

LONDON BOROUGH OF HILLINGDON



CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE PROTOCOL

MARCH 2018

Version Control:

Version	Date	Updated by	Authorised by	Approval by LSCB	Date of Next Review
1.0	March 2018	Shkelqim Luma (Court Progression & Service Performance Manager)	Ana Popovici (Deputy Director of Children's Services)	<i>1st March 2018</i>	March 2019

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. SCOPE OF THIS PROTOCOL	3
3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES	4
4. STRATEGIC LEADS - KEY FUNCTIONS & CONTACTS	5
5. DEFINITIONS	7
6. MISSING PREVENTION STRATEGY	8
7. RESPONDING TO CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME	11
8. RESPONDING TO CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE	14
9. PLANNING FOR THE CHILD'S RETURN	19
1. APPENDIX 1: PROCEDURAL NOTES	21
2. APPENDIX 2: RELATED GUIDANCE	23
3. APPENDIX 3: DEFINITIONS	24
4. APPENDIX 4: PRE-MISSING INCIDENT RISK ASSESSMENT	25
5. APPENDIX 5: RISK ASSESSMENT	29
6. APPENDIX 6: RESOURCES FOR PARENTS/CARERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE	35

1. Introduction

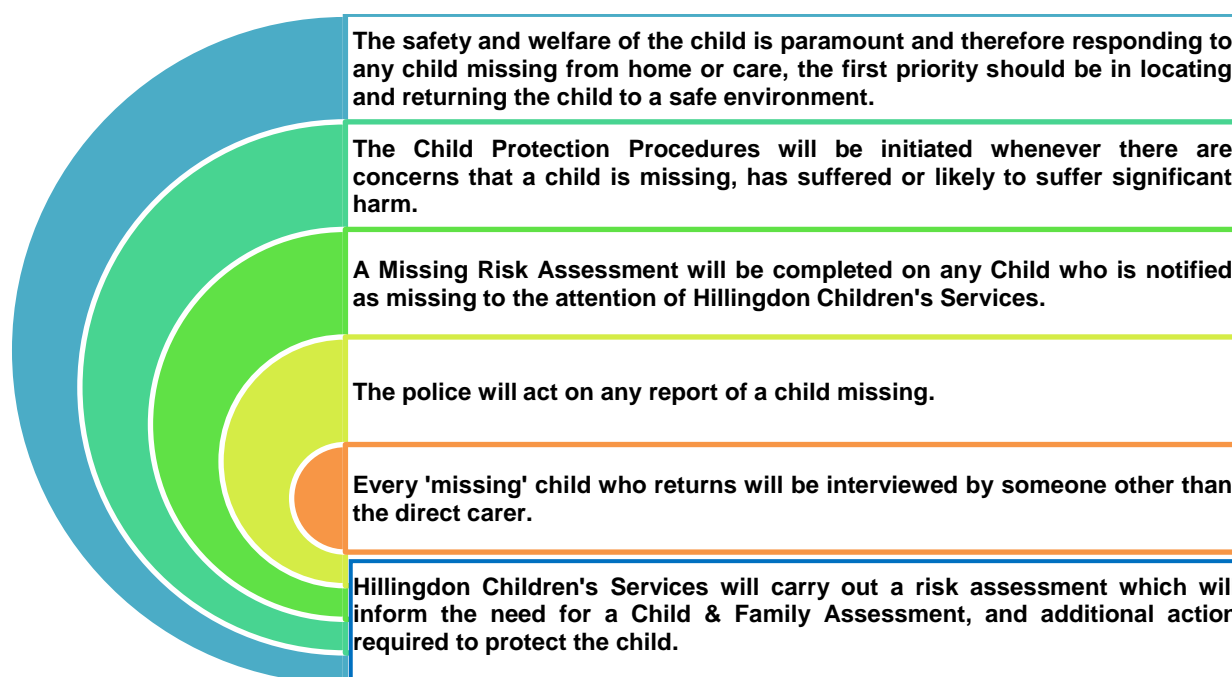
- 1.1 Children who run away from home or Looked After Children missing from their placement are particularly vulnerable and at serious risk of harm. The purpose of this protocol is to assist practitioners across all agencies to develop a robust response to children who go missing. This includes the prevention of all children from going missing and reductions of associated risks and recovering them to a place of safety as soon as possible.
- 1.2 Preventing children from going missing can be achieved by providing effective support and interventions, including good information sharing, multi-agency assessment, planning and performance management. Intervention will include a consideration of risks for each individual child and a focus on reducing repeat missing episodes. Working in partnership with children and their families is a key part of this process and children's views and concerns will be taken seriously. This protocol sets the minimum standards for a consistent and effective approach in working with children at risk of running away or going missing. It is expected that all agencies working with children resident in Hillingdon who are considered at risk of going missing, or are missing from home or care will implement this protocol and ensure their staff are aware of it.

2. Scope of this Protocol

- 2.1 This protocol applies to all children living in the London Borough of Hillingdon (LBH) whether they are at home with their parents/carers or Looked After Children by the Council. The London Borough of Hillingdon retains responsibility for Looked After Children who are placed outside the local authority area. In those cases LBH will require the placement provider to comply with the protocols for their local area supplemented by this protocol.
- 2.2 External local authorities placing Looked After Children within independent fostering or residential children's homes within London Borough of Hillingdon will be required to comply with this protocol. This protocol will also apply to all children and young people within London Borough of Hillingdon and for whom the authority has continuing responsibilities for under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.
- 2.3 This document should be read in conjunction with London Borough of Hillingdon's "[Children Missing Education Policy](#)" and the statutory guidance for "[Children Missing Education](#)". Additional guidance as outlined in [Appendix 2](#) should be followed alongside this document and is particularly significant when working with missing children who are at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation, Domestic Violence, Self Harm, Involvement in criminal activity or drugs and/ or a Child with Disability.

3. Guiding Principles

3.1 Children who are missing from home or care may be at greater risk of harm as a consequence of their basic needs for food, safety and shelter not being met and being at risk from people with whom they may come into contact with. Risks can include physical harm, sexual exploitation, drug abuse and involvement in a range of other criminal activities. Additional vulnerability may also be present due to the child's age, level of understanding, maturity and the seriousness of the circumstances that led to the missing episode. The following principles should be adopted by all agencies in relation to identifying, locating and preventing children from going missing:



4. Strategic Leads - Key Functions & Contacts

4.1 There are two Missing Leads based within London Borough of Hillingdon, one within the Council's Children's Social Care Service and one within Hillingdon's Police Service, these individuals are responsible for specifically identifying vulnerable absent and missing children, to "co-ordinate" a response in order to reduce long-term risk and to share best practice in relation to all missing children and young people investigations. The two nominated leads should work together to risk assess cases of children missing from home or care and analyse data for patterns that indicate particular concerns and risks.

4.2 Local Authority Missing Person's Lead Role and Responsibility:

- Effective use of performance data on missing children, return interviews, advocacy services to better understand the needs of the children who go missing and provide a co-ordinated response to cases of missing children;
- Strengthen partnership working to ensure consistent and robust information sharing, collaborative working and pooling of resources to provide support to children at risk of going missing and their families;
- Strengthen strategic planning and preventative work to inform practice and reduce the number of missing children;
- Lead on cases identified as high risk, alert senior managers and be part of a regular multi-agency forum including Police and Health partners where missing children are discussed;
- Ensure that the voices, views, wishes and feelings of the children are sought, heard and represented; and
- Work with the Learning and Development to ensure training for Social Workers, their managers and support staff in recording systems and developing good consistent practice approach to all missing children.
- Lead Contact details:

Janice Altenor
Head of Service
Safeguarding & Quality Assurance
London Borough of Hillingdon
Tel: 01895 556904
Email: jaltenor@hillindon.gov.uk

Lynn Hawes
Service Manager
Youth Offending Service
London Borough of Hillingdon
Tel: 01895 277957
Email: lhawes@hillindon.gov.uk

4.3 Police Missing Person's Lead Role and Responsibility

- Identify vulnerable children who go missing or absent on more than one occasion, and who may be vulnerable or victims of crime whilst they are missing, via MERLIN reports send to Children's Services;
- Collate and disseminate intelligence on identified problematic persons or locations and make any safeguarding referrals as required, to children's services and other agencies;
- Monitor incidents of missing and absent children, and identify children in need of protective measures and link in with the Local Authority Missing Person's Lead and Social Work teams as required;
- Identify those cases where multi-agency intervention is required to tackle the problem of repeat absences; and
- Assist in the development and delivery of training packages in relation to missing/absent children.
- Lead Contact details:

Sarah McGrory
Uxbridge Missing Persons
Metropolitan Police
Tel: 0208 246 1435
Email: Sarah.McGrory@met.pnn.police.uk

4.4 Other Key Contacts

- Hillingdon Children's Social Care - Tel: 01895 556644 Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) or Tel: 01895 250111 Emergency Duty Team (EDT);
- Police- Tel: 101 or 999;
- Youth Offending Service (YOS) - Tel: 01895 556432;
- NYAS National Advocacy Helpline - Tel: 0808 705 1011;
- UK Borders Agency - Tel: 0843 515 8453; and
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) - Tel: 0870 000 3344.

5. Definitions

- 5.1 There are a range of definitions used concerning missing children across agencies for the purposes of referrals, risk assessment and recording of data. In determining the definition to apply to any form of absence, the Police and Social Care practitioners will be cognisant that some children absent themselves from home or placement for short periods with minimal risk to themselves or others. The level of risk will depend heavily on the age, understanding and vulnerability of the individual child. All absent and missing children should be [Risk Assessed](#) within 72 hours to determine the level of seriousness that should be attached to any absence. Additional details of definitions used in the various agencies can be found in [Appendix 2](#).
- 5.2 The following definitions within this protocol apply in relation to children who runaway or go missing from home or care:

Missing

- The whereabouts of the child / young person 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 others.
- Any child aged 12 or below whose whereabouts cannot be established would automatically be classed as missing.
- A child in this category must be reported to the police.
- The child will be considered missing until that child has been found and their wellbeing confirmed.

Absent

- Child / young person (aged 13 or over only) is not at a place where they are expected or required to be (whereabouts unknown). Following risk assessment the absence does not raise concern for their immediate safety or that of anyone else.
- Where a subject has been reported as absent and new information comes to light or if the subject has not made contact (within the maximum timescale of 24 hours) the case can be categorised as 'missing'.
- A child in this category must be reported to the police.

Unauthorised Absence

- The child's whereabouts are known but the child or young person is not where they are expected or required to be.
- A child cannot be categorised as missing if their whereabouts is verified and known.
- Report to Police only if there is sufficient safeguarding concern for the child/young person, or another, which may require Police intervention.

6. Missing Prevention Strategy

6.1 Missing Prevention & Planning

- 6.2** Research shows that Looked After Children are over-represented in the cohort of children who go missing. Where the child has previously gone missing prior to becoming looked after, this risk should be addressed, refer to Pre-Missing Incident Risk Assessment ([Appendix 4](#)), and planned for as part of the child's care plan. Support and interventions may be focused on the individual child, the child's home or by targeting 'push or pull' factors in the community. 'Push or pull' factors are the influences which appear to 'push' the child from his or her place of residence or 'pull' the child to an alternative place.
- 6.3** Each looked after child has a care plan based on a full assessment of their current and future needs, including potential risk to self and others. The care plan will therefore take account of any risk that the child may go missing in the future and any factors which may increase the risk to the child should they go missing. Children's residential, fostering and placement service should be included in placement and care planning. As part of assessing risk it may be appropriate for the local authority to consult with the child's family, police and any other stakeholders to share information that may be of relevance.
- 6.4** In respect of Looked After Children or children known to Hillingdon Children's Services who are subject to a Child In Need / Child Protection plan considered at risk of going missing, a recent photograph of the child will be kept on record by the local authority. Where possible the consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any missing person investigation. If possible the agreement of the child should also be gained.
- 6.5** When a child goes missing it is vital for the safe recovery of the child that a recent photograph of the child is made available. Most commonly the photograph will be used by local Police Officers to help them recognise the child whilst patrolling or when actively looking for the child at relevant locations. In very serious cases where the child is believed to be at significant risk, the police and local authority may decide to use the photograph more widely and even involve publishing the photograph to national, local and social media. The police would be required to seek consent from the Local Authority prior to publishing the photograph in the media.
- 6.6** The local authority will ensure that sufficient knowledge and information about the child is recorded to enable carers to report the child as missing, this information should be gathered through the [Pre-Missing Risk Assessment](#). The residential home manager/foster carer should consider whether it is necessary and appropriate to discuss with the child the issues and risks of running away.

6.7 Care Planning and Review

- 6.8** Prior to each placement, where there is a likelihood that a child may go missing from their established placement, a Pre-Missing Risk Assessment should be completed by the child's allocated Social Worker. The residential home manager, semi-independent placement, foster carers should assist the child's social worker in gathering and updating this information. When the placements are unplanned there is an expectation that the Pre-Missing Risk Assessment should be completed by the Placement Planning Meeting within 5 days of the first placement start date.
- 6.9** Where the Pre-Missing Risk Assessment indicates a high risk of a child going missing, this should be maintained and updated by the child's allocated social worker through ongoing intervention and visits to the child's placement, please see the Procedural Notes in [Appendix 1](#) of this document.
- 6.10** When reporting an absent or missing child to the Police, copies of the Pre-Missing Risk Assessment ([Appendix 4](#)) along with any further information arising from the Risk Assessment ([Appendix 5](#)) should be shared with the Police. This information should be shared promptly. Information gathered in the Pre-Missing Risk Assessment and any further information arising from the Risk Assessment should be considered by the IRO who must have oversight of this document at Looked After Child reviews and any other interim or midway reviews to ensure the information remains up to date and use the local escalation procedure if safeguarding practice is not being followed.
- 6.11** If the child is or becomes subject to a Child Protection plan, the Child Protection Advisor (CPA) will have oversight of the Pre-Missing Risk Assessment in the same way as the IRO and follow the local escalation procedure if safeguarding practice is not being followed.
- 6.12** The Risk Assessment should be discussed and agreed as far as possible with the child and with the child's parents/carers and should include detailed information about the responsibilities of all services, the child's parents and other adults involved in the child's network.
- 6.13** The Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) or CPA should address the missing episodes in statutory reviews, with consideration to bring a review forward to address this issue. The IRO / CPA will consult with Chapter 6 of the [IRO Handbook](#) and commence the local escalation procedure in cases where the local authority's response to missing episodes is not in line with this protocol.
- ## **6.14 Intelligence and Information Sharing**
- 6.15** Effective sharing of information between professionals and local agencies is essential for effective identification, assessment and service provision in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the children of Hillingdon. Ultimately, effective safeguarding of children can only be achieved by putting children at the centre of the system, and by every individual and agency playing their full part, working together to meet the needs of our most vulnerable children.

- 6.16** The Local agencies, including the police and health services have a duty under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 to ensure that they consider the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children when carrying out their functions. Under Section 10 of the same Act, a similar range of agencies are required to cooperate with local authorities to promote the well-being of children in each local authority area.
- 6.17** This cooperation should exist and be effective at all levels of the organisation, from strategic level through to operational delivery, in accordance with [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) 2015. If a child runs away to another local authority and/or police force area, information sharing will take place between Hillingdon Children's Services and/or Metropolitan Police with the other local authority and/or police force area.
- 6.18 Collecting, Sharing and Analysing Data on Children who go Missing**
- 6.19** Section 4 of this protocol outlined the Two Missing Leads who are responsible for specifically identifying vulnerable absent and missing persons and to "co-ordinate" a response in order to reduce long-term risk. Both roles will identify and share best practice in relation to all missing person's investigations. The two nominated leads should work together to risk assess cases of children missing from home or care and analyse data for patterns that indicate particular concerns and risks. This includes children placed in Hillingdon by other local authorities and Hillingdon's looked after children placed out of the area.
- 6.20** Relevant data collated by Hillingdon Children's Services jointly with the Police and partner agencies includes missing episodes for children from home or care (duration and frequency), police safe and well checks, information from return interviews and identification of specific trends and risks such as child sexual exploitation. A Missing Children Analysis Report will be maintained and updated quarterly; to ensure that the required actions have taken place and themed audits on missing children will provide additional qualitative and quantitative analysis to further improve practice. An annual overview report will be presented to LSCB by the Missing Leads.
- 6.21 Risk Management Group (Vulnerable Young People) Meeting (RMG-VYP)**
- 6.22** The RMG-VYP contains a core membership (e.g. Police, Young Offending Service, Missing Person's Unit, Gangs Unit, Education, Health, Prevent Programme, Probation, Housing etc) able to commit resources and make decisions.
- 6.23** Missing children and young people perceived to be high risk, and a multi-agency plan is required, may be referred to the RMG- VYP, who will consider cases referred by any agency. Please see [RMG- VYP Terms of Reference](#) link in Appendix 2 for further information.
- 6.24 The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) -** will have oversight of the arrangements in place in safeguarding children missing from home and care and review and approve this protocol annually to ensure it remains fit for purpose. The LSCB will scrutinise regular reports received from the local authority analysing data on children missing from home and from care within the local authority area, and on the effectiveness of their measures to prevent children from going missing.

7. Responding to Children Missing from Home

- 7.1** All practitioner's working with children at risk of going missing should discuss the dangers of running away with the child and if appropriate their family. They should be told about support services, helplines and independent return interviews for children. Please see [Appendix 7](#) for associated resources for children / young people and their parents / carers.
- 7.2** If a child is at immediate risk this should be reported without delay to Metropolitan Police on 999, otherwise the Police should be informed by phoning the Police Hub on 101. Police will share the information through a single point of contact, the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) with Hillingdon Children's Services.
- 7.3** Parents and those with parental responsibility are expected to try to locate the missing child. Anyone else who has care of a child without parental responsibility should try to locate the child and ascertain their safety. Professionals working with families will support parents and carers in taking the following steps:
- Search bedroom /accommodation / outbuildings / vehicles;
 - Contact known friends and relatives where a child may be. Speak to other children in the family home to obtain relevant information about the missing child;
 - Visit locations that the child is known to frequent or was known to be attending, if it is possible e.g. a friend's house or party;
 - Call or text any mobile phone held by the child and leave a message asking them to make contact;
 - Search the home for important leads (e.g. mobile phones, diaries, letters, notes explaining absence, emails and website activity) which may inform or assist the investigation in protecting and locating the child; and
 - Contact the child's school or school friends to gather any available information regarding the child's whereabouts, check to see if any items are missing from the home.
- 7.4** At the point where a parent / person with parental responsibility considers the child to be missing, they should inform the police without delay on 101 or 999. The parent/carer should always ask for and record the Police Incident Number.
- 7.5** For children missing from home, it is expected that the parent / carer will inform the Police without delay. When referring to the Police, any relevant information that might help to find or support the child should be shared, including:
- Description of the child including their clothing;
 - Details of where the child was last seen and with whom;
 - Recent photograph;
 - Relevant addresses, known associates and addresses frequented;
 - Previous history of absenteeism and circumstances of where found;
 - Circumstances under which the child is absent; and
 - Any factors that increase the risk to the child.

7.6 If it comes to the attention of any agency that a child is missing, they should check that the parents / carer have taken steps outlined above to try and locate the child. They must advise the parent / carer of their need to report this matter to the police and they also need to check that the child has been reported to the police, if necessary they should follow this up by contacting the police to verify that the child has been reported missing.

7.7 Response From The Police

7.8 Once a child has been reported as missing, the police are the lead agency in relation to finding and securing their safe return. However all partner agencies are required to assist them to carry out this role. They are also required to ensure that practice within their own agencies makes timely and appropriate reports.

7.9 The police will investigate all cases of missing children and will respond in accordance with the College of Policing Missing Persons' policy. Other partner agencies will work collaboratively to assist them with their duties. For further information see the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice guidance [College of Policing \(2016\): Missing persons](#).

7.10 When accepting a missing person report, the police will advise the caller that they will share information about the missing child and seek assistance from partner agencies to find the child. They will have the presumption that all missing children are vulnerable unless a risk assessment determines otherwise. The police have the ultimate responsibility for determining the action that needs to be taken and when it needs to be escalated.

7.11 The Missing Person Risk Assessment questions used by the police can be found in [Appendix 5](#).

7.12 On receipt of a missing report, the police will:

- Enter the details onto database (missing person case management system);
- Check whether or not there is intelligence relating to the missing child and follow internal procedures;
- Forward details to the responsible local authority; and
- Where a situation appears to the police to be urgent, they will also immediately contact Children's Services to make a referral or for assistance.

7.13 The police will allocate the report for a response:

- Wherever possible, the responsible officer will contact the person who has made the report for further information; and
- The call taker / supervisor or officer will undertake an assessment of the risk a missing child may be exposed to and will take account of information available to them from partner agencies, particularly Children's Services.

- 7.14** Police will be alert to the potential significance of repeated missing episodes and will consider:
- The age of the child;
 - Previous behaviour, risk taking history;
 - The emotional needs of the child, e.g. whether there has been any variation in their mood or whether they have expressed any intention to harm themselves or others;
 - Behaviour of the child as influenced by peer groups or others;
 - Whether the child is perceived as running to / running from someone / something;
 - The risk of offending; and
 - The risk that the child may be targeted for economic or sexual exploitation.

7.15 Police Risk assessment should be guided by the College of Policing [Risk principles](#), the [National Decision Model](#) and Police [Code of Ethics](#). An appropriate level of police response based on initial and on-going risk assessment in each case.

7.16 Response From The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

7.17 All missing children that MASH becomes aware of via an electronic notification (MISPER) will contain initial information collated by Police Public Protection Desk (PPD) triage. Any new referrals of missing children will trigger a missing episode on LCS and a missing child risk assessment record will be completed on LCS in accordance with the MASH RAG rating (Red 4 hours, Amber 24 hours, Green 72 hours) with information collated from partner agencies.

7.18 MASH information should be used to inform risk assessment during a missing episode and on return home. On new referrals, information will be gathered and this will be completed by the allocated MASH social worker, if the child has a social worker already then this will be completed by their allocated social worker.

7.19 The facility to refer missing children episodes in other local authorities for the purpose of additional safeguarding checks will be available in each borough.

7.20 For missing episodes where the MASH manager believes that the child meets the criteria for a referral, the Local Authority will ensure that a Child and Family Assessment is completed.

8. Responding to Children Missing from Care

- 8.1** Where a child is looked after, a Missing Child Episode will be opened on the LSC recording system and the report will be notified to the allocated Social Worker, Team Manager, IRO / CPA and HoS. The missing episode should be the date the child left his or her normal placement or the date the child was last seen by a responsible adult (whichever was the latest). The allocated Social Worker will liaise with the Fostering, Placements and Independent Reviewing Services as necessary throughout the child missing episode. If the Child has been missing for 24 hours this should be followed with a referral to NYAS.
- 8.2** Where the child is looked after by another responsible local authority, a Missing Child form will be opened and sent to the responsible local authority. Hillingdon Children's Services will liaise with other responsible local authorities as necessary in relation to children placed in Hillingdon who are missing and follow this protocol in relation to them.
- 8.3** The missing child [Risk Assessment](#) record should be completed immediately (within 72 hours) on every occasion a child is 'missing'. The local authority should provide sufficient information to the Police to enable all risk factors be considered. Consideration should be given to the timeframes for children in both the absent and missing [categories](#). The initial completion and updating of the Risk Assessment should be used to inform and review the level of escalation. This may include input from other practitioners/agencies currently involved in supporting the child such as the Social Worker, CAMHS, Education Welfare or the school.
- 8.4** The plan should outline any individual vulnerability and risk factors that could increase the chances of the child going missing as well as information to help manage any missing episodes and finding the child. All risk assessments should be regularly reviewed and updated and follow the steps outlined above in the Missing Prevention Strategy ([Section 6](#)) of this document.
- 8.5 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)**
- 8.6** There are many additional factors to consider when UASC children are reported missing and further practice guidance should be sought to ensure there is a coordinated approach to full information sharing. Close co-operation with UK Immigration and the Police will be important. The assessment of need to inform the care plan may be critical in these circumstances and an assessment should seek to establish:
- Relevant details about the child's background before they came to the UK;
 - An understanding of the reasons that the child came to the UK;
 - An analysis of the child's vulnerability to remaining under the influence of traffickers;
 - A risk assessment as to the likelihood of the UASC going missing; and
 - The appropriateness of information being divulged as to the whereabouts of the young person.

- 8.7 When UASC are reported missing, they will retain their status of Looked After unless one or more of the criteria are met.
- They return to a birth parent/someone with parental responsibility and cease to be Looked After;
 - They are located in another country;
 - The case is taken over by another local authority; and
 - They are age assessed as being over 18yrs.
- 8.8 The Home Office should be informed of the child/young person's missing status.
- 8.9 Additional practice guidance on safeguarding UASC can be found in [Safeguarding Children who may have been trafficked](#) 2011. Where it is suspected that a child has been trafficked, they should be referred by the local authority into the UK's victim identification framework, the [National Referral Mechanism](#) (NRM). The Trafficked Children Toolkit, developed by the London Safeguarding Children Board, has been made available to all local authorities to help professionals assess the needs of these children and to refer them to the National Referral Mechanism. See also [Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery- Statutory guidance for local authorities, November 2017.](#)
- 8.10 Children placed outside the Local Authority**
- 8.11 Where a child who is missing from one Local Authority area presents themselves in another Local Authority area, it is important for the two authorities to negotiate to ensure the safe return of the child. If any child protection concerns have arisen whilst the child was missing, the responsibility for making Section 47 enquiries is with the Local Authority where the alleged abuse took place, but this should be done in liaison with the placing Local Authority.
- 8.12 **If a child is placed by Hillingdon in another Local Authority**, this practice guidance and protocol should be applied in regular communication with the host authority.
- 8.13 **If a child from another Local Authority is placed within Hillingdon**, this practice guidance and protocol should be implemented in agreement with the child's Social Worker and with regular communication with them.
- 8.14 The placing authority and the placement provider should liaise regularly and take all reasonable and practical steps to establish the whereabouts of the child. This will include contacting any persons whom he/she is likely to be associating with and arranging for those places to be checked. If the location of the child is known or suspected, the placing authority and placement provider must liaise to agree responsibility for locating and returning the child. However, if there are thought to be specific issues of safety or public order difficulties in returning the child, then action should be agreed between the Police and Children's Services.

8.15 Review of Continued Absence

- 8.16 Upon receiving a report of a child being missing from home, the Police will carry out enquiries (which are proportionate to the perceived risk) aimed at locating the child as soon as possible. A risk assessment will be carried out for each individual on every separate occasion they are reported missing to the Police. This risk assessment, usually conducted by the Initial Investigating Officer, and subsequently confirmed or revised by a supervising officer will form the basis for the subsequent investigation into the child's disappearance.
- 8.17 Throughout the missing episode, the Police are responsible for ongoing enquiries, risk assessment and proportionate actions. A strategy meeting should be convened dependant on the risks associated with the missing episode and the age and vulnerability of the child/ young person. **Dependant on the level of assessed risk, it may be necessary to convene an immediate strategy meeting following the notification of a missing child where the circumstances give rise to concern of significant harm.** These meetings are particularly important to collate and share information with Police and Health, Education and other partners about groups of young people who run away together.
- 8.18 Continual multi-agency Strategy Meetings should be held at a minimum of six weekly intervals or more frequently depending on the level of presenting risk to monitor and respond to missing episodes and to ensure all that should be done is being done until there is confidence that the issue has been resolved.
- 8.19 Strategy discussions should also consider:
- The need to initiate a missing child health alert which will notify all local health providers of the missing child and any particular vulnerabilities. This will be particularly important if the child/young person has identified health needs such as a mental health condition, substance misuse or a health condition. The Named Professionals within all NHS provider organisations can initiate these alerts;
 - Alerting the National missing persons desk (parental consent required where child is not CLA);
 - National Referral Mechanism where the child is missing and subject to exploitation, trafficking or modern slavery;
 - Agreements on communication between agencies, other local authorities and with the parents / carers;
 - Action required and agreed to locate the child;
 - Updates to the Risk Assessment; and
 - Agreements in relation to a Media Strategy.

- 8.20** Missing children assessed to be a high risk should also be referred to the RMG-VYP to ensure multi agency intelligence is being gathered and all possible powers and options available to agencies are being utilised to ensure locating and returning the child to a safe environment. All agencies involved in the RMG-VYP should put alerts in their own electronic recording systems in relation to high risk missing children and young people and notify immediately Police and Children's services in the event the child or young person comes to their attention.
- 8.21** The Deputy Director of Children's Services should also receive notification of all CLA children who are missing for more than 24 hours from the Head of Safeguarding. The Deputy Director of Children's Social Care will formally review all cases where children/young people have been missing for 3 months to satisfy him/herself on the actions taken to recover the child/young person. A decision as to whether or not to end the accommodation placement must be an outcome of the meeting. If the decision outcome is to end the placement, then it will be recorded within the meeting minutes that should the child/young person be found then a placement will be sought. If a young person has not been found by their 18th birthday then a formal Missing Child Meeting should be held to determine whether the case should be closed. Any decision to close the case should be on the proviso that it is reopened if the young person is located and found to be in need of services as an eligible, relevant or former relevant child.
- 8.22 All agencies/voluntary organisations**
- 8.23** If it comes to the attention of any agency that a child is missing, they must advise the parent/carer of their need to report this matter to the Police. They also need to advise the parent of the agency's duty to ensure that the matter is reported to the Police and if necessary follow this up by contacting the Police to verify that the child has been reported missing. The consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any subsequent missing person investigation. If possible the consent of the child should be gained.
- 8.24 Education**
- 8.25** Hillingdon has identified key stakeholders both statutory and non statutory to provide relevant information through the Hillingdon Children's Safeguarding Board. Hillingdon has publicised notification routes for all stakeholders nationally through DfE and locally through the West London Children Missing Education (CME) network. CME may become known to partner agencies that then have a duty to share this intelligence with the Participation Team within Early Intervention and Prevention Services to act upon this. This is particularly likely from all schools and academies, Police, CAMHS, Hillingdon Young Carers, YOS, KISS, SORTED, Housing, Admissions, Border Agency, other boroughs and counties, Health A&E, Health Visitors, G.Ps and residents. For further information please see London Borough of Hillingdon's "[Children Missing Education Policy](#)".

8.26 Children Looked After by Hillingdon are closely monitored by the Virtual School utilising the support of an external provider, Welfare Call, who collect and collate attendance and exclusions of all those in the care of the local authority. Every Hillingdon Child Looked After also has an allocated Virtual School Officer who maintains regular contact with schools, social workers and foster carers to ensure that key information is shared and the necessary strategies are implemented to address any concerns. This work is undertaken informally through telephone and email correspondence but also more formally through the termly PEP process, to ensure these young people continue to make progress and receive the necessary support.

8.27 Healthcare Professionals

8.28 The need to initiate a missing child health alert which will notify all local health providers of the missing child and any particular vulnerabilities. This will be particularly important if the child/young person has identified health needs such as a mental health condition, substance misuse or underlying health conditions. The Named Professionals within all NHS provider organisations can initiate these alerts.

8.29 Healthcare professionals have a key role in identifying and reporting children who may be missing from care, home and school. Missing children access a number of services in a range of NHS settings, for example:

- Urgent Care Units;
- Accident and Emergency Departments;
- Genito-Urinary Medicine Clinics (GaUM);
- Community Sexual Health Services; and
- Pharmacy Services.

8.30 Health professionals should have an understanding of the vulnerabilities and risks associated with children that go missing. Staff working in NHS provider settings should be aware of their professional responsibilities and the responses undertaken by the multi-agency partnership. Risks include sexual exploitation, trafficking, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Radicalisation, also is a risk factor for vulnerable young people, is managed via the national 'Prevent' strategy.

8.31 The NHS provides a comprehensive service for Child Looked After (CLA). A Designated Nurse and Doctor for Child Looked After are located in each Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). They are statutory appointments and are responsible for the commissioning and delivery of appropriate healthcare, assessments and services. Designated health professionals for a Child Looked After should share relevant information and intelligence relating to high risk individuals or emerging themes and patterns indicative of organised and targeted abuse, to the NHS Patch Safeguarding Children Forum. They should also ensure that NHS staff within their locality knows how to identify, report and respond to a child who is missing from care.

9. Planning for the child's return

- 9.1** Once a child has returned home, the Police will carry out a **Safe and Well Check** as soon as possible. The aim of this is to check for any indications that the young person has suffered harm; establish the reasons for their disappearance; find out where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them. Even where a young person is going missing frequently, there is a requirement to undertake the Safe and Well Check and every effort should be made to visit those young people missing from home on every occasion. If during the Safe and Well Check the police identify that there are immediate safeguarding concerns, then a referral should be made to Children's Services. In addition, if a private fostering arrangement is in place, this will also need to be reported to Children's Services.
- 9.2** When the Police locate a child who is reported as **missing from home** they will normally return the child to the parent/carer and undertake a Safe and Well Check. However, there may be occasions when it is appropriate or necessary for agencies and the family to discuss who will be responsible for returning the child. If there are specific and identified issues of safety or public order associated with returning that child, then a coordinated approach to recover the child should be agreed with the Police. In some instances it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home or placement and in such cases Police will liaise with Children's Services or the Emergency Duty Team (out of hours) for an evaluation of their safety.
- 9.3** Where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child could suffer significant harm, particularly if returned home, the Police can take that child into [Police Protection](#) and remove them to suitable accommodation which could include the home from which the child originally went missing (Section 46 of the Children Act 1989), please see [Appendix 6](#) for a full range of police powers. However, the Police are not given the power to use force to take a child into Police Protection but "reasonable force" may be used to prevent a child suffering significant harm. For full information on safeguarding concerns, refer to the [London Children Protection Procedures](#).
- 9.4 Response from the Local Authority**
- 9.5** For young people aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless the Local Authority should complete a Child & Family Assessment informed by the [Statutory Guidance](#) for the provision of Accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation. Where the assessment indicates they are a child in need and require accommodation under Section 20 of Children Act 1989, their views about becoming Looked After should be sought.
- 9.6** For Looked After Children, Children's Services will be responsible for recovering the child and returning them to their home or placement, unless the child is located by Police. In some instances it may be inappropriate to return a child to their home or placement and in such cases the Police will contact Children Social Care or the Emergency Duty Team (out of hours) for an evaluation of their safety.

- 9.7** When another professional/associate has located the child, Children's Services will be responsible for making arrangements for their return to the Children's Home/Foster placement. Where possible, residential staff/foster carers will transport the child themselves, however where this is not practical, arrangements will be agreed between the residential staff/foster carer and the social worker/EDT. There may be occasions where it is appropriate for the Police to assist. This will be subject to discussion and agreement on a case by case basis.
- 9.8** It is good practice and an expectation within this Protocol where it has been identified that the missing child is subject to a Child Protection plan, Child in Need or Looked After, the relevant social worker must ensure that contact/visit is made with child/young person promptly and an independent return interview should be offered and provided within 72 hours of the child's return.
- 9.9 Independent return interviews**
- 9.10** On return, from any missing episode, the child should be offered an independent return interview carried out by a representative deemed most suitable for the child. For Looked After Children, the person undertaking the Return Interview should be independent of the line management of the residential establishment or the foster home. This should allow the child to talk openly about why they went missing, where they were and any risks they experienced. This information should be gathered with a non-judgemental supportive approach and should be used to inform the current assessment/intervention see [Appendix 6](#).
- 9.11** The return interview should be carried out no later than 72 hours of the child's return. The child must always be seen on their own and consideration of an interview away from their placement to be seen separately as well as with their parent/carer and consent should be sought to share information with other services where appropriate. All efforts should be made to carry out the return Interview, however if this has not been possible due to the lack of response or engagement by the child/family, then this should be recorded.
- 9.12 Multi-Agency Response:**
- 9.13** Sharing information is paramount to promote the safety wellbeing of all children. All practitioners should ensure that they pass on information which may be critical to keeping a child safe, please see [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) 2015.
- 9.14** Following the safe and well check and independent return interview, local authority Children's Services, police and other agencies including voluntary services should work together and provide a multi agency response to:
- Build up a comprehensive picture of why the child went missing;
 - Understand what happened while they were missing;
 - Understand who they were with when they were missing and where they were found;
 - Decide what support they require upon returning to home or their care placement. See the [Continuum of Help and Support \(Threshold Document\)](#) and the [Framework for the Assessment of Child In Need and their Families](#); and
 - Ensure that there is a multi-agency plan to reduce repeat missing incidents.

1. Appendix 1: Procedural Notes

- 1.1 This appendix provides some additional procedural notes as a guidance to help professional implement this implement protocol and ensure there is a consistent response to missing children.
- 1.2 Placement Team is to ensure that every approved placement provider for Hillingdon has a copy of the Missing Protocol prior to a child being placed.
- 1.3 Every occasion of a missing episode is to be recorded on LCS by the MASH service or the Child's Social Worker in the Missing Person Records under the tab "Additional".
- 1.4 The Pre-Missing Risk Assessment is to be authorised by the social worker's line manager on LCS. Once this form has been authorised, the LCS will automatically send an alert to the HoS, the child's IRO/ CPA and Local Authority Missing Person's Lead that there is a child that has been identified as at risk of going missing. The same process will be followed once Missing Child Risk Assessment has been completed.
- 1.5 Every 'missing' child who returns will be interviewed by someone other than the direct carer, this means the Social Worker or Independent Advocate.
- 1.6 Interventions for looked after children must be informed by and reflected in the placement information record and in the care plan and at the Looked After Child reviews the IRO must have oversight of these documents.
- 1.7 Please see below Flowchart to accompany this protocol.

Child Goes Missing

Attempt to Locate Child



2. Appendix 2: Related Guidance

- 2.1 [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of Children\) 2015.](#)
- 2.2 [Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or go Missing from Home or Care, 2014.](#)
- 2.3 [Children Missing Education - Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, 2016.](#)
- 2.4 [London Borough of Hillingdon's Children Missing Education Policy.](#)
- 2.5 [London Child Protection Procedures - Children Missing from Care, Home and Education.](#)
- 2.6 [College of Policing Missing Person's Policy, November 2016.](#)
- 2.7 [Safeguarding Children who may have been trafficked 2011.](#)
- 2.8 [Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery- Statutory guidance for local authorities, November 2017.](#)
- 2.9 [Child Sexual Exploitation Prevention and Intervention Strategy 2015.](#)
- 2.10 [Children missing education Statutory guidance for local authorities September 2016.](#)
- 2.11 [Domestic Violence](#)
- 2.12 <http://hillingdonchildcare.proceduresonline.com/>
- 2.13 [Missing children: who cares? The police response to missing and absent children.](#)

3. Appendix 3: Definitions

- 3.1 Missing:** Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.
- 3.2 Child:** anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout this guidance.
- 3.3 Young runaway:** a child who has run away from their home or care placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.
- 3.4 Missing child:** a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.
- 3.5 Looked after child:** a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
- 3.6 Responsible local authority:** the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning.
- 3.7 Host local authority:** the local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority's area.
- 3.8 Care leaver:** an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.
- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 Away from placement without authorisation:** a looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.
- 3.11** For the purposes of this protocol a child who has run away or who is missing will be defined as one where the episode has been reported to the Police and recorded on the Police COMPACT database. The Missing Persons Authorised Professional Practice was last updated in December 2017, consolidating and updating previous ACPO guidance. It can be accessed at: [Missing Persons Authorised Professional Practice](#).

4. Appendix 4: Pre-Missing Incident Risk Assessment

- 4.1** Where there is a likelihood that a child subject to a Child In Need or Child Protection plan, or a Looked After Child may go missing from their established placement, a Pre-Missing Risk Assessment should be completed prior to each placement by the child's allocated Social Worker. The parents, residential home manager, semi-independent placement, foster carers should assist the child's social worker in gathering and updating this information. When the placements are unplanned there is an expectation that the Pre-Missing Risk Assessment should be completed by the Placement Planning Meeting within 5 days of the first placement start date. This form is available on LCS and should also be updated upon the child's return from each missing episode in order to gather intelligence and maintain up to date Risk Prevention Strategy and Action Plan for that individual child.

Pre-Missing Incident Risk Assessment

(To be completed at the start of the placement and maintained throughout)

Section 1

Full Name: Previous names Nickname/Street name:		Recent Image of Child
DoB:	Child's current address:	
Contact and Social Media Mobile phone number: Facebook Username Twitter Username		Height: Weight: Build: Complexion: Eye Colour: Hair:
Primary contact: Office Tel No: Mobile Tel No:		

BBM detail/PIN Access Code: Email addresses: Any other social media: (Instagram etc)		Marks, scars, tattoos: Physical/Psychological disabilities
	Length at placement: Previous placement/Home Address:	Ethnicity: Nationality:
	Legal status (including orders/Immigration)	
Medical requirements – Including Medication		
Placing Authority:	Social Worker name:	
Childs Next Of Kin – Including relationship and contact:	Contact (phone/Mobile/email) Detail of Child protection plan if relevant	
OYSTER Card Number & Adult Sponsor (U16):	Bank Account Details and Access to funds: Eg Debit card etc	
Does the child smoke, consume alcohol or illegal/recreational drugs? Provide full details:	Provide details of the child’s friends, include their home address and contact details:	

Locations Frequented/Places or worship <i>If the child has been missing before, include where they were found</i>		Details of other associates and family members that the child has contact with, include their home address and contact details:	
Child's view on current placement/ stability of their relationships at home			
Previous Missing Incidents – Attempts to Locate Contact Enquiries with Known Friends, Relatives and Acquaintances			
Date	Time	Name/Contact No and Address	Result
Level of supervision/support that care staff propose to provide for the child			
The views of parents/carers on their child's needs and the action that needs to be taken if their child is missing			
Consideration of any external influences which may result in the child being harboured or the child's removal without consent <i>[See also the:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hillingdon Child Sexual Exploitation Prevention and Intervention Strategy 2015 • London Child Protection Procedures on Safeguarding Trafficked and Exploited Children. 			
Details any 'push or pull' factors in the community. <i>('Push or pull' factors are the influences which appear to 'push' the child from his or her place of residence or 'pull' the child to an alternative place).</i>			
Detail the Risk Category (Low, Medium or High) according to the Risk Definitions in Appendix 4 of the missing protocol.			
Risk Factors – Victim or potential victim, of forced marriage, FGM or trafficking, or sexual exploitation			
Risk Factors – At risk from Gang Involvement/Membership <i>Consider new acquaintances, unexplained cash funds, regular travel patterns</i>			

Risk Factors – Is the child previously known for Suicide Attempts or Self Harm Tendencies:

Provide details including dates

Risk Prevention Strategy and Action Plan.

Review date for actions decided.

Completed by (full name)

Signature

Date

[This form should be emailed to police when the child goes missing along with the Missing Child Risk Assessment in [Appendix 4](#) of the Missing Children Protocol, and must include an up to date photo of the child.]

5. Appendix 5: Risk Assessment

5.1 This Risk Assessment is an aid to action and for information sharing and recording.

5.2 Aid to action

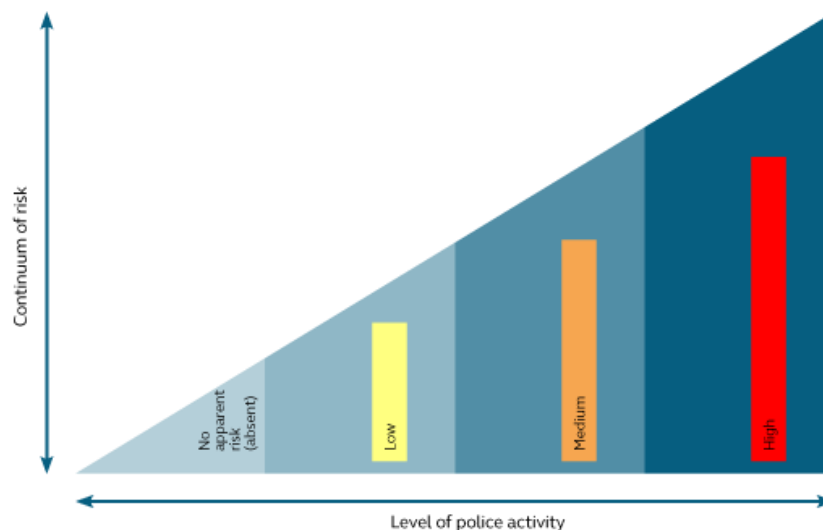
5.3 As an action tool the purpose of the Risk Assessment is to inform single and multi-agency decision-making and planning to locate a '**missing**' child. The Risk Assessment provides an indication of:

- the urgency of inquiries
- areas of inquiry, e.g. where drugs are available or that certain adults frequent, country of origin or country children are trafficked on to etc
- type of specialist knowledge that might be needed
- the supervision that may be required
- agencies who may be first alerted e.g. local Accident and Emergency services

5.4 **Aid for information sharing and recording:** At the time that a child goes '**missing**' the completed Risk Assessment should be shared with all agencies working with the child and kept on the child's file in each agency. In cases where new information becomes available and/or the child remains absent for a protracted period, the risks should be re-assessed, shared with the agencies and kept on the child's file in each agency. The most recently completed Risk Assessment should remain on the child's file in all agencies working with the child.

5.5 All reports of missing people sit within a continuum of risk from 'no apparent risk (absent)' through to high-risk cases that require immediate and intensive action, please see ([Missing Persons Authorised Professional Practice](#)).

Missing definition



5.6 **Risk Definitions** (to be used with the risk assessment below):

- **High Risk** - The risk posed is **immediate** and there are **substantial** grounds for believing that the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability; or may have been the victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public in is danger.
- **Medium Risk** - The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.
- **Low Risk** - There is no apparent threat of danger to either the subject or the public.
 - *Children and young people under 18 years of age should not be included in this classification.*
 - *'Regular' episodes of missing are often a sign of significant risk and therefore low risk should not be an automatic consideration without further rationale.*

Missing Child Risk Assessment Record

(To be completed by the MASH Social Worker or the Allocated Social Worker)

Name of child missing: _____ Date: _____

Address from which missing: _____

Factor	Details – Level of Vulnerability & Risks
Length of time missing until now	
Child's date of birth and home address <i>(if different to searched address)</i> .	
Child's age group <i>(10 years old or under, 11 to 14 years of age, 15 and up to 18 years of age)</i>	
Needs essential medication or treatment not readily available to them, i.e. diabetes, epilepsy, etc. <i>(including frequency and any withdrawal or side effects if known)</i> .	
List any physical impairment or disabilities <i>(may not have the physical ability to interact safely with others or in an unknown environment, e.g. visually impaired, history of abuse or inappropriate adult/stranger relationships, Down's Syndrome etc.)</i>	
List with details any mental illness or psychological disorder that may increase risk of harm to themselves or others. <i>(i.e lacks reasonable awareness of the risks associated with running away, incl. learning disabled.)</i>	
Provide details if the child/young person subject to a Child Protection / Child In Need / Looked After Child Plan or subject to a Care Order.	
Detail the weather / environment conditions <i>(i.e low temperature, and is suitable clothing was worn, etc.)</i>	

Detail any family / relationship problems or recent history or family conflict / abuse.	
Detail any suspicion being a victim of forced marriage, domestic abuse, honour violence. Details any judicial orders in place (<i>i.e FMPO / DVPO</i>).	
Details any known to associate with adults or children who present a risk of harm e.g. Sexual Offenders, Offenders against children.	
Details any educational, employment and financial problems.	
Detail any ongoing victim of bullying or harassment issues (<i>i.e any racial, sexual, homophobic, transphobic, etc</i>).	
Detail if they were they subject to any violent, racial, homophobic, transphobic, or domestic abuse incident or confrontation prior to disappearance.	
Detail any previous disappearance and any suffer or exposure to harm whilst missing.	
Detail any dependency on any drugs or any other substance (<i>i.e alcohol, controlled / uncontrolled drugs</i>).	
Detail any suspicion of foul play, abduction, homicide or serious violence, or were they subject to criminality prior to going missing.	
Is this out of character for the child? Have there been any previous missing / absent episodes? (<i>Being regularly reported as missing is NOT an indication of lower risk</i>).	
Detail any suspicion of suicide or self-harm.	
Is the child normally resident abroad and is believed to have gone missing in the UK?	

Is the child normally resident in the UK and is believed to have travelled abroad?	
Provide details of any suspicion of radicalisation or extremism. Have they attempted or already travelled to a conflict zone? Are there any recent indicators of radicalism?	
Detail any history or suggestion of gang involvement (<i>i.e association and exploitation</i>).	
Detail any known or suspected child sexual exploitation risks.	
Detail any PNC status of the child (i.e known, wanted, or any markers relevant in the context of the missing episode/investigation).	
List any other unlisted factors which the officer or supervisor feels should influence the risk assessment.	
List any other special factors the person reporting or family believe needs to be considered.	
Detail any community concerns about this person's disappearance or any risks to the public.	
Detail any reason to treat this person's disappearance as a critical incident.	
Detail the Risk Category (Low, Medium or High) according to the Risk Definitions in Appendix 4 of the missing protocol above.	
Summary of risk (summarise the risks in a couple of sentences).	
Summary of actions taken (Include attempts to talk to child / young person on mobile phone and attempts to contact friends and family).	

Review date for actions decided	
Completed by (full name)	Signature

6. Appendix 6: Resources for Parents/Carers and Young People

- 6.1 [A safety plan for young people experiencing relationship abuse.](#)
- 6.2 [Safelives - Safety Plan for Young People.](#)
- 6.3 [What to do if your child goes missing \(Practical advice for parents and carers\).](#)
- 6.4 [Parents against child sexual exploitation.](#)