**Children Missing from Home and Care**

This guidance relates to children missing from their own home or those who are cared for by the Local Authority.

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There are no exact figures for the number of children who go missing or run away, but estimates suggest that the figure is in the region of 100,000 per year. Children may run away ***from***a problem, such as abuse or neglect at home, or ***to***somewhere they want to be, or a person they want to be with. They may have been coerced to run away by someone else.

Whatever the reason, it is thought that approximately 25 per cent of children and young people that go missing are at risk of serious harm. There are particular concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual exploitation. Missing children may also be vulnerable to other forms of exploitation, to violent crime, gang exploitation, or to drug and alcohol misuse.

Some Cared for children are unaccompanied asylum seeking children or migrant children. Some of this group may have been trafficked into the UK and may remain under the influence of their traffickers even while they are Cared For. Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing, with most going missing within one week of becoming Cared For and many within 48 hours. Unaccompanied migrant or asylum seeking children who go missing immediately after becoming Cared For should be treated as potential victims of trafficking.

**Children and Young People who run away or go missing from Home or Care: Pan Cheshire joint protocol:**

Cheshire East has been part of a pan-Cheshire group which have formulated a joint protocol; this protocol is to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear. It should be read as guidance only and cannot anticipate every situation. Anyone working with children in a professional capacity should use their judgment to take whatever action is deemed necessary to protect and safeguard the child, based on an assessment of risk for each individual. [pan-cheshire-missing-from-home-protocol-2016](http://www.cheshireeastlscb.org.uk/pdf/pan-cheshire-missing-from-home-protocol-2016.pdf)

**Possible antecedents**:

* Arguments and conflicts
* Conflict within a placement
* Poor family relationships
* Physical and emotional abuse
* Boundaries and control
* Step parent issues (*Source: Children’s Society)*

**Indicators a child may be at risk of running away:**

* Starting to push boundaries, staying out later, leaving home without informing parents / carers, staying away overnight.
* Associating with a new crowd or getting involved in a new relationship (Especially with an older partner)
* Signs of drug and alcohol use.
* Not wanting to leave school/ friends/ their youth/sports club.
* Leaving home or attending school with a large bag of clothing.
* Self harm, suicidal thoughts or depression.
* Being found with unaccounted for ‘gifts’ or money.
* Becoming secretive, including private phone calls, and online activity.
* Changes in behaviour, becoming more aggressive or withdrawn.
* Telling lies

**What can schools do to support young people?**

* Encourage them to talk about their problems. If they don’t feel like they can talk to you or another trusted adult they can contact ChildLine on 0800 1111.
* Teach them to spot the signs of sexual exploitation. The “Thinkuknow” website has information and advice for young people about this and what to do if they need help.
* Teach them about personal safety when going out e.g. fully charge mobile phones, tell parents / carers where you are going and let them know when you arrive at your destination and when you are due to return.
* Discuss the dangers and risks of going missing from home to raise their awareness
* Help them to understand that running away is never the answer to any problems they face. Let them know that they have a choice; this can be an important step in preventing them from going missing.
* Where students are identified as missing lessons or parts of the day; where they, go missing from the school site or have unexplained absences carry out supportive discussions with them to ascertain the reasons and any worries the student may have, which may lead to support being put into place to divert them from going missing and potentially going missing.
* Be alert to ‘soft intelligence’ around particular pupils. Respond to this in a proactive manner to support the student.
* Have a clear procedure in place for when any member of staff becomes aware that a child/ young person is missing
* Ensure that missing incidents which take place during the school day are fully recorded and reported
* Procedures should include the need for the school to make the parent/carer aware of any missing incidents in a timely manner and for them to make the parent aware that they should report any missing episodes to the Police.
* The school needs to advise the parent that, as a professional, they have a duty to ensure that the matter is reported to the Police and if necessary will follow this up by contacting the Police to verify that the child has been reported missing by the parent/carer.

**Cheshire East’s Missing and Child Sexual Exploitation Service:**

Cheshire East has commissioned a service which aims to reduce the numbers of young people going missing and the number of missing incidents. They raise awareness amongst young people and provide training for professionals, parents and carers.

In addition they aim to complete return home interviews with each young person who has returned, following a missing incident. They help to identify the push/pull factors and support the young person in order to reduce these. [Pan Cheshire Missing and Child Sexual Exploitation Service - Catch22](https://www.catch-22.org.uk/services/cheshire-missing-home-child-sexual-exploitation/)

The service runs a dedicated helpline **0808 168 9698** and provides support to young people who have run away or need advice as well as family and friends who are concerned about runaways.

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**Children Missing from Education:**

All staff should be aware of the need to identify children missing from education and how to notify the Local Authority where they know or suspect that a child is missing from education.

Contact information, leaflets and notification forms for Children Missing from Education can be found by following this link [Children Missing Education](http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/schools/parents/education_welfare_service/children_missing_education.aspx).

**Sources of support and Information:**

* **Government’s Statutory guidance for local authorities** September 2016[Children Missing Education Statutory Guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/550416/Children_Missing_Education_-_statutory_guidance.pdf)
* **Parentline**:Providesa confidential advice and listening service for parents that provides help and support in all aspects of family life. **Telephone:** **0808 800 2222**, [email](http://familylives.org.uk/how-we-can-help/email-support), or have a [live online chat](http://familylives.org.uk/chat.html) with a trained support worker.
* [**NSPCC**](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/help-and-advice/for-parents-and-carers/for-parents-and-carers_wdh72917.html): Provides a helpline for adults who are concerned about the safety or welfare of a child. **Telephone:** **0808 800 5000**.
* **Missing Kids UK** is a website run by the Missing Children Team, part of CEOP Command within the [National Crime Agency](http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/). <http://missingkids.co.uk>
* Some useful tips on speaking to children about running away can be found online: [Advice for adults | Railway Children](http://www.railwaychildren.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work-in-the-uk/advice-for-adults/)
* [https://www.**thinkuknow**.co.uk/](https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/)

**Resources:**

A film about a Child Missing from Home which could be used with staff or young people: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z293D3_OPbs&feature=youtu.be>

**If you have concerns that a child is at risk you should contact Cheshire East Consultation Service (ChECS) and/or Cheshire East Police without delay:**

**ChECS: 0300 123 5012**

**Cheshire East Police: 101** **or in** **urgent cases dial** **999**