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Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons 2010 Second Edition

This guidance is a second edition and is, therefore, not new but updates the existing guidance. It builds on the good practice and lessons learned since the publication of the earlier edition, and it is presented here in an electronic-only format for your convenience.

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Guidance on

**THE MANAGEMENT,
RECORDING AND
INVESTIGATION OF
MISSING PERSONS**

Second Edition

2010

Produced on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers
by the National Policing Improvement Agency

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National Policing
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IMPROVEMENT

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**THE MANAGEMENT,
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Foreword

This guidance is a second edition and is, therefore, not new but updates the existing guidance. It builds on the good practice and lessons learned since the publication of the earlier edition.

The impact of 'going missing' has never been higher in the national consciousness.

- High-profile missing cases highlight how vulnerable some individuals are and demonstrate the devastation caused to the families involved; this anguish is heightened by the lack of closure that sometimes has to be endured and by a collective sense that 'this could happen to anybody'.
- A ministerial task force has reported on missing persons issues that will enable us all to contribute more effectively. This report has made twenty-two recommendations. See ***Home Office (2010) The Missing Persons Taskforce: A Report with Recommendations for Improving the Multi-Agency Response to Missing Incidents.***
- A Command Paper, published in January 2010, announced that the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre will lead on missing children and provide additional capacity in this important area.

ACPO (2005) Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons collated best practice from forces all over the country. The NPIA supported its implementation and the National Missing Persons Bureau provided leadership. Our links with the charities dedicated to supporting us – lead by Missing People and Parents and Abducted Children Together (PACT) – have grown stronger than ever and they are committed to delivering tangible benefits both in terms of services on the ground and in better understanding of what and who is involved in this problem.

This revision of ***ACPO (2005) Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons*** reflects the need to do more, specifically in relation to prevention and in responding to the needs of high-risk groups – most notably children. The guidance will be distributed in electronic format to accommodate the ongoing changes that I have described and to provide links to the other areas of business that we rely upon.



Managing the risk involved in missing cases remains more of an art than science and while we continue to refine our understanding of the latter, I should like to thank all those who practice the former daily. They have contributed to a greater understanding of how to manage missing cases effectively and with compassion. All across the country there are examples of groups committed to bringing excellence to this important area of policing. I hope that this manual serves to assemble and share that knowledge effectively.

Richard Bryan
ACPO Lead for Missing People



1

Introduction

This section sets out the reasons why missing person investigations are important and describes the investigation cycle that underpins a problem-solving approach to managing missing person incidents. It also provides a checklist of the main factors that lead to the effective management of missing person incidents.



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1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to enable the effective investigation of missing persons supported by relevant management structures. The safeguarding of vulnerable people is paramount. Three key factors should be considered in any investigation:

- Protecting those at risk of harm;
- Minimising distress and ensuring high quality of service to the families and carers of missing persons;
- Prosecuting those who perpetrate harm or pose a risk of harm.

1.2 What Police Forces Are Expected To Do

The main factors that lead to the effective management of missing persons are listed here, with reference to where detailed information can be found:

Management Issues	References
Effective recording of information about missing persons including direct inputting of information onto systems	See 2.4 Initial Recording , and 2.4.1 and 2.4.2
Accurate identification of the level of risk	See 3 Assessment of Risk
Active supervision of investigations	See 4.4 Supervision
Access to specialists such as Senior Investigating Officers (SIO) and Police Search Advisers (PoLSA) when needed	See 4 Investigation
Support to the families and carers	See 4.11 Family Liaison and Support
Management of the return and information gathering	See 4.12 Management of the Return
Links to intelligence systems and recognising potential links with crime types	See 5.4 Links to Serious Offences
Coordination with other agencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Local authorities – Effective protocols – Reduction strategies – Information sharing 	See 6.1 A Multi-Agency Response See 6.2 Protocols See 5 Harm Reduction Strategies See 6.3 Information Sharing

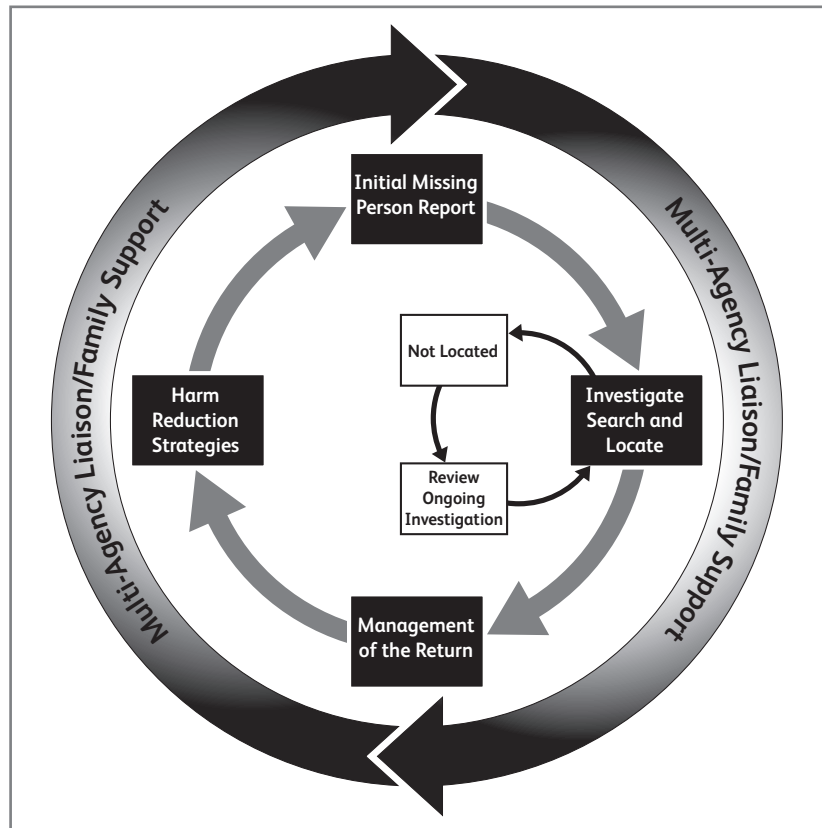


Management Issues	References
Provision of a dedicated response to missing persons through the coordinators role	See 4.15 Governance and Missing Person Coordinators
Delivering a proactive rather than reactive response to missing persons	See The Investigation Cycle

1.3 The Investigation Cycle

To enable the Police Service to work effectively with other agencies in the management of missing person incidents, the approach must be cyclical rather than linear. This means that the processes will lead to problem-solving and a reduction in harm as opposed to dealing with each incident in isolation. This cyclical approach forms the basis for the procedures set out in this document.

Figure 1 – The Investigation Cycle





This cycle principally relates to individual investigations, but if the outcomes and harm reduction strategies are properly used and applied, the cycle will influence the overall reduction in repeat incidents and reduce the risk of harm.

1.4 Relationship to Other Guidance

This guidance builds on and replaces previous editions; it also includes the expertise and good practice that has been developed in this field. Further information on related information, such as, example protocols, good practice and advice documents will be placed in the Missing Persons Bureau community on POLKA at <https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=134>

1.5 What Makes Missing Persons Important?

Missing person investigations should be regarded as a high-risk area of policing and given appropriate levels of priority and resources. This is also a safeguarding issue and should be treated accordingly. There is clear evidence from work done so far by police forces and partner agencies that significant inroads can be made into reducing the volume of unnecessary reports by taking a proactive or problem-solving approach. It is necessary, therefore, to develop a strategic framework that will help to deliver a problem-solving approach to cases. This will help to reduce the number of missing person incidents that need to be dealt with by the police and lower the risk of harm to these vulnerable people. This can only be achieved by understanding the causes of their going missing.

A person going missing should be regarded as an indicator of other issues. Such incidents may lead to uncovering exploitative and criminal behaviour against vulnerable children, young people and adults. There is usually a reason why a person goes missing, and understanding the circumstances and causes creates an opportunity for the police and other relevant authorities to identify intervention measures that can stop or minimise further disappearances. More importantly, it will draw attention to the safeguarding issues related to going missing and assist in the identification and investigation of crimes which are linked to, or are the cause of, someone going missing.

The reasons for a person going missing are described as the push and pull factors that attract them to going away or drive them into doing so. These factors are described in ***Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2002) Young Runaways: Report by the Social Exclusion Unit.***





2

Initial Reporting

The definition of a missing person and the associated categories of potential disappearance are set out in this section. It then describes how information should be recorded from the first point of contact with the police, including priority grading, and the use of electronic recording systems.



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2.1 Duty of Positive Action

The Human Rights Act 1998 places a positive obligation on police officers to take reasonable action, within their powers, to safeguard the rights of individuals who may be at risk. Those rights that may be relevant to missing persons are: the right to life (Article 2 European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)); the right not to be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 3 ECHR); the right to prohibition of slavery and forced labour (Article 4 ECHR); the right to respect for private and family life (Article 8 ECHR); the right to freedom of expression, including freedom to receive information (Article 10 ECHR). Failure to properly investigate a report of a missing person may leave an individual at risk and the Police Service vulnerable to a legal challenge under either the Human Rights Act or the law relating to negligence.

Whether a missing person has been identified as being high, medium or low risk, positive action is an obligation at every stage of the investigation.

IF IN DOUBT, THINK MURDER.

It is also important to consider all issues that arise from dealing with a missing person who belongs to a minority ethnic group, has particular religious beliefs, issues relating to gender or sexuality or anything that may require a particular response or consideration.

2.2 Definition

The ACPO definition of a missing person is:

Anyone whose whereabouts is unknown, whatever the circumstances of disappearance. They will be considered missing until located and their well-being or otherwise established.

There will be circumstances where a person is missing but police involvement may not be required as set out in sub sections **2.2.1 – 2.2.5**. Appropriate action may be a referral to other relevant agencies that can provide assistance.



2.2.1 Wanted/Missing

There will be occasions when a person may be considered as both a wanted and a missing person. This may be a person who is wanted for an offence, an absconder from a lawful care or custody order or is Absent Without Leave (AWOL). On these occasions it is normal to deal with them as a wanted person, not as a missing person. There may, however, be circumstances where the person should be treated as missing. This will generally be where they are considered to be at risk of harm by, for example, their own actions or by a third party. The model for assessing risk set out in this guidance can be used to assist in determining how the matter will be dealt with.

In these circumstances, the investigative processes and recording requirement of a missing person investigation may be of benefit to ensure a thorough investigation.

2.2.2 Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Where a person is reported to the police as missing and it appears they may have entered the country without the appropriate authority, the decision about whether this report should be dealt with by the police will depend on the circumstances of disappearance and risk. In some cases the person may be evading lawful authority and should be dealt with as a wanted person. See also **4.16 Asylum Seekers and Refugees**. An assessment of risk as described in this guidance may assist in deciding how to deal with the case.

2.2.3 Tracing a Lost Relative

Where the person making a report is trying to trace a lost relative, an assessment of the circumstances and risk must be made. The Police Service is not a tracing agency and there are specialist organisations that are better placed to do this, for example, Missing People, the Salvation Army or internet tracing services. Where the circumstances indicate that there is a present risk of harm to the person, further enquiries should be made to determine the nature of that risk or to decide that no police action is required.



2.2.4 Fear for Welfare

Command and control systems have this or similar incident categories. There have been several cases where the Police Service has been criticised for misuse of this category when the correct one should have been missing person. If the initial categorisation is correctly assessed to be fear for welfare but subsequently it turns out to be a missing person, it is important that the missing person process is followed. It is poor practice to use such a category to avoid the rigours of a full missing person investigation.

2.2.5 Unauthorised Absence

In *ACPO (2005) Guidance on the Management, Investigation and Recording of Missing Persons*, a category of unauthorised absence was created. Experience has shown that this it is not appropriate to use this category. An assessment of the circumstances will determine if the person should be reported as a missing person or not. The category was mainly applied to a person in care and it is expected that the person reporting, whether this be a relative or carer, will have taken all reasonable steps to enquire into the circumstances, see **4.6.1 Unauthorised Absence**.

2.2.6 Young Runaway

The terms 'young runaway' and 'missing' in this context refer to children and young people up to the age of 18 who have run away from their home or care placement, or whose whereabouts is unknown.

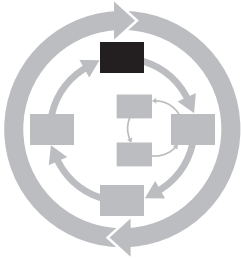
2.3 Priority of Response

A large number of missing person reports are made to the police annually. They must, therefore, be given an order of priority, which generally starts in the control room. Supervisors should be aware of the grading of incidents to ensure that the correct level of priority is given. See **3.5 Review of Risk**. The call taker will have to make a decision, based on the information available at that time, about the level of priority response that the incident will receive. The decision will be based on a graded response policy and an assessment of the risk factors relating to the incident. This risk identification should determine the speed and scale of the initial police response.

If child abduction is suspected, consideration should be given to implementing a Child Rescue Alert. For further information, see <https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=134>



2.4 Initial Recording



■ Initial Missing Person Report

It is the responsibility of the police area receiving a report of a missing person to record all relevant reports. It is not appropriate that members of the public are passed from one police area to another. The investigation into a missing person begins at the point of first notification to the police and as much detail as possible should be established. See **3.2 Priority Assessment**. Every report should be assessed and responded to with the appropriate level of priority.

When taking a missing person report, it should be remembered that the act of going missing is likely to have been precipitated by a problem in the person's life. This may be related to their personal circumstances or something more sinister. It is only with a thorough investigation that these circumstances can be discovered. The extent to which the missing person form is completed should depend on, and be proportionate to, the investigation. Where it is not considered necessary to take all details, comment should be made about this on the reporting form to ensure clarity about why they have not been recorded.

Consider missing as an indicator not just an event in itself.

Investigating and recording missing person reports effectively will ensure that the foundations are laid should a criminal investigation follow.

2.4.1 Recording Category

The missing person report needs to be correctly classified and have information recorded at the earliest opportunity. Inappropriate recording of missing persons as fear for welfare or other similar category can lead to a failure to investigate the case properly and has drawn adverse criticism from the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). See **IPCC Learning the Lessons: Bulletin 6, case 2.3** and **Bulletin 7, case 2.7**.

2.4.2 Recording System

To ensure that all reports are recorded, details should be entered as soon as possible onto whatever electronic reporting management system individual forces use for missing person reports. The most effective way to manage this is for the inputting to start at the first point of contact with the police, which usually means that it will be done at a call or communications centre. This ensures that the fullest information is available from the outset and that when the officer attends the incident, the primary function is to investigate and search, not to fill in a form.



Failing to record incidents correctly on missing person management systems has resulted in adverse criticism, see **IPCC Learning the Lessons: Bulletin 7, cases 2.6 and 2.9**. In those forces where this procedure has already been adopted, the cost of initial inputting is more than compensated for in the saving of officer time. Where police forces have mobile data, the officer is able to fill in the blanks in the data, stating what has already been obtained. The format used should follow the national reporting form.

Good practice example – direct inputting onto IT system

A police force that uses the COMPACT missing person management system instigated direct inputting to this system, limiting the activity carried out on the command and control system. This resulted in 90 per cent of cases being recorded on COMPACT as opposed to 30 per cent before the change. It saved 6,000 officer hours per year, which paid for extra office staff for inputting and, in addition, still saved in excess of £20,000.

Devon and Cornwall Constabulary

Key Issues

- It is the responsibility of the police area in which the report is made to take that report.
- Missing person incidents must be correctly categorised as such.
- Inputting reports directly onto missing person IT management systems will improve the management of investigations.





3

Assessment of Risk

This covers the levels of risk and response that must be considered for every report, together with the factors that contribute to the decision-making process.



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The initial assessment is made at the first point that the report is made to the police, see **2.3 Priority of Response**. Consideration should be given to The Statement of Risk Principles, see **ACPO (forthcoming) Practice Advice on Improving Operational Decision Making**.

3.1 Factors that Influence Risk

Certain factors about a person's disappearance need to be considered when determining the level of risk that is appropriate to the investigation. These factors are considered to be the main indicators that should guide police staff judgement.

3.2 Priority Assessment

It is important that as much information as possible is recorded when the report is first made to the police to ensure that the report is responded to appropriately. See **IPCC Learning the Lessons: Bulletin 4, cases 2.1 and 2.2**.

Call handlers should be guided by an abbreviated version of the full list of risk factors and is available from the NPIA Missing Persons Bureau at <https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=134>

3.3 Classification of Risk and Response

The level of risk can only be properly determined when an officer takes the full report details.

The information on which any judgement of risk is made must be recorded. It is also important to record the name and contact details of the person who gave that information and when. The determination of risk will be based on an officer's judgement, guided by the assessment form contained within this guidance. A decision will always be subjective and should be checked as part of the supervisory process.

Persons who are missing may be at risk of physical harm resulting from factors such as inability to cope with weather conditions, being the victim of violent crime, or risks relating to non-physical harm, eg, the people they are with, the places or circumstances they are in. The fact that they may be the unknowing victim of crime, for example, trafficking or exploitation, should not be overlooked and will generally raise the level of risk when missing on this and subsequent occasions.



Table 1 sets out the definition of each category and gives an explanation of what each category means in terms of operational response.

Table 1 – Classification of Risk and Response

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 is in danger.	This category requires the immediate deployment of police resources. A member of the BCU senior management team or similar command level must be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate staffing levels. Such cases should lead to the appointment of an IO and possibly an SIO and a PolSA. There should be a press/media strategy and/or close contact with outside agencies. Family support should be put in place. The NPIA Missing Persons Bureau should be notified of the case without undue delay. CEOP and Children's Services should also be notified (only if missing person is under 18).
MEDIUM RISK	
The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.	This category requires an active and measured response by police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.
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.	In addition to recording the information on the PNC, the police will advise the person reporting the disappearance that once all active enquiries have been exhausted, the case will be deferred to a regular review pending any further information coming to notice. In these cases, they may be filed on the computer system as 'inactive' provided the review process continues.



The risk assessment process should be transparent and recorded in writing or electronically. It should result in:

- Clear information being provided to those with an interest in the enquiry on how they can update it and be updated;
- An appropriate classification with the grounds and reasoning for this;
- An indication of the police level of response and point of contact;
- The identification of interested parties such as family, friends, work colleagues and other agencies, eg, social services and schools.

Risk assessment is a critical initial appraisal, and as the enquiry continues, it must be reviewed. It provides the basis for both priority and lines of enquiry.

3.3.1 Dealing with Low-Risk Cases

Low risk does not equate to no risk; many homicide cases initially reported as missing persons fit the low risk classification. Risk can also change with the passage of time and so the risk assessment must be regularly reviewed throughout the time a person is missing. A change in circumstances can significantly alter the initial judgement.

Risk must be assessed on the merits of the individual case. Where the missing person is under 18 years of age, the low risk classification is not appropriate.

Initial enquiries must be completed to ascertain the risk to the missing person. Once completed, if the missing person remains outstanding, the case must be monitored and reviewed effectively. An 'inactive' classification may be used for these cases provided the review process continues.

The timings of these reviews should be dependent upon the case details. All reviews should include basic checks to establish if the person has returned or if there is reason to believe that the level of risk may have changed.

As a minimum, these reviews should be completed at three, six and twelve months and then annually thereafter.



3.4 Decision-Making Guide

ACPO (2002) Manual of Guidance for the Management of Missing Persons established as a matter of principle that numerical scoring was not a safe method of identifying risk due to variations in scoring and lack of reliability.

Force senior management teams have a responsibility to ensure that risk assessments and prompt, appropriate investigative actions are regularly overseen. High-risk cases must be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

The importance and relevance of risk factors will depend on the circumstances of each case and require investigation to determine if they are a cause for concern. This concern will increase with the number of risk factors that apply. The approach should not be regarded as a mechanical one and police officers must be mindful that the risk assessment is a subjective judgement, and that just one factor alone may be considered so important as to prompt an urgent response.

Risk may be associated with immediate and present danger, such as a lost and vulnerable child, a possible abduction, or the longer-term harm that can occur as a result of frequent absences, eg, affecting the development of young people. This must be assessed on a continuing basis. There may also be benefits from making an assessment in conjunction with other agencies, particularly in relation to children in the care of the local authority.

Using factors listed in the NPIA Missing Persons Bureau community at <https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=134> as the basis of a questionnaire will provide officers with a decision-making guide that will assist them in making a professional judgement of the risk level. These are, however, only a guide and other grounds for suspicion, even if intuitive, can be registered by the investigator.

3.5 Review of Risk

The management of risk requires that a supervisor reviews the risk assessment as soon as practicable. The initial information gathering should also be reviewed and, if necessary, further enquiries instigated to validate the initial assessment. Risk assessment is a dynamic process with further assessments being made as the investigation progresses and as new information and evidence come to light. The passage of time can also influence the risk grading and this must not be overlooked.



The assessment of risk should be reconsidered and challenged at every point of handover and discussion, for example, at the beginning and end of a tour of duty or at tactical tasking meetings. If the case is managed by an individual or an investigation team, and there is no handover, the risk level should be reviewed on a daily basis. Information in support of the decision about the level of risk must be recorded so that the rationale behind the decision can be understood and reviewed.

Any decision to vary the level of risk should be endorsed by a supervisor.

For key lessons see ***IPCC Learning the Lessons: Bulletin 7, case 2.9.***

3.6 Critical Incidents

Any missing person investigation may become a critical incident where the circumstances warrant it, and this should be a consideration in all high-risk cases. A critical incident is defined by ACPO as:

...any incident where the effectiveness of the police response is likely to have a significant impact on the confidence of the victim, their family and/or the community.

The management of critical incidents is well understood in policing, and established methods should be applied in missing person incidents where relevant. See ***ACPO (2007) Practice Advice on Critical Incident Management.***

The factors that may make an investigation a critical incident may include the age of the missing person, their public profile or status or the circumstances of their disappearance. It is not just high-risk cases that are likely to precipitate this. A community impact assessment should also be considered in such cases.

Key Issues

- It is important that the correct assessment of risk is made.
- A supervisor should validate the assessment of risk as soon as practicable.
- The level of risk should be continuously reviewed to allow for the probable variations throughout the life of the investigation.





4

Investigation

This section describes the roles and responsibilities of all staff involved in an investigation and the supervision that is required. The specific issues relating to children missing from home and from care and vulnerable adults are covered. Working with the media, support for families and carers and management of the return are also included.



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4.1 The Investigative Process

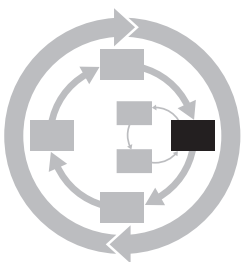
This process should be seen as a cycle of actions that are used in a problem-solving approach to missing persons. See **Figure 1 The Investigation Cycle**. This will help to improve the safeguarding issues for individuals and reduce the number of missing person incidents.

Information that is collected from each missing episode must be recorded to provide intelligence for future or current investigations. In the case of individuals who go missing repeatedly, information about where they went or who they were with on previous occasions can be useful. Past behaviour influences future behaviour. Information gathered on trends or patterns of missing persons can help to identify their involvement in crime, whether as a victim or an offender.

Search is an integral part of the investigative process; search and investigation should be seen as being complementary activities and the outcomes of each assists the progress of the other. See **4.3 Search**.

Where appropriate, multi-agency strategy meetings should be held. By understanding why a person is going missing, strategies can be developed to deal with the issues relating to the person. These meetings should be attended by a police officer. See **6.5 Multi-Agency Meetings**.

4.2 First Officer to Attend



■ Investigate, Search and Locate

The key roles of the first officer to attend a report of a missing person are to investigate, search and verify the level of risk. Judgements made at this point will have a significant effect on the effectiveness of the investigation. Consideration must be given to the nature of the report being taken and, where appropriate, the needs of individuals or relevance of their being from a particular group, for example, black minority ethnic (BME), faith, sexual, gender or other group, as this can affect the nature of the investigation. This may also be the first report of a serious crime or an indication of a person being at significant risk of harm. If so, the involvement of a supervisory officer should be considered a priority. See **5.4 Links to Serious Offences**.

Although most missing person enquiries do not lead to a major crime investigation, where they do, early identification is crucial to the investigation. How this is conducted in the first few hours after the report is made to the police can affect the outcome. Risk assessment not only places a priority on the efforts to locate the missing person but includes a judgement about the likely reason for their being missing. In some cases where there is no obvious reason for the person going missing, suspicion may be aroused. If immediate enquiries do not satisfy those concerns, supervisors must become involved and oversee the investigation.



4.2.1 Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the first officer attending a report of a missing person are:

- Establish the facts and keep accurate records of what was said and by whom.
- Make an assessment of the circumstances of the disappearance in order to make a judgement regarding the risks to which that person or the community are likely to be exposed. The decision, the evidence supporting it and where the information came from, should be recorded on the appropriate form.
- Gather sufficient information about the missing person to enable an effective and thorough investigation to be conducted. The depth of that information will vary according to the assessment of risk. Very detailed information and a lifestyle profile will be needed in high-risk cases.
- Notify a supervisor immediately in high-risk cases. In the case of medium- and low-risk cases, notify them as soon as is practicable.
- Conduct a thorough search of the premises and its environs and the place last seen, if different. See **4.3 Search** and **ACPO (2006) Practice Advice on Search Management and Procedures, Section 8**. Give consideration to electronic devices, computers and social networking sites.
- Make all immediate relevant enquiries in order to locate the missing person.
- Circulate the person reported missing on PNC.
- Circulate the person on local information systems.
- Consider obtaining any physical evidence of identity such as recent photographs, fingerprints, DNA samples in accordance with **ACPO (2009) Code of Practice on the Collection of Missing Persons Data**.
- Identify the person who is the point of contact for the police, assess levels of support required for the family, residential worker or foster carer and give information regarding other organisations that may be able to assist or support them.
- Consider the need for a multi-agency response involving the police and partner organisations in the investigation.



Following the initial risk assessment, the ownership and supervision of the investigation should be clear. The case must not be left for long periods of time without active investigation taking place.

4.3 Search

Searches must be properly conducted and recorded. While the extent and intrusiveness of any search will be dictated by the circumstances of the case, a search of the place missing from and/or the home address should be conducted in all cases unless there are specific reasons why not. These searches should include the grounds, outbuildings and surrounding areas.

All searches must be proportionate to the circumstances of disappearance, in consideration of the purpose of the search and conducted with compassion towards the needs of the affected families and local communities.

4.3.1 Purpose and Extent of the Search

There are three basic reasons for conducting searches in a missing person investigation. These are to:

- Locate the missing person;
- Identify any information that may lead to their discovery;
- Establish whether a crime has been committed against the missing person.

When looking for the person, the type of search performed is known as an Open Door Search. This entails searching all spaces and opening any door within the premises, searching to find an object equivalent to the size of the missing person. Where there are relevant suspicions, it may be necessary to conduct a more intrusive search, but this should be done under the supervision of a Police Search Adviser (PoISA).

The purpose of the search is to look for anything that may give information that could lead to their discovery, such as diaries, notes, computers and phones.

All searches must be justifiable, proportionate to the circumstances and fully documented. This must include the reasons for the search and its extent so that accurate information is available if further searches are to be conducted. It is also important to record what has not been searched. See **ACPO (2006) Practice Advice on Search Management and Procedures, Section 8.**



The Fire and Rescue Service will assist the police in searches for high-risk missing persons under a national protocol agreement. Advice on the behaviour of missing persons and how this may influence the search strategy can be found in ***Grampian Police (2007) Missing Persons: Understanding, Planning, Responding***.

4.3.2 Legal Powers to Search

The majority of missing person searches will be conducted with the consent of the owner or occupier of the premises. A legal power will exist where there is an immediate fear for the life or safety of a person and section 17 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act applies. Also, where relevant suspicions arise and consent is not given to search, a warrant could be applied for to give a power to enter and search.

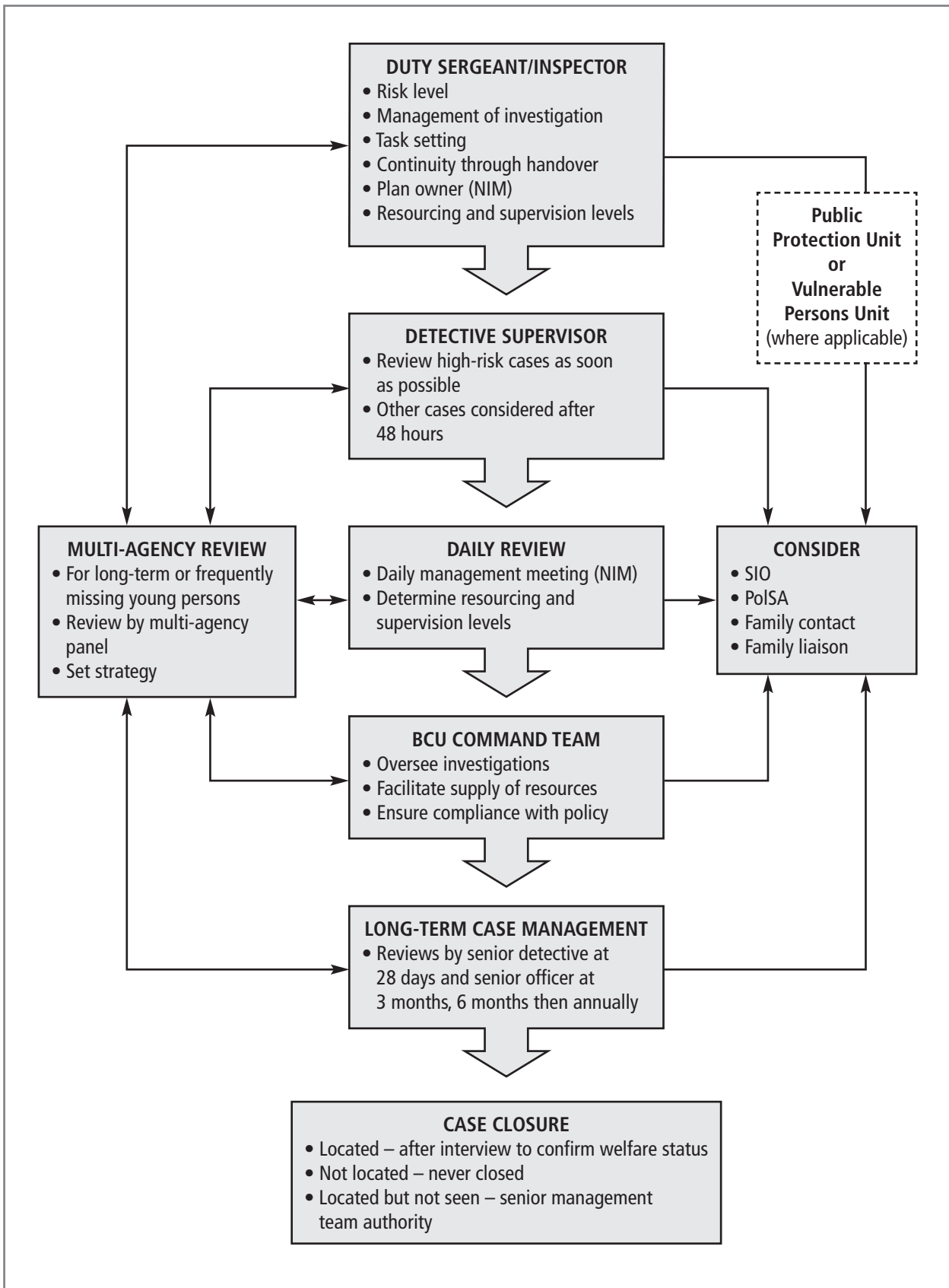
4.4 Supervision

Missing persons represent a real risk and they should receive the correct level of priority and resourcing to investigate them effectively and ensure that all safeguarding issues are addressed. To achieve this, the investigations need to be properly supervised. The large number of missing person reports that are received every year means that there is a clear need to determine which cases should be prioritised. This is achieved by determining the level of risk that is attached to each report and it being confirmed by a supervisor. The level of risk is determined by use of the decision-making guide. Supervision should also guide any inter-agency working arrangements.

Force policies must ensure that there is an active and intrusive supervision of all missing person investigations. Within the BCU there should be an officer of at least inspector rank who is responsible for overseeing missing person reports. Having a missing person's coordinator at force and/or local level will assist in the independent oversight of cases, see **4.15 Governance and Missing Person Coordinators**. Where BCUs do not have a dedicated inspector and a specialist unit, commanders should ensure that rigorous management systems are in place to ensure twenty-four-hour supervision of these cases.

This specialist tier is not designed to remove responsibility from general patrol duties or routine supervision. Initial report and enquiry will almost always lie with frontline staff. The specialist unit should be there as a backup, to pursue more in-depth enquiries and to work on solutions.

Figure 2 – Model for the Supervision of Missing Person Cases





4.4.1 First Line Supervision

The initial supervision should be by sergeants and inspectors; their responsibilities are as follows:

- The officer's assessment of risk should be checked, verified and recorded on the appropriate form. This should be done as soon as practicable. In high-risk cases, supervision should be immediate.
- Supervisors must ensure that the appropriate levels of action are taken to locate the missing person.
- An immediate and longer-term investigation plan must be set. Any such plan should cater for realistic staffing levels and must be recorded in the missing person report form. Such entries must be timed, dated and signed by the supervisor.
- If the missing person is under 18 years of age, consider the use of:
 - Child Rescue Alert, see the ***Child Rescue Alert Activation Protocol*** at <https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=134>
 - The UK Missing Kids website <http://uk.missingkids.co.uk/> (see **6.16 NPIA Missing Persons Bureau**) is also appropriate, relative to risk.
- Consideration should be given to the need for the investigation to be referred immediately or at a later stage to:
 - Detective;
 - Police search adviser;
 - Senior management team;
 - Child specific services.
- Consideration must be given to the level of resources needed to pursue an effective investigation.
- Judgements have to be made about the level of ownership of the investigation and in all cases there should be a nominated investigating officer (IO). This will be at one of three levels:
 - Officer allocated from patrol duties and handed over to subsequent shifts;
 - More serious cases should be allocated an IO whose sole or primary role is to investigate this incident;
 - A Senior Investigating Officer (SIO), where the seriousness of the case warrants this.

The next duty supervisor must be fully briefed to ensure continuity of the investigation.



The tasking and co-ordinating group will monitor missing person investigations ensuring that they are being managed effectively with an appropriate level of resources.

In order for an investigation to succeed, it must have strong continuous ownership and efficient day-to-day supervision. It must be established at the outset where ownership lies within the remit of uniform shifts and/or reliefs, and the investigation should be handed over at the end of every tour of duty. Senior management must ensure that adequate arrangements exist to maintain the quality and progress of an investigation.

4.4.2 Detective Supervisor

The value of employing the investigative expertise of a detective supervisor must be recognised and they should conduct case reviews. In high-risk cases this should be done as soon as possible. In all other cases this review should be considered forty-eight hours after the report is made to the police. It is suggested that the rank of the reviewing officer should be no less than that of a detective inspector.

4.4.3 Daily Review

All cases should be reviewed at the daily management meeting. It is probably the duty inspector who will have responsibility for bringing this to the meeting, depending on force structures. This is an appropriate forum for determining the level of resources and supervision that the case requires.

4.4.4 Senior Management Team

While the daily responsibility for the investigation will generally rest with other ranks, senior management have a responsibility to ensure that the following needs of the investigation are met:

- An appropriate level of support must be given and sufficient resources made available to carry out the investigation. Research has shown that many missing person investigations fail when they are not given appropriate recognition and are understaffed from the outset.
- They have a responsibility to ensure that policy is adhered to and the investigation is carried out thoroughly.



4.4.5 Long-Term Case Management

Long-term cases should be reviewed by a senior officer who has been trained as an SIO. It is suggested that the rank of the reviewing officer should be no less than that of chief inspector. Reviews should take place every twenty-eight days for the first three months, then at six-monthly and twelve-monthly intervals, then annually thereafter. Should any significant information come to light, this should trigger an immediate review. Consideration may also be given to cold case reviews of outstanding missing persons. Examples of review checklists developed by police forces and good practice in relation to the reviews are available from the NPIA Missing Persons Bureau at <https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=134>

4.4.6 The Purpose of the Supervision and Review Process

This is as follows:

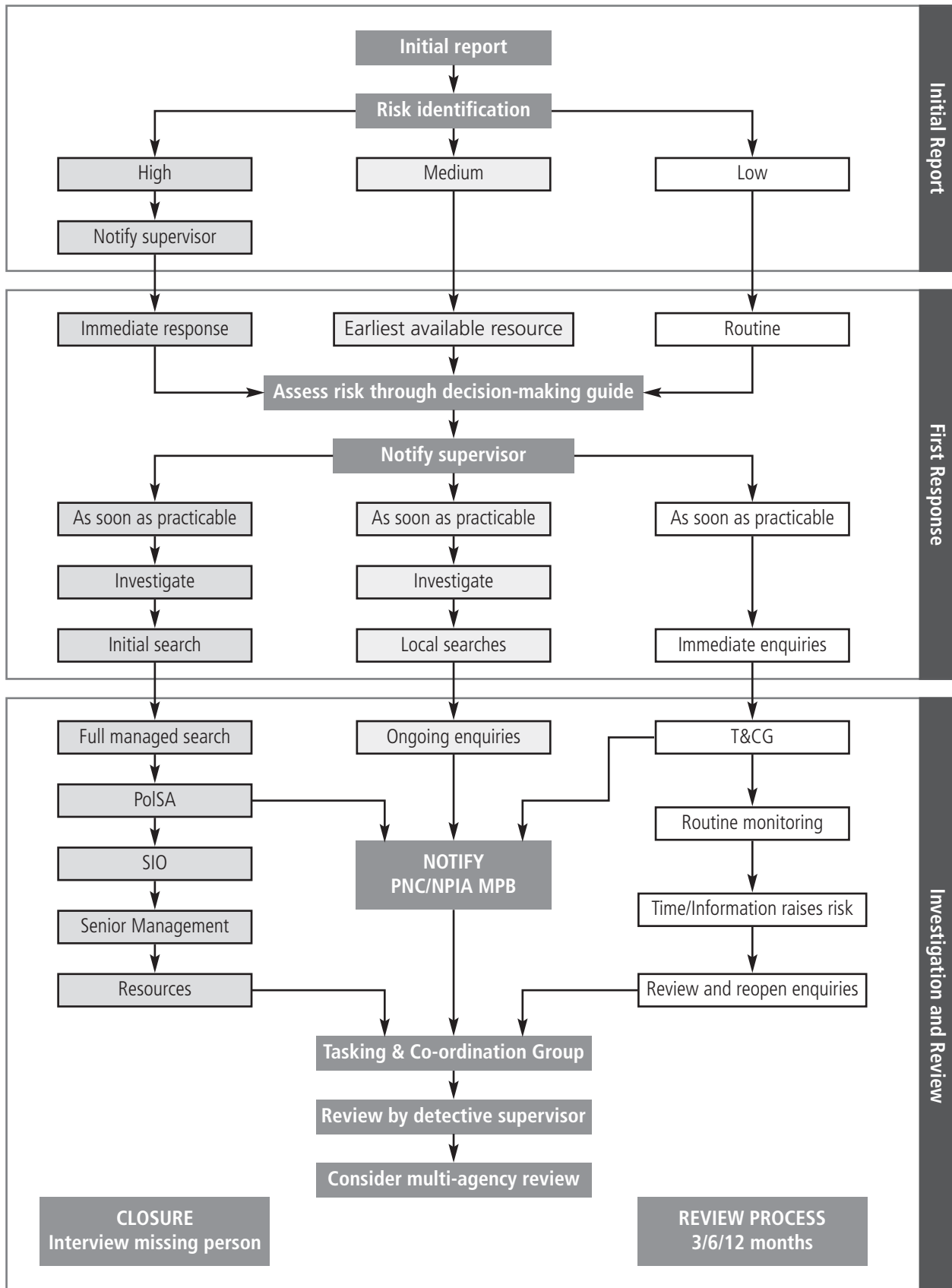
- Review the level of risk;
- Check for any outstanding and incomplete actions;
- Quality assure actions already taken;
- Set new actions and enquiries in order to bring the investigation to a successful conclusion;
- Make recommendations about the management and ownership of the investigation;
- Set future review date(s) as appropriate.

All the above should be recorded as policy decisions within the report.

4.5 Missing Persons Process Chart

Figure 3 illustrates the stages of a missing person investigation after being reported to the police.

Figure 3 – Missing Persons Process Chart





4.6 Children Missing from Home and from Care

Safeguarding of the young and vulnerable is the responsibility of everyone, including the Police Service. When the police are notified that a child is missing, there is a clear responsibility on them to prevent the child from coming to harm, and the following additional actions apply.

- No child or young person will be classified as low risk;
- Strategy meetings are held where appropriate;
- Specialist assistance in investigations can be supplied by Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP).

Running away or going missing can be symptomatic of wider problems in a child or young person's life, but whatever the reason one thing is clear: children who decide to run away are often unhappy, vulnerable and in danger. Many are not reported to the police. Recent research by the Children's Society indicated that only one third of all missing children are reported. See ***The Children's Society (2009) Still Running 2: Findings from the Second National Survey of Young Runaways***. Analysis of police missing person management systems and other research suggests that the majority of children who runaway or go missing do so from their family home. Although looked-after children are a much smaller proportion of young people who run away, they are far more likely to be reported as missing. They are also more likely to run away repeatedly, so account for the larger number of missing person incidents that the police deal with. Many of the actions that should be taken to investigate an instance of missing, thereby ensuring a child's safety, are the same whether the child has gone missing from their family home or from the care of a local authority.

Incidences of migrant children (mainly unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) going missing from local authority care may be linked to serious crime, such as trafficking. This is a serious issue that officers should be aware of and should be investigated where appropriate. Particular consideration should be given to returning migrant children into the care of adults who may be 'gang masters' for serious and organised crime.



Children and young people do not have the same levels of awareness or ability to keep themselves safe as an adult has. By the very fact that they have run away or gone missing may well be indicative of something being seriously wrong in their lives. Many of the children and young people who deliberately go missing are considered by some to be 'streetwise' and able to look after themselves; in fact, these children are even more likely to put themselves in positions of danger, having been abused, neglected or rejected by their families or others. They are more likely to engage in further risky behaviours, such as misusing substances, committing crimes and mixing with inappropriate adults.

By the same token, children who go missing repeatedly, whether from home or care, should not automatically be considered to be at diminished risk; they are vulnerable each time they go missing. They often have a false perception of their ability to look after themselves and so allow themselves to become engaged in risky activities or associations. Each episode of going missing should be individually considered, without forgetting the information that may be available from previous episodes.

Finding suitable emergency accommodation for children can be difficult and sometimes police stations are used as a solution of last resort. They are not, however, appropriate places to accommodate children, even for a short time, not only because the child may not have committed an offence, but because a police station is an unsuitable environment for a child.

The terms 'young runaway' and 'missing' in this context refer to children and young people up to the age of 18 who have run away from their home or care placement, or whose whereabouts is unknown.

4.6.1 Unauthorised Absence

In *ACPO (2005) Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons*, a category of unauthorised absence was established. Experience has now shown that it is not an appropriate category for the police to record but is still available for carers to use in relation to appropriate cases.



Where a looked-after child's whereabouts is known or thought to be known but unconfirmed, they are not missing and may instead be considered as absent without authorisation from their placement. In these cases it is the responsibility of the residential staff and foster carers to search the accommodation and local area, and make enquiries to locate the person with relatives or friends and where necessary, take steps to return them to a safe place. See 3.10 of ***DCSF (2009) Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away and Go Missing from Home or Care***, hereafter referred to as the ***Statutory Guidance***. Should the child or young person be subsequently reported missing, the police should consider re-searching the accommodation and local area.

Note: The Department for Education was formed on 12 May 2010 and is responsible for education and children's services, replacing the Department for Children, Schools and Families. All statutory guidance referred to in this document continues to reflect the current legal position.

Where there are concerns for a child or young person's safety, it may be appropriate for police officers to work with the care provider to ensure a swift and safe return of the child to their placement. Guidance to local authorities has reiterated that these children and young people should not be reported to the police as missing see ***Statutory Guidance, 1.1***. These standards apply whether homes and fostering services are provided by local authorities or independent sector organisations.

Where a young person refuses to return to the placement, the local authority should consider using its statutory powers, for example, a recovery order, to return the child or young person.

Care providers are expected to monitor any unauthorised absence carefully as, after following reasonable enquiries to establish the child's whereabouts, the child or young person may subsequently become a missing child. At this point the care provider should notify the police with details of the missing person.

The simplest interpretation of the action that carers should take before making a missing person report is to consider what a reasonable parent might do in those circumstances.



It may be helpful to hold joint training sessions with other local agencies, to encourage a better understanding of the relevant issues affecting everyone concerned. Understanding terminology used by different organisations is an important step towards ensuring appropriate responses from all organisations when a child runs away or goes missing.

4.6.2 Investigation Procedures

The investigation into a missing child will follow the same processes as those for any other missing person investigation and will be driven by the circumstances of their going missing and the level of risk. Where the case relates to a looked-after child, close engagement with the carers and other relevant agencies is important. They should also be able to provide information about the child and the risks to which they are likely to be exposed. Police officers should ask the care home or local authority for details of the child's risk assessment, in order that this can be taken into consideration during the investigation. For further information see **6 Working with other Agencies** and for greater detail see **Statutory Guidance, 3.4**.

The online activity of children may need to be investigated and appropriate procedures followed for this type of investigation.

If neighbourhood policing teams are familiar with the staff of care establishments and children who are looked after on their area, this will enable a speedier resolution to many cases. Agreed protocols in relation to these establishments should be used, see **6.2 Protocols**.

A child going missing will usually have a significant impact on their family and friends and their needs should not be overlooked. A child, especially a teenager, is unlikely to share all information about their life with their parents. Information that may be gleaned from siblings, friends, associates, school teachers and others should not be overlooked.

Where a child or young person has gone missing from care, it is important to work with all the agencies that are already in contact with the child, as they may have additional information about the child that may help locate them. It is expected that staff within children's homes keep fully updated records, including a recent photograph, and this will help officers in their attempts to trace the missing child. See **Statutory Guidance, 3.10**.

**Good practice example – working with children’s home staff**

Working together with care providers and other partners to agree what enquiries should be made by care providers and local authorities, and the thresholds for contacting the police will potentially produce more information about the missing person and ensure that police time is used appropriately.

In some investigations, care providers and the police have each taken a share of the enquiries to conduct a joint investigation to locate the missing person.

Source: West Mercia Constabulary

A child going missing should be considered as an indicator of other serious factors, including their being the victim of criminality such as sexual exploitation and trafficking, and of abuse in families and in care. See ***HM Government (2007) Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked.***

4.7 Children in Secure Accommodation

A small number of children will be placed in secure accommodation and may come to the notice of the police as follows.

4.7.1 Children Placed in Secure Accommodation on Welfare Grounds

In some cases young people are placed in secure accommodation on welfare grounds under section 25 of the Children Act 1989. Once in a secure setting it is highly unlikely that these young people will go missing. If they were to do so, the usual missing person procedures would apply.

Placing young people in secure accommodation is unlikely to be a solution to the problem of them running away.



4.7.2 Unlawfully at Large

In a small number of cases, young people become looked-after children because they are remanded to local authority accommodation by a Youth Court, having been charged with a criminal offence. This is known as Remanded to Local Authority Accommodation (RLAA). The child may be placed in secure accommodation, but may also be placed in a non-secure children's home or foster placement. A child who goes missing when RLAA is unlawfully at large, and in legal terms has escaped custody. The established procedures relating to an escape from custody should be followed, together with a missing person investigation. The investigating officer will need to liaise with an appropriate officer in the area's Youth Offending Team.

4.8 Children Not Receiving a Suitable Education

This was previously known as 'Children Missing from Education' and there was some confusion in relation to the use of the term 'missing'. Children not receiving a suitable education are defined as children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll, and are not receiving a suitable education otherwise than being in school, for example, at home, privately, or in alternative provision.

When a child fails to attend school, this may be for a variety of reasons and may indicate that the child is at risk of harm. The education authority should make reasonable enquiries to ascertain the circumstances before reporting them as missing to the police. Details of these enquiries are contained in guidance for local authorities on children not receiving a suitable education, which can be found at <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/ete/childrenmissingeducation/>

Staff should be aware of the possibilities that children are absent from school to facilitate offences of forced marriages and female genital mutilation, which necessitate trips abroad.

4.8.1 Truancy

This is not normally something that should be dealt with as a missing person investigation; reporting all such cases would put an impossible burden on the Police Service. Consideration should be given to the circumstances to determine if there are any indications that such an investigation is warranted.



4.9 Vulnerable Adults

Adults who are accommodated in residential care situations or are day patients at hospital, including accident and emergency departments, can be vulnerable when missing. Their vulnerability may arise from age, infirmity, mental or physical health issues or a combination of factors. Advice should be sought from qualified medical staff as to the likely outcomes from their not receiving treatment and their ability to look after themselves or to survive.

It is suggested that such locations are identified and agreements reached with the care providers about missing person procedures. Establishing protocols, similar to those regarding children, are a good way to agree those procedures and lead to proper management of incidents. Liaison and training will support the protocols and working practices.

Elderly persons in residential care and those being cared for at home can be particularly vulnerable if they wander off or become lost. Police forces may wish to consider protocols in these situations but less formal arrangements may suffice through liaison with the care providers.

It is important to have agreed procedures for reporting absences to the police, after the care staff have made appropriate enquiries. Such procedures should be set out in an agreed protocol.

4.9.1 Absconders from Hospital (Compulsory Patients Absent without Leave)

The compulsory detention at hospital of patients for the purposes of assessment or treatment is provided for under various sections of the Mental Health Act 1983. Any report of an absence in breach of these powers must be risk assessed and appropriate action taken to safeguard the wellbeing of the individual and the public at large.

4.9.2 Protocols for Missing Hospital Patients

There has been some concern over persons missing from hospital, with particular emphasis on those with mental health issues who are in accident and emergency departments. A number of forces are making progress in getting protocols in place, resulting in a reduction in the number of reports and better working practices. Some of the key learning points are mentioned here and the principles behind them apply to all types of protocol concerning the reporting of persons missing from any type of care. Example protocols are available in the NPIA Missing Persons Bureau community on POLKA at <https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=134>



The importance of good working relationships is recommended in ***IPCC Learning the Lessons: Bulletin 2, case 2.10*** and ***Bulletin 4, case 2.2***.

4.9.3 Missing from Accident and Emergency

Problems arise when trying to determine the level of risk to persons who go missing from these locations, particularly when assessing the potential medical risks. The police have a duty to find the person where they are at risk due to their injuries or illness and there is cause for concern that they are likely to die or collapse, or are likely to have a permanent disability they do not know about.

4.10 Media Strategy

Should the police wish to use the media as part of the investigation, this should be done in consultation with the family of the missing person. Occasionally, the family will object to this. Publicity can still be used, however, without their consent provided the decision is made in consideration of the Human Rights Act 1998, is carried out proportionately and in what is perceived to be in the best interest of the welfare of the missing person. Particular care should be taken in relation to looked-after children. This should be carried out in partnership with the local authority and all risk factors explored. Some addresses will be confidential and there will be times when birth parents do not know where the child is living.

A media strategy must be developed in high-profile cases. Its twin objectives will be to generate information and public awareness to assist the enquiry and to control speculation.

Guidelines relating to media strategy for critical incidents and major crimes can be found in ***ACPO (2006) Murder Investigation Manual***. It must be considered, however, that a missing person critical incident is different from other incidents and will require additional considerations. This is because the dynamic nature of such an investigation will generate public interest and sympathy over a number of days and consideration should be given to the impact on the community. The search operation will be the primary focus for the media in the early stages, before the investigative process supersedes it. A high level of media interest will also attract offers of help from members of the public and others who might wish to influence the search. For information on these and other media issues as they relate to the search, see ***ACPO (2006) Practice Advice on Search Management and Procedures, section 16.1***.



Careful management of the media will help to ensure that they obtain newsworthy material but that any interference with the investigation is kept to a minimum.

Missing People

When there is widespread media coverage of a missing person investigation, many people contact the charity Missing People with important and relevant information. It is important that communication links are established with Missing People to ensure that this information is managed within the investigation.

Issues relating to the investigation

There are three ways that information must be managed in relation to the investigation:

1. Police response to media requests for information;
2. Police use of the media, for appeals for information in relation to suspects, offenders and witnesses;
3. Police use of communication methods to gain information.

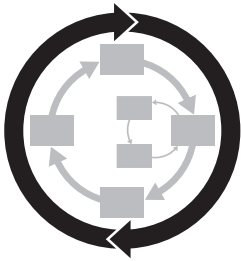
In the case of 1 and 2 above, it is important that accurate information must be given with regard to descriptions, clothing, vehicles and last sightings. Any photographs must be recent or accompanied by supporting information to describe when they were taken.

4.10.1 Sightings

Use of the media will lead to potential sightings of the missing person being reported to the police. Sightings must be managed carefully to ensure that they are properly considered in the context of the overall investigation. Where there are a large number of sightings, it will be necessary to have a strategy for investigating them. For more detailed advice see **ACPO (2006) Practice Advice on Search Management and Procedures, section 16.2.**



4.11 Family Liaison and Support



○ Multi-Agency Liaison/
Family Support

One of the considerations the police will have to address during a missing person investigation is how best to provide support to the family and carers of the missing person. This support is inextricably linked to other aspects of the investigation and is as important. Giving proper levels of support to families and carers of the missing person will also benefit the investigation.

Recent research into the needs of families and carers gives a valuable insight into these issues and makes recommendations for the Police Service. See *Missing People (2008) Living in Limbo*.

The impact on the families of missing persons must not be overlooked. While it is expedient for the Police Service to manage these investigations within the uniform response area, this does not always satisfy the needs of families and carers. Rotating ownership of the investigation through a twenty-four-hour shift pattern does not allow for a consistent point of contact and ease of obtaining updates.

How this point of contact is maintained will be a matter for each police force to decide, but this may be a suitable role for missing person coordinators or liaison officers. See **4.15.2 Missing Person Coordinator**. The family must be given a suitable contact number and reasonable expectations of when the point of contact will be available.

4.11.1 Police Actions in Relation to Support for Families

The recommendations from 'Living in Limbo' and this guidance translate into the following actions for the Police Service:

- Ensure the families are informed of the role of the charity Missing People and the support services available to them – this could be provided as a leaflet or similar;
- Recognise the importance of the incident to the families;
- Give realistic updates on what is being done, how an investigation is conducted and limitations that may be placed on it;
- Make sure that they know that everything possible is being done to find the missing person and give information, where possible, about what is being done;
- Provide a single point of contact that is realistic for them to make contact with and provide updates;
- Continue the contact in long-term cases and inform them of reviews;
- Provide a family liaison officer in appropriate cases.



4.11.2 Family Liaison Officers

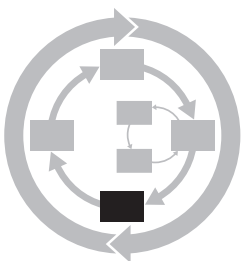
The trauma associated with some missing person investigations may place the family under immense pressure. This is at a time when the needs of the investigation may be making heavy demands on them for detailed information. In some cases the public interest generated by the event will mean that the media will also make further demands on the family. In such circumstances it may be necessary to appoint a family liaison officer (FLO) to work closely with and support the immediate family of the missing person.

For a detailed description of the role of the FLO, see **ACPO (2008) Family Liaison Officer Guidance**.

4.11.3 Long-Term Case Reviews

Family and carers should be given reasonable expectations about ongoing contact in longer-term cases. They should be told about the review process and when the next review is due. When that review takes place, they should be contacted and updated with the outcomes. They should be consulted about their feelings about this ongoing contact, as they may have concerns about how it will impact on their hopes or expectations. Those expectations in relation to the review process and its potential outcomes also need to be managed.

4.12 Management of the Return



■ Management of the Return

When a missing person returns or is located, the management of that part of the event is critical. Consideration must be given to the reasons why they went missing and, particularly with regard to children, whether it is appropriate to return them to their home address or other place they went missing from. For example, the cause of running away may be abuse within the home or be in relation to honour-based violence. Any decision not to return them to their home must be considered seriously and with appropriate levels of supervision. For looked-after children, the local authority will be responsible for making the decision about whether they should be returned to their placement, although in some instances they will do that following consultation with police officers and other professionals.



Good practice example – Management of the Return

Talk Don't Walk was set up in 2004 in Warrington, Cheshire and provides a range of services to vulnerable young people and their families, including family mediation and intervention.

Acknowledging that young people don't run away if they are happy and that parenting can be very difficult, it works on a problem-solving approach that rules out blame and enables long-term change. Young people and their families self-refer into the project or can be referred in by other agencies or individuals. An initial Common Assessment Framework (CAF) based assessment is carried out with workers, identifying any other services that may be required and referring onto these where appropriate.

Each party has a separate worker which helps build trust and ensures a neutral process for the mediation. One-to-one work is carried out with all parties to identify issues and any further support needed. The process involves the identification of coping strategies to help diffuse tense situations. Relationships with siblings are also looked at if they are emulating the behaviour or involved in the issue.

The project's centre in Warrington is used as a neutral venue for sessions to take place and all mediation is carried out by highly trained and qualified staff.

This way of managing the return has shown a reduction of repeat missing person incidents by 50 per cent.

More information can be found at
<http://www.talkdontwalk.org.uk>

Police officers must be mindful that when an adult missing person is located, their whereabouts must not be disclosed to others if this is against their wishes. They should inform the person who reported them missing that they have been located and reassure them about their wellbeing. It is possible that the person making the missing person report has done so for an ulterior motive.



Correct management of the return is important for several reasons:

- They may have been the subject of crime or otherwise been at risk of harm;
- They may have been the perpetrator of crime;
- They may have gone missing in order to harm themselves, either recklessly or deliberately;
- Their safety may have been put at risk due to their inability to properly look after themselves due to age, incapacity or other reasons;
- Understanding the reasons why they went missing can help future missing episodes and/or provide information to assist their location should they go again.

It is a commonly held belief that a missing person will not be willing to talk about their situation. Experience shows that this is not the case and what is required is a diplomatic approach, using an understanding rather than an admonitory style.

4.12.1 Police Safe and Well Check

The police have a duty under common law to protect life and investigate crime. For those reasons they must conduct a safe and well check of the missing person as soon as possible after they return. Its purpose is to check for any indications that the person has suffered harm; where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them. While this may be difficult and sometimes the person will be unwilling to speak to a police officer, every effort must be made to encourage them to do so.

Where a person goes missing frequently, it may not be practicable to see them every time they return. In these cases a reasonable decision should be taken with regard to the frequency of such checks. This will mainly apply to young people missing from care who are likely to have other people responsible for their welfare to check this. However caution should be taken if there is any suggestion that a child, for example, is running away from something occurring in their care setting. An example of this may be where they go missing on several occasions each day and it would be more effective to see them just once in each day at a convenient time. Every effort should be made to visit young people who were missing from home on every occasion.



4.12.2 Return Interview

While return interviews are particularly important in relation to children and young persons, they are also relevant to all missing persons. Whether a person has gone missing from their family home or from a looked-after setting, arrangements should be made for the missing person to have an in-depth interview shortly after their return. The information gathered from such an interview helps professionals to understand the reasons why the person went missing and therefore take action to help prevent future missing episodes. Where a service is available, the return interview might be best provided by a professional from a voluntary agency (which could be an independent advocacy service or specialised runaways project) who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow up any actions that emerge with the authority responsible for the child's care. Many young people who run away or go missing need to build up trust with somebody before they will discuss the reasons why they decided to run away. The interview and actions that follow from it should be used to:

- Identify and deal with any harm they have suffered, including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the Police Safe and Well Check (his/her medical condition should be discussed and any need for medical attention assessed);
- Understand and try to address the reasons why they ran away; and
- Try to prevent it happening again.

It is good practice that the initial interview takes place as soon as possible and in any case within seventy-two hours of the person being located or returning from absence. It is especially important that a return interview takes place when a child:

- Has been missing for over twenty-four hours;
- Has been missing on two or more occasions;
- Has been engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities during their absence;
- Has been hurt or harmed while they have been missing (or this is believed to have been the case);
- Has known mental health issues;
- Is at known risk of sexual exploitation; and/or
- Has contact with persons posing risk to children.



Delays in return interviews can result in retraction of statements and disclosures and loss of the child's confidence in the agency's response. Information and intelligence supplied by parents and carers, such as details of telephone calls or messages on mobile phones can be very relevant.

In all cases, consideration should be given to the practices of Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) and interviews conducted accordingly.

Good practice example – return interviews

Lancashire Street Safe Project provides return interviews and ongoing support work to young people missing from care. The return interviews are undertaken by project staff who work in partnership with police colleagues. The police are able to get timely, updated information about the episodes of missing-from-home, and the project staff can respond immediately to this. The information gathered in the return interview helps in the development of an intervention plan. The runaways project worker acts as an advocate for the young person to ensure that they are fully involved in their intervention plans, getting the young person on board at an early stage so they feel empowered. Young people are advised that their information is vital to ensuring the best services are put into place.

If the young person continues to go missing and five episodes are reached, more senior personnel meet so that relevant interventions and decisions can be agreed and put into place immediately. If the missing episodes reach nine, senior officers in the police and children's services come together to determine further strategies for working with the child/young person. If the child/young person continues to go missing, these senior staff meetings continue to take place. Tactical meetings are also held within Lancashire County bringing agencies together (police, children's services, health, Street Safe and other partners) to ensure that vulnerable young people are identified, and support is provided at an early stage. Cases are discussed at tactical and strategic levels to ensure that remedies are found to reduce episodes of children/young people going missing.



4.13 Cross-Border Cases

Difficulties can arise when a person reported missing normally resides outside the area where the report is being made, eg, a student in temporary accommodation or a day trip visitor. The principle that the police area that receives the report must record it is particularly important in these cases. The force that records the details of the report should carry out all necessary initial actions and then the report can be transferred to another police area for investigation. Looked-after children who are placed out of area are a particular source of difficulty between police forces, see **4.13.1 Out-of-Area Placements.**

The key issue is to consider where the bulk of the enquiries are and where is the greatest opportunity of locating the missing person. It is probable that the place where the person was last seen would generate the majority of the initial enquiries.

There must be ownership and responsibility for the investigation. The focus should be on achieving a satisfactory outcome for the missing person and making this decision promptly. It is not appropriate to have ongoing arguments about who should own the investigation.

In cases of dispute, where the locus is not clear, the matter should initially be referred to a senior supervisor within each force to determine who should own the investigation. In extreme situations where it cannot be resolved at this level, it should be referred to an ACPO officer who will discuss the matter with an ACPO representative of the other force. If the dispute is within one force in relation to internal boundary issues, it should be referred to the Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) who has territorial responsibility.

4.13.1 Out-of-Area Placements

Where children placed out of their local authority go missing, the placement provider will be responsible for following the local Runaway and Missing From Home and Care (RMFHC) protocol. They will also need to ensure that they comply with any other processes that are specified in the RMFHC policy of the local authority which placed the child (also known as the 'placing' or 'responsible' authority). It is possible that the child will return to their home area so it is essential that the necessary liaison between the police and professionals in the area of placement and in the responsible authority is well managed and coordinated. This should prevent issues of logistics and/or distance delaying or interfering in the actions of planning to locate the child. See **Statutory Guidance, 3.5 paragraph 25.**



Police forces will follow similar principles in these cases. Where a child is placed out of area, unless there are specific investigative reasons for doing so, the investigation should be transferred to the police force in which the placing authority is located. This is usually appropriate as the young person will gravitate towards their home area, which is where most of the enquiries will be centred.

The process is as follows where the young person from area A is placed in area B:

- Missing person report made in police force area B and the report is taken here;
- Initial investigative actions and assessment of risk carried out by police area B;
- If significant factors relating to the investigation are centred in area B, the investigation will remain here;
- If the investigation reveals that there are no reasons why the missing person might have stayed in area B or suffered harm there, the case should be transferred to area A.

There should be credible evidence to suggest the person is not in the force where they have gone missing or have returned to the placing force.

4.13.2 Transfer of Cases

In cross-border tasking and requests, it is beneficial to pass details of the result of the risk assessment carried out by the investigating force, and other contextual information, to other forces likely to become involved in the enquiry. This allows colleagues to make an informed decision as to whether the force receiving this information needs to action additional or particular enquiries. This is especially relevant to British Transport Police (BTP), given the unique and dangerous environment of the railways. See **6.13 British Transport Police**.

There is a responsibility on communications staff and investigating officers to request this information; developing a process that includes the provision of this additional information will reduce the risk to all involved.



When transferring cases, it is important that this is done in a timely manner using an auditable process. It is recommended that all police forces have email addresses that are available twenty-four hours a day so that investigation records can be transferred. The NPIA Missing Persons Bureau holds such a list of email addresses and will maintain this on behalf of police forces. It will be available through the NPIA Missing Persons Bureau community on POLKA at <https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=134>

4.14 Case Closure

Missing person cases should not be closed without the previously missing person first being seen by the police. The officer will check on the health and welfare of the person and give them the opportunity to disclose any offending behaviour by or against them while, or as a result of, being missing. See also **4.12 Management of the Return**. It is important that the appropriate closing code is used to identify the incident as a missing person.

In circumstances where the missing person has been located but it is impractical to see them due to their present circumstances, eg, they are abroad or are deliberately making themselves unavailable to police, the case can be closed provided that the authority of a member of the senior management team is given.

Where the missing person has not been found, the case must remain open and be the subject of review as deemed appropriate in line with the process outlined in **4.4.5 Long-Term Case Management**.

4.15 Governance and Missing Person Coordinators

A number of forces are introducing the role of missing person coordinator at force level and on local areas. Consideration should also be given to how missing persons are managed as part of a force strategy.

4.15.1 Force Governance

Good practice examples demonstrate that where forces have a clear ACPO lead for missing persons, together with a force strategic lead, the force becomes more effective in dealing with such issues and more innovative approaches emerge. It is recommended, therefore, that forces ensure that such roles are in place and that the strategic lead is at the rank of superintendent.



A number of forces have placed the responsibility for missing persons at strategic level within vulnerable people in general, and this approach has much to be commended.

There can be difficulty when the individual with strategic responsibility changes on a frequent basis. Where possible, forces should ensure that there is some continuity in relation to the individual who has overall strategic responsibility for missing persons issues.

4.15.2 Missing Person Coordinator

The responsibility for the investigation of missing persons rests with response teams and there needs to be regular management intervention to ensure that cases are investigated correctly, see **4.4 Supervision.**

A preferred model would be to have a force coordinator who is able to look across the whole organisation to ensure that good practice is promulgated and that the actions set through the force strategic lead are implemented. There would also be coordinators on a local or BCU level. They will not be responsible for every missing person report, but will perform a coordination role. This includes working with key locations such as children's homes and hospitals and providing an overview particularly in relation to long-term missing cases or where people frequently go missing. The roles and responsibilities of coordinators are suggested in the document ***Functions of a Coordinator*** which can be found in the NPIA Missing Persons Bureau community on POLKA at <https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=134>

Good practice example – missing person coordinators

Missing person coordinators were introduced specifically in relation to children and young persons and included many of the roles outlined above. This resulted in a reduction of around 30 per cent in missing person incidents.

Bedfordshire Police



4.16 Asylum Seekers and Refugees

It is not always possible to establish the true identity of the person or whether they are intentionally missing in order to establish a new life in this country. Where an asylum seeker is not where they should be, the agency having responsibility for them should make enquires before any report is made to the police. If the person is an adult, it should be ascertained whether there are any suspicious circumstances or any information that they have come to harm before they are considered to be missing. Young people can be extremely vulnerable and should be recorded as missing persons when their whereabouts is unknown. If such a young person is accompanied by an adult, consideration should be given to whether there is any cause for concern for the child's safety. The fact that the child appears to be with the person willingly does not mean that they are not being coerced.

Consideration should be given as to whether the person is intentionally missing and seeking to avoid immigration procedures or repatriation, whether there are any suspicious circumstances surrounding their disappearance or whether they are the victim of human trafficking. In many cases young people enter the country in possession of a mobile phone or a telephone number and use this to contact the traffickers who have brought them to this country. Although they appear to be here willingly, they are often brought here by deception or coercion and honestly believe that they have no other option but to comply and that the UK authorities are their enemy.

Safeguarding issues must take priority and this should be the responsibility of all agencies. The UK Border Agency has a duty to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009.

4.16.1 Working with other Agencies

Locally developed practices suggest that effective liaison with the local officers from the UK Borders Agency is the best way to tackle these issues. Such practices have been developed by Staffordshire Police. Where there is a port or airport within the police area, the model developed by Sussex Police, known as Operation Newbridge, is a good example of a multi-agency approach. See the NPIA Missing Persons Bureau community on POLKA at <https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=134>



The police e-Borders team at the National Border Targeting Centre may be able to provide information on the missing person's travel into or out of the UK, details of credit cards, telephone numbers, addresses and travelling companions. They can be contacted through the Force Intelligence Bureau, or if the case is urgent by telephone.

**Good practice example –
Multi-agency approach to safeguarding**

Working arrangements have been set up between the police, UK Borders Agency, children's services and care providers in relation to unaccompanied asylum seekers and vulnerable children entering the country at Gatwick Airport (Operation Newbridge) and the London Ports (Operation Paladin). This process identifies young people entering the country who are vulnerable, particularly those who are victims of human trafficking, and provides them with options to escape from their situation and to safeguard them.

*Operation Newbridge, Sussex Police and
Operation Paladin, Metropolitan Police*

Where a person has reported to the UK Border Agency, fingerprint records, photographs, personal details and information about their history will be kept. This might include whether they have been the victim of serious offences in their home country, eg, whether they were raped or tortured before leaving their home country.

There are six regional offices that are part of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate and these should be the first point of contact for any enquiries about asylum seekers.

4.16.2 Closure of Missing Person Reports

Police forces have a number of reports of missing persons that do not relate to an identifiable individual. This occurs where a person absconds and is reported as a missing person but their true identity is not known and there is no identification material that could identify them if found. In these cases, where there is no likelihood of matching the person against a found person or body, it is reasonable to put the case before a member of the local senior management team for a decision as to whether to close the missing person report.



4.17 Retention and Weeding of Reports

While a missing person enquiry remains open, all records and stored data must be retained. The enquiry will only be closed when the police have carried out the appropriate physical checks to establish that the person is safe and well. This will allow for the analysis of all information and the identification of any trends or patterns that will assist future investigations. When linked to the force missing persons IT application, this will allow officers to access previously stored information, which may also assist in the enquiries.

Each force should include clear guidelines within their policies to address the issue of retention of missing person records and their ultimate destruction. All unresolved cases should be retained indefinitely. In cases where missing persons have been traced, policies should dictate retention periods and include keeping records of locations where missing persons have been to and who they associated with. This can be crucial in future criminal investigations. It is a legitimate purpose to retain missing person reports for the following reasons:

- People often go missing on more than one occasion;
- People who go missing more than once often return to the same location;
- Closed reports usually contain information that will be of benefit to future investigations;
- Persons with health issues such as Alzheimer's are known to return to places known to them in their past.

For more detailed information see **ACPO (2010) Guidance on the Management of Police Information, Second Edition.**

4.18 Unidentified Bodies and Body Parts

The central repository and database of information in relation to this is the NPIA Missing Persons Bureau. All unidentified bodies and body parts must be notified to them within forty-eight hours. This is in accordance with **ACPO (2009) Code of Practice on the Collection of Missing Persons Data.** The purpose of this is to enable matching of these records with those of outstanding missing persons and assist in major investigations involving murders that cross force borders. This cross-matching is a routine function of the Bureau in respect of all unresolved cases for as long as the record is outstanding.

Advice using available good practice on how best to conduct investigations into unidentified bodies and body parts has been developed to assist police forces. It is available in the NPIA Missing Persons Community on POLKA at <https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=134>



Key Issues

- The role of the first officer attending is to investigate, search and verify the assessment of risk.
- There should be recognition of the potential links to serious crime.
- Effective supervision is essential.
- Senior management should take overall responsibility for investigations and provide adequate resources.
- Working with other agencies to achieve a problem-solving approach will reduce the risk of harm and the number of repeat incidents.
- Families should be provided with a point of contact throughout the investigation.
- A return interview will provide the opportunity to reduce future incidents of going missing.



5

Harm Reduction Strategies

Reducing harm is part of dealing with missing persons and some of the methods that can be used are described here. This includes harbourers' warnings and links to serious offences.

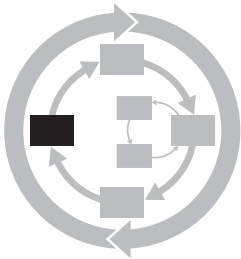


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5.1 Prevention and Intervention



■ Harm Reduction Strategies

The information gathered and shared from the missing episode, the safe and well check and the return interview should be used to develop a strategy for prevention and intervention. This may, for example, include the use of harbourer's warnings, see **5.3.1 Abduction or Harbourers' Warnings**, or referrals to support services. What is appropriate could be decided by the police or in a multi-agency review meeting. Data sharing is also an important component of this

Not treating incidents in isolation can assist in the reduction of future incidents or tackle safeguarding issues relating to the missing person. The benefits of taking a wider view include:

- Knowledge of previous incidents can identify locations and people associated with indicating where the person may be found;
- Patterns of behaviour can be identified, thus indicating the reasons for going missing or situations they are involved in;
- Information about locations that may identify the need to take action to ensure more effective management of those locations;
- Identifying trends and patterns of behaviour over a wider geographic area.

5.2 Prevention

Local areas should have clear plans on how they intend to reduce instances of running away in their area. For most children and young people, this will be a mixture of universal education about the dangers that young people face when they run away – probably delivered through the Personal and Social Education curriculum in schools – and targeted work with young people thought to be at greater risk of running away because they or their families exhibit particular risk factors that are known to lead to running away. Understanding the reasons why a child might run away will also assist in preventing future harm to them. See **Statutory Guidance**.

For children who are looked after by the local authority, it may already be known that the child has a propensity to run away. When this is the case, it is extremely important that the professional responsible for their care has plans in place to minimise the number of instances of running. This applies particularly when a child is placed outside their home authority. If local authorities place a child who has a history of running away in an out-of-area placement, they need to alert the host authority so they can agree a response to any instances of running by that young person in the Placement Information Record (PIR), see **Statutory Guidance, 3.4 paragraph 17** and **Statutory Guidance, 3.5 paragraph 25**.



5.2.1 Assessment of Need

Some young people who run away from home will be 'children in need' and therefore entitled to services provided by the local authority or local voluntary agencies. These might include advice, guidance and counselling for the young person and for their families.

The police and other partner organisations should have agreed protocols and processes for referring children to the local authority for an assessment of their needs, and this should be outlined in local protocols. Agencies working with young runaways will need to be familiar with the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need. See also **6.1.2 The Common Assessment Framework (CAF)**.

For further information see *HM Government (2006) Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children* <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice/IG00060/> or, for Welsh police forces, the *All Wales Child Protection Procedures*.

5.2.2 Care Planning

For looked-after children, a key element of managing their return from a missing episode will be to review their care plan. Every looked-after child will have such a plan. This is a comprehensive assessment of their needs that takes into account their wishes, feelings and aspirations for their future. The care plan should be used to decide which placement (eg, foster care or children's home) will be most suited to meeting the child's needs.

While care planning is the responsibility of the local authority, effective multi-agency partnerships should ensure that information from the police about the person is considered when drawing up their care plan.

For more information about care planning for children who go missing from care, see **Statutory Guidance, 3.4**.

5.3 Disrupting Patterns of Running

Understanding patterns of running and missing among all missing people is a key tool in preventing and disrupting future instances. Collecting data about individual cases, and at an aggregate level, helps police forces and other local agencies to do that. All reported instances of missing should, therefore, be recorded on force databases used for missing persons.



5.3.1 Abduction or Harbourers' Warnings

Harbourers' warnings are an effective disruption strategy used to sever contact between victims and perpetrators. The legislative framework in relation to harbouring is section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984 and section 49 of the Children Act 1989. The police give harbourers' warnings directly to suspects in circumstances where arrest and prosecution is either not available or undesirable at the time. A harbourer's warning can only be issued with the agreement and signature of the person with parental responsibility for the child or young person. It is recommended that this agreement is recorded in a witness statement. Harbourers' warnings are only applicable to children under 16 years of age unless they are the subject of local authority care. In these cases the warning can be applied to protect children and young people up to the age of 18 years using section 49 of the Children Act 1989.

Harbourers' warnings should only be issued in consultation with other safeguarding agencies that can offer the appropriate support to the victim. They should not be used as an alternative to prosecution if prosecution is an achievable and more desirable outcome.

While used as a way of disrupting exploitative behaviour, a harbourer's warning can also assist evidentially in a future prosecution using section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984. In addition, these warnings may be used to prevent the suspect successfully raising defences should contact with the victim be maintained and a section 2 abduction charge be pursued. These defences may be that they did not know the age or identity of the child or young person or that they had permission to allow the child or young person to be with them.

It is good practice to show the perpetrator a photograph of the victim and state the child's age. The officer should also ensure that the perpetrator signs the form to the effect that they have received the warning, giving the date and time. Officers should be aware that some victims of child sexual exploitation will use 'street' names, as do some perpetrators, as a means of protecting themselves. Perpetrators have used this as a defence in that they did not know the victim as the person named. A photograph of the victim prevents this line of defence.

Proper provision should be made to cater for the service of warnings on people who are blind, visually impaired, cannot read or where English is not their first language.



It is suggested that a policy is developed to describe the circumstances under which this process will be used, for example, setting out by whom or at what level the decision can be made. Consultation with the CPS is recommended to ensure that they are happy with the local procedures in the event of a prosecution.

Police forces have developed specific forms for issuing harbourers' warnings, examples of which can be found in the NPIA Missing Persons Bureau community on POLKA at <https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=134> A searchable database should also exist on the force intranet alongside the PNC and local intelligence system. This will ensure that any suspect with a harbourer's warning who is stopped by the police in company with a victim, can be identified and arrested anywhere in the country. For these warnings to be fully effective, it is important that such a database exists and that follow-up checks are made to ensure that the warning is not being breached.

5.4 Links to Serious Offences

The majority of missing person enquiries are quickly resolved. In a few cases, however, the report of a missing person is the first step in a major crime case. Therefore, the initial stages of any missing person enquiry should commence on the basis that the case may escalate into a serious crime enquiry. It is always easier to rein back from the early stages of a major enquiry than it is to recover missed opportunities resulting from a miscalculation in the early stages.

It is now widely recognised that missing is a key indicator in identifying victims of various crime types.

5.4.1 Homicide

One of the fundamental facts to be determined in a missing person investigation is the reason why the subject has disappeared. In cases where the circumstances are suspicious or are unexplained, use the maxim:

IF IN DOUBT, THINK MURDER.

Failure to apply such thinking in past cases has led to the loss of valuable investigative opportunities. This can ultimately result in failure to trace the missing person or to establish sufficient evidence to convict a perpetrator.



The status of the relationship between the missing person and the person making the initial report can also be important. Investigators should not always assume that such relationships are stable. There have been numerous cases where the person reporting the crime and/or the missing persons has been found to be the perpetrator of the crime.

For further information see ***ACPO (2006) Murder Investigation Manual***.

5.4.2 Abduction

Investigations into missing persons should always consider the possibility of abduction. In cases where there appears to be an immediate threat of harm to a young person, consideration should be given to implementing Child Rescue Alert using the website **<https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=134>**

5.4.3 Child Abuse

Young persons reported missing may have been exposed to physical or moral danger and may have run away to avoid abuse. Enquiries should be made to discover the reasons for the young person going missing and by speaking to them on their return. Where the abuse has been perpetrated by a parent or carer, they should not be present at any interview. Background enquiries, particularly with caring agencies and checks against police records, may assist in confirming or reducing suspicions. Where there is any suspicion of abuse, the case should be referred to the Child Abuse Investigation Unit in the relevant police area.

Refer to ***ACPO (2009) Guidance on Investigating Child Abuse and Safeguarding Children***.

5.4.4 Sexual Exploitation

It is sometimes the case that missing persons, particularly young people, may be the victims of sexual exploitation. This will not usually come to notice through normal crime reporting as victims often do not recognise that they are being exploited or are too fearful to make a report.



Attention should be given to the indicators listed in the document ***Advice on Sexual Exploitation*** see <https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=134> The safe and well check and the return interview should be conducted with these in mind. Obtaining intelligence and evidence to assist future investigations should be a part of this process. Intelligence obtained during missing person investigations may show patterns of behaviour indicating visits to the same locations or persons relating to activities while missing. An example of this is young people who are regularly found at the same address or with the same person. In these cases, the circumstances and nature of the situation and those involved should be considered.

Victims do not necessarily come from any particular background and those missing from home are as susceptible as those missing from care.

There are also underlying factors which may increase the importance of other indicators and these should be taken into consideration. These are a history of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse, neglect, domestic violence and parental difficulties. See also ***DCSF (2009) Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation***.

5.4.5 Domestic Abuse

There is a potential link between missing persons and domestic abuse. The person reporting an individual missing may either not know of, or not disclose, domestic abuse issues. Identifying that the missing person is a victim of domestic abuse or child abuse, or is an offender, will determine the type and level of investigation undertaken. The missing person could be the victim of a domestic homicide, or they could be the victim of domestic abuse and have gone missing to escape from it. The person making the report could, therefore, be attempting to locate the victim to continue the abuse. If they have killed the person, they may be reporting it to look innocent.

Police staff should, therefore, be alert to the possibility that the missing person is either a victim of domestic abuse or an alleged abuser. Specialist domestic abuse officers should be informed when a domestic abuse victim or suspect/offender is missing. Previous domestic abuse records and intelligence should be used to assist in the investigation. Established links with domestic abuse service providers, such as local refuges and outreach services, should be used where appropriate, as they may be able to assist with the investigation. Such contact should respect the confidentiality process of the service provider and should not presume that information will be made available.



Refer to **ACPO (2008) Guidance on Investigating Domestic Abuse** for more detailed information.

5.4.6 Human Trafficking

Being a missing person can be a key indicator in the recruitment of trafficked children. Police officers should be mindful of information gathered that may indicate involvement in trafficking.

This is an exploitative crime in which the perpetrators use a variety of controls over their victims, including violence and the threat of violence, the creation of dependency on traffickers for basic needs and psychological controls such as manipulating the sense of shame felt by sexually exploited victims. As a consequence, police officers dealing with suspected victims of trafficking should be aware that they should be treated with the utmost sensitivity, and that victims might be reluctant to cooperate until they feel safe from the influence of their traffickers.

Advice can be sought from the United Kingdom Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) on <http://www.ukhtc.org>

National referral mechanism

All children who may have been trafficked should be referred to children's social care for assessment for onward referral to the competent authority. This is part of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for the identification of victims of trafficking. All identified cases of child trafficking should be sent to the UKHTC as a matter of course as this is the central repository for all human trafficking cases. The UKHTC and the UK Border Agency act as the competent authorities within the national referral mechanism for the identification of victims of trafficking. Alongside CEOP, the UKHTC acts as a conduit for frontline intelligence which is used to assess the current picture of trafficking across the UK. This intelligence is passed on to practitioners to help them develop policy and help them identify and combat this abuse.

For more information, contact can be made to the United Kingdom Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) see <http://www.ukhtc.org>

For further information on child trafficking, see **CEOP (2007) A Scoping Study of Child Trafficking in the UK; CEOP (2009) Strategic Threat Assessment on Child Trafficking in the UK** and **HM Government (2007) Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked**. See also **ACPO (2005) Practice Advice on the Use of Immigration Powers Against Crime**.



The NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice and Information Line (CTAIL) has been set up to help frontline professionals to:

- Offer advice and information;
- Give safeguarding guidance about children and young people who are suspected to have been, or who may have been, trafficked internally and across borders;
- Offer presentations and case consultancy to professionals;
- Gather information and data to gain a wider understanding of the causes of and issues around trafficking;
- Work in collaboration nationally and internationally to prevent abuse from trafficking of children and young people.

This service is available from 09.30 to 16.30, Monday to Friday by telephone: 0800 107 7057 or see <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

5.4.7 Forced Marriage

This is where a person is forced into marriage against their will, as opposed to an arranged marriage, which normally has the consent of both parties. Abuse may be used to force the victim into marriage. The abuse can be perpetrated by any female or male family member and may include the other party to the forced marriage. The marriage can occur in this country or abroad.

For further information see **HM Government (2009) Multi-agency practice guidelines: Handling cases of Forced Marriage.**

5.4.8 Honour-Based Violence (HBV)

A missing person report may be an indicator that the person is the victim of HBV and care should be taken to ensure that the correct investigative procedures are followed. See **ACPO (2008) Honour-Based Violence Strategy.**

Key Issues

- Safeguarding issues will be improved through prevention and intervention strategies.
- Links to crimes and other sources of harm should be recognised as a cause of going missing.



6

Working with other Agencies

This section contains information about the various agencies that can be involved in missing person cases. The use of protocols is covered together with multi-agency meetings and the assistance that other agencies can give. The potential links to serious offences are also described here.

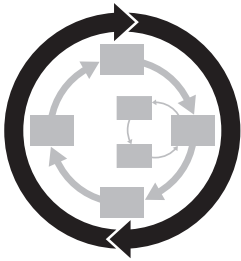


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6.1 A Multi-Agency Response



○ Multi-Agency Liaison/
Family Support

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, in particular protecting them from significant harm, depends on effective joint-working between agencies and professionals that have different roles and expertise. Where local agencies work together and ensure a coherent response to instances of missing, clear benefits have been seen in reducing the number of missing incidents and in safeguarding issues.

The Police Service expects that all agencies will work together, each taking the appropriate level of responsibility within their own remit to assist in the safeguarding of vulnerable people. Multi-agency partnerships should involve all relevant agencies, for example, police, social services, health, education and the voluntary sector. The purpose should be to share information about missing persons, both individually and collectively, identify local trends and patterns, recognise links to offending and safeguarding issues, manage individual cases and ensure that processes are in place to tackle missing person-related problems.

These processes are normally used for children or young people but could also be used for other vulnerable people if appropriate.

A joint investigation involving the police and carers can be very effective when a child has gone missing from a looked-after setting. An agreement can be reached in any investigation whereby the police conduct some enquiries and carers conduct others.

6.1.1 Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

LSCBs are charged with ensuring children and young people stay safe from harm. Some local authorities have chosen to set up subgroups specifically to deal with the issue of missing or runaway children and find this a helpful way of bringing together representatives from the main statutory and voluntary agencies, including the police.

6.1.2 The Common Assessment Framework (CAF)

The CAF will mainly be used by those with responsibility for a child's care. It is a consent-based tool for assessing a child in a holistic way to identify their additional needs. There is no need to use the CAF to access every child and the pre-CAF checklist may be a useful way of determining whether a CAF is necessary.



6.2 Protocols

Every local area should have protocols in place setting out roles and responsibilities when responding to runaway and missing children, see **Statutory Guidance, 3.3**. These protocols should be developed and agreed by local authority children's services, the police, other statutory agencies and relevant voluntary sector organisations. They will have been signed off by the LSCB and are sometimes known as Runaways and Missing from Home and Care Protocols (RMFHC).

These protocols exist for both children who go missing from home and those who go missing from the care of the local authority. They are intended to be working documents that will provide a source of practical guidance to those charged with ensuring the safety of others. Some areas may have a single document while other areas may have separate protocols in place. The protocols will be a useful reference point when a child is reported as missing. They include:

- An agreed definition of a missing or runaway child or young person; including when and how the unauthorised absence category should be used;
- An agreed inter-agency framework for classifying the degree of risk when a child goes missing from home or care or when a missing young person comes to agency notice;
- Guidance on the threshold for referrals to social care;
- Details of which local authorities should be involved in referrals when children have either run across local authority borders, or are in a care placement outside their home authority;
- Details of who should carry out a common assessment (CAF) and how this information should be shared;
- The basis on which agencies offer 'return interviews' for children who have run away from home;
- Effective reporting and information sharing between the local authority, the police and other agencies;
- Details of preventive approaches.

6.2.1 Missing from Home

Protocols will also agree a threshold for when referrals should be made to children's services' social care, for example when:

- Evidence exists that the child has developed a repeated pattern of running;
- The child has experienced, or is likely to experience significant harm;
- The parent appears unable or unwilling to work to support and meet the needs of the child.



6.2.2 Missing from Care

Where children placed out of their local authority go missing, the placement provider will be responsible for following the local RMFHC protocol. They will also need to ensure that they comply with any other processes that are specified in the RMFHC policy of the local authority which placed the child (also known as the placing or responsible authority). Independent sector homes and fostering services should be aware of, and follow, the missing persons protocols established between their local police force and the authority in which they are located.

The National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes and Fostering Services require that all homes and fostering services should have clearly defined procedures to follow when children in their care may be missing or absent; these processes should clearly link with the local protocols.

6.2.3 Vulnerable Adults

The protocols and procedures mentioned in **6.2 Protocols**, should also exist for vulnerable adults to set out the roles and responsibilities in the same way as for children.

6.3 Information Sharing

To prevent harm to the missing person, information about their behaviour and circumstances should be shared among relevant agencies. By doing this, a complete picture of their circumstances can be built up and appropriate action can be taken. It is the safeguarding issues that are paramount and agencies should not be reticent in this sharing. Confidentiality is a consideration and this should be discussed with the interviewee and usually their consent to share the information is obtained. There will be circumstances where they will need to be assured of confidentiality before they are willing to discuss some issues. See **Statutory Guidance, 1.4, paragraph 29**.

In policing, the process for recording information and intelligence is well understood. Other agencies may not understand this and there can be frustration on both sides when information is passed but cannot be used due to the manner in which it has been recorded. There are significant benefits to be gained from delivering training to partner agencies and by introducing a pro forma for recording the information. An example can be found in the NPIA Missing Persons Bureau community on POLKA at **<https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=134>**



6.4 Data

Police and local authorities must comply with a number of demands in relation to recording and sharing of data.

6.4.1 Police Code of Practice

This relates to the sharing of data between police forces and the NPIA Missing Persons Bureau:

- Missing person cases where there is a significant cause for concern to be notified to the Bureau immediately;
- All other cases to be notified to the Bureau seventy-two hours after they were reported missing and within eighty-six hours of that report;
- All unidentified persons, bodies and body parts are to be notified within forty-eight hours;
- When found, the Bureau is to be notified of these cancellations;
- All missing person cases are to be notified to the Bureau within a quarterly return.

See **ACPO (2009) Code of Practice on the Collection of Missing Persons Data** for more detailed information.

6.5 Multi-Agency Meetings

Where these meetings are held, clear benefits have been the reduction in the number of missing incidents and in safeguarding issues. Such a meeting could be triggered by three or more incidents of going missing, or one occasion where the circumstances give rise to concern of significant harm. The All Wales Child Protection Procedures also recommend that this meeting is convened after the child has been missing for more than seven days.

There are a number of models that can be used for structuring such multi-agency meetings, either working through the LSCB or, for example, using the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). This brings together the individuals within agencies who have responsibility for the missing person. They can determine an appropriate strategy for ensuring the safety of that person. This is also an opportunity for information sharing about that person to gain a better understanding of what is causing them to run away. Having the person who is the subject of the meeting there should always be considered and can add significant value to the outcomes.

These meetings would normally be used for children or young people but could also be used for other vulnerable people if appropriate.

**Good practice example – multi-agency partnerships**

Effective management of missing person incidents by a police force can provide data to make a strategic assessment of the relevant issues and identify the locations and individuals that make up the greatest number of repeat incidents. This enables the multi-agency partnership to tackle the issues and reduce the risk of harm to missing persons and in this case reduced the number of missing person incidents by more than 70 per cent.

Leicestershire Constabulary

6.6 Care Homes and the Ofsted Inspection Process

Ofsted has a statutory responsibility to inspect the accommodation and care provided by children's homes in England. This includes accommodation provided by the local authority and by the private and voluntary sector. These inspections cover the quality of provision, leadership and management and outcomes for children. Inspections are carried out at least twice in every twelve months.

Ofsted uses feedback from a range of stakeholders to inform inspections. Information that the Police Service has about individual homes should, therefore, be shared with Ofsted.

Should the children's home fail to comply with regulations, taking into account the national minimum standards for children's homes, Ofsted has the power to make requirements, impose restrictions and can in extreme circumstances apply to close the children's home.

If there are significant concerns about how a children's home operates, Ofsted should be contacted to ensure that any police action is taken in collaboration with them and safeguarding issues are properly considered. The police should not take unilateral action that may result in the closure of the children's home.

A protocol is currently being developed regarding this information sharing and, when complete, will be available via the NPIA Missing Persons Bureau.

In addition to the response to Ofsted's annual request for information, any concerns about a children's home can be raised with Ofsted by calling the helpline which is available from 08.00 to 20.00, Monday to Friday by telephone: 0300 123 4666.



6.7 Missing People

Missing People (previously called the National Missing Persons Helpline) is a registered charity that works across the UK. The charity provides services to families and police forces.

To request a service provided by Missing People, or for more information, see:

Website: <http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/police>

Telephone: 0500 700 700

Email: police@missingpeople.org.uk.cjsm.net (secure)

Fax: 0208 878 7752.

6.8 International Issues

There are cases where a missing person investigation extends beyond national borders. This means that procedures will need to be modified to conform with international law and processes.

6.8.1 Persons Lost at Sea

This procedure applies to all persons reported lost at sea from a vessel travelling to or from ports within the UK, or a where a vessel is passing close to the UK and the incident is reported to UK coastguards. It also includes cases of persons missing from offshore installations and those lost from areas of the UK coastline.

All reports must be properly acted on and should be dealt with by the relevant UK police force. In cross-border cases if there is any doubt as to which force has ownership see **4.13 Cross-Border Cases**. A missing persons form will be completed and an investigation undertaken.

If the missing person is not from the UK, the force to which the initial report is made should retain ownership, of the enquiry and be responsible for all subsequent enquiries (including the transfer of the report overseas if deemed appropriate). Any transfer of ownership of the missing person file should only be made after consultation between senior officers in each force.

At the earliest opportunity after the initial report, the matter should be reviewed by an SIO to assess if, on the information available, there is any possibility that the missing person is the victim of a crime.

Where a person has been reported lost at sea from a vessel travelling to or from a port within the UK, a missing person report will be completed. The incident location will be the area of the UK coastline which is nearest at that time. Where there is doubt, the location for the port of destination will be used.



If the person is a Foreign or Commonwealth Citizen, the relevant Embassy or High Commission should be informed immediately. A report should also be forwarded to Interpol for notification to be sent to the appropriate country and for any relevant background information to be gathered.

Where the vessel from which the person is reported missing is travelling to or from another UK port, officers must ensure that the details of the missing person are passed to the Home Office police forces responsible for the ports concerned.

Any UK national reported missing from any vessel outside UK waters and reported to the UK (usually through Interpol channels) will be dealt with by the home force of the missing person or the closest relative of the missing person.

The Police Service is recognised as the authority which coordinates the response to an incident on land. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency has responsibility for the initiation and coordination of civil maritime search and rescue, defined as being the area below the high-water mark, within the UK and will assist the police on request.

The Aeronautical Rescue Co-ordination Centre (ARCC) for the UK and territorial waters is based at RAF Kinloss and controls helicopters and other aircraft from a number of RAF stations. They are usually called by the MCA for assistance in sea-based incidents but are also available for land-based life saving operations.

6.8.2 UK Residents Missing Abroad

Sometimes a UK police force becomes involved when a UK resident is reported missing while abroad. This is a guide to the appropriate procedures that should be followed.

Interpol is the single point of contact for making requests for enquiries to be made abroad and all enquiries should be routed through this agency. Enquiries can be made in the first instance by telephone followed up with a report by email, fax or post. The Interpol Bureau in London is staffed twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and they have a call-out list for specialist officers if required. See also the Interpol Manual of Guidance. Each police force also has an International Liaison Officer who may be able to assist.



6.8.3 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The FCO is responsible for the UK's international relations, working for UK interests throughout the world. One of the functions is to protect and assist British Nationals overseas. The FCO publishes advice on missing persons abroad (available at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/publications>) which provides information on the processes involved in the event of a missing person overseas and in identifying useful organisations and support networks. The Consular Directorate Police Adviser can be contacted by telephone: 0207 008 8734.

The FCO has a dedicated Forced Marriage Unit which can offer advice and support, see *HM Government (2009) Multi-agency practice guidelines: Handling cases of Forced Marriage* at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage> and *ACPO (2008) Honour-Based Violence Strategy*.

6.8.4 International Investigations

Any reports of missing persons overseas will, in the first instance, be investigated by the relevant agency within the country where they went missing. If the matter is reported to the UK, a UK police force may decide to commence their own enquiries and/or investigation. Should it be necessary for the UK investigators to liaise directly with their overseas counterparts, or if a need to visit the country conducting the enquiries is identified, the first approach should be made through the Interpol Bureau in London. Interpol will then advise on the most appropriate approach to be made and through which channels. Each police force also has an International Liaison Officer who may be able to assist.

UK officers have no authority or rights to visit another country or carry out enquiries or investigations in another country without the appropriate authorities first being obtained through Interpol channels as laid out in the Home Office guidelines.

6.9 International Child Abduction and Contact Unit (ICACU)

The ICACU is the central authority in England and Wales for the Hague Convention on the civil aspects of international child abduction and the European Convention on recognition of enforcement of decisions concerning custody of children and on restoration of custody of children. It is able to provide advice on children who may or have been taken or kept abroad. Advice about these matters and can be obtained from their website: <http://www.officialsolicitor.gov.uk/os/icacu.htm> or they can be contacted by telephone on 0207 911 7127 during office hours.



6.10 Reunite

This is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that specialises in international parental child abductions and can give support and advice to families and the police. Their advice line can be contacted by telephone on 0116 255 6234 or via their website

<http://www.reunite.org>

6.11 National Ports Office, Heathrow

This is staffed by the Metropolitan Police and can offer assistance in cases where urgent action is required to prevent the persons leaving the country. They can be contacted by telephone on 0208 721 6000.

6.11.1 e-Borders

The e-Borders police team located in the National Border Targeting Centre can enter the missing person onto a watch list. The system then screens travellers into or out of the UK in advance of their journey and alerts the port where the missing person is expected to arrive or depart, thereby facilitating intervention. Officers will also search journeys made before the missing person was entered onto the system to ensure they have not already left the UK. Where journeys have been made, the system may also contain details of the person's credit cards, telephone numbers, addresses, travelling companions and other information helpful to locate the person.

6.12 Interpol

The Interpol Unit located at the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) is responsible for facilitating all matters involving enquiries abroad. The Interpol Unit will liaise with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as appropriate. Interpol will only accept missing person enquiries that fit their definition of high risk:

- Persons under the age of 18;
- Persons 18 years and over, who are vulnerable, such as through physical or mental ill health, or some other special feature which makes it desirable to have them on record without delay;
- Persons who are 65 years or older and vulnerable;
- Persons whose disappearance gives rise for suspecting some harm may befall them or if criminal investigation is commenced;
- Persons normally resident in the UK who are believed to have travelled abroad and are believed to be vulnerable;
- Persons normally resident abroad who are reported to have disappeared within the UK and are believed to be vulnerable.



If the person has been reported missing by a foreign law enforcement agency, as well as meeting one of the above criteria, there must also be a clear UK connection.

These reports must involve a real risk to the subject that is detailed in the report submitted. All such requests must be supported with full details of both the subject and the location overseas. Interpol does not provide a family tracing service except in high risk or life and death situations.

Interpol notices

Yellow Notice – to help locate missing persons, especially minors, or to help identify persons who are not able to identify themselves.

Black Notice – to seek information about unidentified bodies.

Interpol NCB can be contacted (24 hours) by telephone on 0207 238 8115 or via London@soca.x.gsi.gov.uk

6.13 British Transport Police

British Transport Police (BTP) is the national Police Service for the railways. Although BTP does not have a primary role in recording or investigating reports of missing persons, it can have a valuable role in supporting forces with missing person investigations.

On receipt of a request for assistance from any police force in relation to a missing person investigation, the BTP Force Control Room (FCR) will ask the reporting force for the risk assessment grading of the missing person. BTP FCR will also ask whether there is intelligence or information to suggest that the person will visit BTP jurisdiction and in particular whether there is any suggestion of intent to self-harm or attempt suicide within BTP jurisdiction.

BTP will then apply the following graded response.

BTP response to high-risk missing persons

- If information suggests there is a high risk of harm to the missing person while **within BTP jurisdiction** a level ONE response will be allocated as follows:
 - On call senior BTP officer advised;
 - Local area BTP inspector advised for appropriate action, or sergeant if no inspector is on duty.



- If information suggests that the high-risk missing person is using or will use the rail network only to travel and not self-harm or harm others while on the network, a level TWO response will be allocated:
 - Local Area BTP inspector advised for appropriate action, or sergeant if no inspector is on duty.
- A level ONE or TWO response will require the BTP investigating officer to liaise with the Home Office force that has primacy for the missing person investigation. Specific actions will be agreed and documented on action sheets from the Home Office force and faxed or emailed to the BTP IO. The actions will depend on the particular circumstances of the case but may include:
 - PoISA-led searches of stations, line-side locations and rail depots. A detailed search contract should be agreed between the Home Office SIO and BTP PoISA;
 - Missing person messages displayed on posters and plasma screen messaging boards at railway stations;
 - Circulation of description and photographs to BTP officers, railway station staff and train crews;
 - Reviewing in full closed-circuit television (CCTV) on stations and trains;
 - Search Force Intelligence System for sightings of the missing person and any other BTP intelligence about the missing person that may assist the investigation.

BTP response to medium- and low-risk missing persons

BTP will allocate a level TWO response to all medium and low risk missing persons.

Safety on the railway

The railway is a high-risk environment and BTP must be consulted prior to considering any searches on railway lines or premises. See ***Network Rail (2004) Emergency Services Rail Incident Protocol*** and ***Network Rail (2004) Railway Safety for the Emergency Services***.



6.14 Police National Computer (PNC)

Although individual police forces may have their own procedures, details of all missing persons should be recorded on the PNC as soon as possible and at least within forty-eight hours of their disappearance. Police forces must ensure cancellation of missing persons records once they have been found.

Details of identified persons and/or bodies should be recorded on PNC, eg, unconscious accident/illness victims, and people with amnesia, where the next of kin have not been informed. This can be particularly helpful if they are reported missing, especially if in another area.

6.15 Schengen Information System (SIS)

This system, which will allow alerts to be issued to participating European countries, is still under development and it is anticipated that it will be ready in 2011. Guidance on SIS and its use in relation to missing persons will be published in due course

6.16 NPIA Missing Persons Bureau

The Bureau works with the police and related organisations to improve services to missing person investigations, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the police response.

It serves all UK police forces as well as international and overseas police agencies, and is a part of a wider network of partners including other government departments, NGOs and stakeholders.

The Bureau holds the policy lead for the area of missing people on behalf of the government.

For more information see:

Website <http://www.npia.police.uk/mpb>

Telephone: 01256 602 979

Email: missingpersons bureau@npia.pnn.police.uk



6.17 NPIA Specialist Support

In addition to those already mentioned elsewhere in this guidance, there are a number of sources of specialist support available to assist in the investigation of missing persons. These are:

The NPIA Specialist Operations Centre

This is available twenty-four hours a day and has access to specialist support for investigations. It includes:

- Serious Crime Analysis Section (SCAS) – access to geographic profilers, comparative case analysis, database analysis, serial offending and a good practice knowledge database;
- National Injuries database;
- National Search Advisor;
- Specialist support, eg, forensics, equipment.

They can be contacted at: soc.npia.pnn.police.uk or by telephone: 0845 000 5463.

Key Issues

- Effective protocols and working arrangements with other agencies will improve the quality of investigations.
- Information sharing and multi-agency meetings will enable harm reduction strategies to be put in place and recognition of wider problems.
- Be aware of other agencies that are there to help, and use them where appropriate.





Appendix 1

Abbreviations and Acronyms



Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABE	Achieving Best Evidence
ACC	Assistant Chief Constable
ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
ACPOS	Association of Chief Police Officers Scotland
ARCC	Aeronautical Rescue Co-ordination Centre
AWOL	Absent without Leave
BCU	Basic Command Unit
BTP	British Transport Police
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CEOP	Child Exploitation Online Protection
CTAIL	Child Trafficking Advice and Information Line
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FLO	Family Liaison Officer
GMCN	Global Missing Children's Network
ICACU	International Child Abduction Advice and Contact Unit
IO	Investigating Officer
IPCC	Independent Police Complaints Commission
LSCB	Local Safeguarding Children Board
MARAC	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIM	National Intelligence Model
NI71	National Indicator 71
NPJA	National Policing Improvement Agency
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
PACT	Parents and Abducted Children Together
PIR	Placement Information Record
PNC	Police National Computer
POLKA	Police Online Knowledge Area
PolSA	Police Search Adviser
RLAA	Remanded to Local Authority Accommodation
RMFHC	Running away and Missing From Home Care protocol
SCAS	Serious Crime Analysis Section
SIO	Senior Investigating Officer
SIS	Schengen Information System
SOCA	Serious Organised Crime Agency
UKBA	United Kingdom Borders Agency
UKHTC	United Kingdom Human Trafficking Centre



Appendix 2

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