full statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, and is not intended to be a comprehensive list of actions.



Children's home or foster carer	Responsible authority	Host authority	Local police
<b>When a looked after child is found</b>			
<p>If the child returns to their placement, the responsible authority and police should be informed.</p> <p>Carers should continue to offer warm and consistent care when a child returns, and running away should not be viewed as behaviour that needs to be punished.</p>	<p>If the child is located but meaningful contact can not be established, the responsible authority and police should consider appropriate action.</p> <p>An independent return interview should be offered and provided within 72 hours of the child's return. When a looked after child is placed in a host authority, the responsible authority should ensure the independent review interview takes place, working closely with the host authority.</p>		<p>A safe and well check should be carried out by the police as soon as possible after a child reported as missing has been found.</p>
<p>The responsible local authority should review whether the child's placement remains appropriate. The decision should be informed by discussions with the child and carers where appropriate.</p>			
	<p>Care plans should include a strategy to minimise future risk of repeated missing episodes.</p>		
	<p>IROs should be informed about missing episodes and address these in statutory reviews.</p>		
<b>Data and analysis</b>			
<p>Children's homes should be prepared to provide information on missing incidents to those conducting independent visits to monitor the effectiveness of the home.</p>	<p>Data on missing episodes, including intelligence from return interviews, should be analysed regularly by all relevant partners to map problems and patterns. Regular reports should be provided to council members and the LSCB.</p>		
	<p>Data for children missing or away from placement without authorisation should be reported to the Department for Education by the responsible authority through their annual data returns on looked after children.</p>		