



Policy for Missing Child / Young Person

DATE CREATED	January 2023	DATE OF NEXT REVIEW	January 2024
POLICY OWNER(S)	Director of Education and Head of Residential Childcare		
DESIGNATION	School and Children's Home		

Purpose of policy	Policy to provide details on what to do for a missing child / young person
Intended audience	All school and children's home staff
Links to other policies	Whoever is reading this policy, do they need to be aware of other relating policies? If so, list here

Definitions:

Missing Child: A child is missing when no staff member is aware of their whereabouts and the child or young person is known or thought to be unsupervised by a staff member.

Unauthorised Absence: Where a child's or young person's whereabouts is known or thought to be unconfirmed, they are not missing and may be considered as absent without authorisation from their placement. (Protocol for Children Missing from Care or Home: Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board). **Due to the vulnerable nature of the children and young people at St Elizabeth's, it is unlikely that any incident of a missing child or young person will be treated as 'Unauthorised Absence'. The only exception to this rule is when a risk assessment and written agreement exists between the school, young person, family and responsible authority.

Underpinning Ethos and practice

- Safety and welfare of children and young people is paramount and everything reasonably possible must be done to deter children and young people from going missing.
- Key work sessions and House Meetings should be undertaken to help children and young people gain awareness of the risks and dangers of going missing.
- Staff meetings should be used to discuss any concerns about any children and young people going missing.
- In some instances, running away can be prevented by staff adopting a positive approach. Staff should be acutely aware of individual triggers and group dynamics and recognise the benefits of using activities to positively engage children and young people.
- The policy is written in line with The Hertfordshire Protocol for Children Missing from Care or Home.
- This policy is shared with Herts Police.

Overview:

Due to the vulnerability and complexity of needs of the children and young people placed at St Elizabeth's an immediate search will commence when any child or young person becomes missing.

This policy applies to all children and young people at St Elizabeth's School and Children's Home including those that are aged over 18.

This policy directs staff to the agreed protocols to use during incidents of missing children and young people and preventative measures. It provides a framework to work within. Every child or young person is different so individual plans must be followed.

Each child or young person has an individual agreed protocol (see Student Information / Missing Child Protocol) based around their needs with time frames which are for guidance and the Person in Charge may decide to request external support from the police at an earlier stage. Decisions to lengthen the time frames must be justifiable and may be based around knowledge at the time of the event.

Aims:

- All staff are aware of the correct individual protocol to follow when a child or young person goes missing.
- Keep individual records of all incidents of missing children from the home / school.
- The school and children's home will report all incidents of missing children or young people to the family and responsible authority.
- Following any incidents of missing children, the care plan and individual protocol in place for the child or young person will be reviewed and necessary adjustments made.

Guidance:

CARE PLANS

Staff supervision is high at St Elizabeth's School and Children's Home. Many of the children and young people require this due to the complex nature of their learning, health or social needs.

Where children and young people have agreed higher levels of independence, staff should be aware of their whereabouts and return times.

Individual care plans will indicate the amount of support each child or young person requires. Some children and young people are likely to 'wander', others may walk/run off when they are distressed, confused or angry. This must all be well documented in the individual care plan.

Staff will document the supervision requirements for every child and young person within their Placement Plan and Risk Assessments. These detailed documents include the following information:

- The level of supervision / support required by the child and young person (if this changes in relation to specific times of day, activities, places – this will be documented).
- The likelihood of the child or young person going missing and/or absconding from the staff / site.
- The level of risk and vulnerability presented if the child or young person goes missing.
- The child's or young person's view (if appropriate). Staff will discuss the agreed protocol with children and young people for whom that would be useful so that they understand the actions of staff members.
- Strategies to prevent reoccurrence.

All children and young people will have an individual protocol for when they leave with purpose from staff / the site. These should be included in the Placement Plan folder, mentioned under supervision requirements and kept immediately accessible for use during incidents.

STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET / MISSING CHILD PROTOCOL

Every child and young person has a Student Information / Missing Child Protocol Sheet. Every residential house keeps a file of these on the house.

The Student Information / Missing Child sheet provides details that include:

Name, Preferred name, Photo, Communication needs, Behaviour Presentations, Health Needs, Supervision requirements, Self care skills, Dietary information, Allergies. Height, Weight and the protocol (including time frames) for actions to be taken when missing.

There is an empty box ready to be filled in if the child goes missing that covers Description, Clothing, Time and Location last seen.

The Student Information sheet / Missing Child Protocol will be passed to any additional staff that assist in a search and external agencies involved in a search e.g. police.

EQUIPMENT

Torches to use during searches are available in each Individual House. During the night, torches are also available in the night room.

High Visibility Jackets are available in the houses.

Emergency Vehicle there is a vehicle kept on-site at all times both to support and incident a missing child or young person or other emergency medical purposes.

1. CHILD or YOUNG PERSON MISSING - On Site

As soon as staff realise that a child or young person is missing, they will alert senior staff and response staff by using the Emergency Bleep facility. Staff should be clear when they make the call in regards to the last sighting, frame of mind of child or young person, clothing if known and whether they have the use of a bike. If the staff member suspects that the missing child or young person is intending to leave the site, they must make this clear in their original message.

When staff are unsure if a child or young person is missing or is with another member of staff, the bleep system should be used to check the location of the child or young person with other staff. If in any doubt, staff should treat the situation as a missing person.

The individual Missing Child protocol for that Child or Young person must then be followed with regards to time frames used before external support is required e.g. Police.

Once the child or young person has been returned to the home / school or is found:

- Re-contact the police if they had been contacted and have not arrived

- Alert the police search party if already present

- Make sure that all is well with the child or young person

- Ask the nurse on duty to check the child or young person

- Write up a report of the incident (see Recording)

- Organise informing parents* and local authority.

Notify OSFTED through the usual Notification procedure if the missing incident meets the Regulation 44 reporting threshold as outlined within the “*Guidance: What Ofsted means by a serious incident (2021)*” and “*St Elizabeth’s Children’s Service Guide to: Notifying Ofsted of a Serious Event*” guidance documents.

*Parents will be notified as soon as reasonably practical. This would usually be once the child is found and safe. However, if the child or young person is missing for more than thirty minutes (the police and staff are unable to find the child after a thorough search), senior staff will notify parents.

2. Child or young person missing during an off Site Activity

All staff should be aware of the children and young people they are responsible for during off site activities. There must be a risk assessment in place for every off site activity. Communication between staff is key, especially when the group is being split. Mobile phones can also be used for communication between staff if groups are split,

As soon as staff realise a child or young person is missing, they must inform other staff members on the offsite activity immediately.

The individual child or young person's individual Missing Child Protocol must be followed.

A member of staff must remain in the location where the child or young person was last seen.

The safety of the rest of the group must be considered during all actions. If at all possible, the rest of the group should return to the vehicle with a staff member.

If the group is visiting a venue who have their own staff (theme park, zoo, etc) they should be alerted and requested help.

As soon as reasonably practical, a staff member should contact the senior staff on site to inform them of the situation, and assistance needed (if possible). It may be possible to collect the other children and escort them back to the site.

The off site trip (location, group, staff ratio, vehicles) should be re-evaluated and re-risk assessed to avoid future incidents and / or reconsider the suitability of the outing.

3. Child Missing During the Night (9:45pm – 7am).

The building is secure at night. The waking night staff do a locking up check at the 10pm round. Any concerns will be reported to the Centre's Night Manager or those acting in their place.

Most children and young people are monitored by an audio system and have door contacts on their bedroom doors (unless there is a risk assessment to say that this should not be in place).

Night staff do an hourly round to check the majority of children and young people. Some have less frequent checks.

Children and young people with an increased risk of missing during the night will likely be allocated a 1:1 carer within their home overnight.

If a child or young person is missing during the night their individual Missing Child Protocol must be followed.

CALLING THE POLICE

The police will request the following information when a report of a missing child or young person is initially made to them:

- Name
- Age

- Description of the child or young person and the clothing they were last known to be wearing
- Address (may request school address and family address),
- Last known location missing from
- Circumstances under which the child or young person is missing
- Is the behaviour out of character?
- Name, address and telephone number of person reporting
- Enquiries and searches that have taken place to establish the whereabouts of the child or young person

The staff member calling the police must ensure that they explain the child's or young person's additional needs and vulnerability clearly and early on in the call e.g. level of understanding, epilepsy, attraction to or lack of awareness of danger etc. Local police have information on those who have been known to abscond regularly.

RETURNING TO SCHOOL OR CHILDREN'S HOME / MOVING FORWARD

If a child or young person has left the site and has been located by the police or a member of the public, 2 staff (one being a senior member of staff) will immediately go to collect the child and bring them back to the home / school.

The child or young person will need to be de-briefed at a time and a level that is appropriate to their level of need and understanding. It may be useful to ask the Speech and Language therapist to help. Remember – the time frame for this depends on the emotional state and the ability of the child or young person. This work may be immediate and/or long term.

If a child or young person has been missing and has left the site, their individual missing protocol needs to be reviewed by the multi-disciplinary team in order to prevent a similar occurrence. Parents and Placing authorities need to be consulted and in agreement with this protocol. It may be necessary to discuss future plans with the local police so that everyone is working towards the same protocol and they are aware of a known risk.

INDEPENDENT RETURN INTERVIEW

Children and young people must feel welcomed back into the home / school following a period of being missing. They must see that staff are relieved they are back and keen to ensure they are safe and well, and that they react swiftly to any medical attention.

When a child or young person returns, they must be offered an independent return interview. These provide an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children and young people from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing and from risk factors in the home. (Please refer to Individual Missing from Home form).

The interview should be carried out within 72 hours of returning home. Children and young people must have the opportunity to speak to someone independent of their care, to ensure they are safe and well and procedures have been followed.

The statutory guidance on children who runaway or go missing from home or care issued by the DFE in January 2014 states that the person conducting the interview should usually be independent of the child's placement and of the responsible local authority.; an exception maybe where a child has a strong relationship with a carer or social worker.

It is recognised that the children and young people living at St. Elizabeth's may need support with these meetings, or feel unsure/ unsafe with an unknown face. In this case, staff should consider the keyworker or a familiar staff member to accompany.

If the child refuses, then this MUST be recorded and a key work session / meaningful conversation completed, covering-

- Understand and try to address the reasons why the child or young person ran away
- Help the child or young person feel safe and understand that they have options to prevent repeat instances of then running away

RECORDING

Within the Children's Home - In all cases of a missing child or young person, an incident report record (DATIX) will be completed. These will be completed in all cases – even if the child or young person was only missing for a short while. Details will include a log of when bleeps calls were made, staff were allocated to search and calls to external agencies were made (both to request assistance and to report events). This report will be completed by the member of staff present during the incident and will be signed off by the manager of the respective home and / or a designated safeguarding lead. This allows for the incident to be properly reviewed, required changes to practice and changes to individual protocols highlighted and reflective learning to take place.

MONITORING/REVIEW OF ALL CHILDREN or YOUNG PEOPLE WHO RUN AWAY/GO MISSING

- Within the Children's Home staff ensure the incident report (DATIX) is completed and missing person's protocol and individual risk assessment are reviewed, updated and held on the children's file
- Debriefs will be recorded.
- Monthly and quarterly monitoring of individual children will be assessed and risks / protocols reviewed.

NOTIFICATION / REPORTING

When a child or young person has been missing from School and the police have been called to assist the school, the following agencies should be notified:

- Placing Authority
- OFSTED
- Chair of Governors

When a child or young person has been missing from the Children's Home and the police have been called to assist, the following agencies should always be notified:

- Placing Authority

OFSTED should only be notified if:

1. The child/ young person has been missing for more than 30 minutes
2. The child/ young person was found/ returned at significant risk of harm
3. The Designated Safeguarding officer assesses the incident as meeting the Regulation 44 reporting threshold as outlined within the "*Guidance: What Ofsted means by a serious incident (2021)*". (Refer to "*St Elizabeth's Children's Service Guide to: Notifying Ofsted of a Serious Event*" guidance document).

This is the responsibility of the school leadership team, residential management team, duty manager or the Person in Charge. This task can be delegated to senior residential team, senior residential staff, and senior academic staff.

Parents will be notified as soon as practically possible and preferably once the child has been located and confirmed as safe. If it becomes necessary to report a missing child to a parents whilst the child remains missing, this will be the responsibility of the most senior member of staff on site to make the call or delegate to the most appropriate person.

STUDENTS WITH GREATER INDEPENDENCE

Occasionally, older young people at St Elizabeth's are judged as being able to have lower staff supervision than is usual, or may be able to leave the Centre unsupervised. Any such circumstances will be agreed with the young person, family and local authority after a clear risk assessing process. Mobile phones and / or walkie talkies have been useful tools to support this in the past.

HERTFORDSHIRE POLICY

A copy of the **Hertfordshire Protocol for Children Missing from Care or Home** is kept in the Person in Charge File. St Elizabeth's School and Children's Home works with many different local authorities. The school and Children's Home will liaise with Hertfordshire CSF, Hertfordshire police, the referring authority and family where there is a pattern of a child or young person absconding or missing from home / school.

- This policy will be shared with all parents / families / carers on admission.
- The policy will be sent to all referring local authorities for their agreement.
- The policy will be ratified by Hertfordshire Police

Information required in the event that a child or young person is missing from home:

1. Missing Child / Young Person Individual Protocol
2. Individual Missing from Home Record