

Redbridge Local Safeguarding Children  
Board (LSCB)

# **Missing from Care or Home Policy**

2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

July 2017

## **FOREWORD**

Partners within the Redbridge Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the children and young people who live and access services in the Borough.

Children and young people who go missing from home or care represent a safeguarding issue. Although we know that many of these children stay with friends or family members there are some who do not have access to any support system, or who are forced to stay in environments that are harmful to their safety and well-being and are therefore more likely to engage in activities that may put them at risk. Children who run away are at a heightened risk of becoming a victim of crime, being sexually exploited, and involved in substance misuse or becoming involved in crime and disorder. Additionally research shows that the level of risk to the individual child escalates with each episode they go missing and repeat episodes have been identified as a significant indicator of high risk to the child or young person.

The reasons for their absences may be varied and complex. Every missing episode should attract attention from professionals to assess the risk and respond appropriately and proportionately. When a child goes missing, the priority must be to return them as quickly and safely as possible to their home or placement or an alternative place of safety as appropriate.

This Policy was originally developed by the London Borough of Redbridge Children's Services, and the Metropolitan Police, on behalf of the LSCB, in accordance with national guidance and its purpose is to put in place clear guidelines, including responsibilities of each agency, to ensure that practitioners work together to prevent children and young people going missing, support their safe return and put in place processes to manage risk.

The LSCB encourages all partners to disseminate this 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition across their agencies and ensure that the contents are familiar to all, so we can effectively work together to safeguard our children and young people.

**Redbridge LSCB**

**July 2017**

## CONTENTS

Section	Title	Page No.
1	Introduction	4
2	Background	4
3	Purpose and Scope	4
4	Multi-Agency Working	5
5	Definitions	5
6	Responding to Missing Children – Roles and Responsibilities	6
7	Additional arrangements relating to Looked after Children (LAC)	8
8	The Return of Children and Young People Missing from Home or Care	11
9	Planning and Prevention	11
10	Additional guidance and associated policies	11
11	Review	12
Appendix 1	Met Police Missing Child Risk Assessment Record	12
Appendix 2	LBR Children's Services Missing Child Risk Assessment Record	12
Appendix 2	Children Missing from Care and Home Return Questionnaire	12
Appendix 3	Referral Process for Return Interviews	12
Appendix 4	Referral Form for Return Interviews	12

## **1.0 Introduction**

This document sets out the agreed policy and protocol across partnerships in the London Borough of Redbridge Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LSCB), in relation to our response to children and young people going missing from care or home.

This has been developed in conjunction with the Department for Education (DfE) [Statutory Guidance on children who runaway or go missing from home or care](#), published in January 2014, which states *"Local authorities should agree with local police and other partners a protocol for dealing with children who run away or go missing in their area. Where appropriate they should also have agreed protocols with neighbouring authorities and administrations."*

This Policy should be read as guidance, which cannot anticipate every situation. All agencies and carers should use their professional judgement, whilst following the protocol, to take any action that is deemed necessary to safeguard the child/young person based on an assessment of risk for each individual child/young person.

## **2.0 Background**

Children and young people who go missing from care or home may place themselves and others at risk of serious harm including sexual exploitation, violent crime, alcohol or drug misuse or exploitation by gangs. Reasons for absence are often varied and complex and cannot be viewed in isolation from their home circumstances or their experiences of care. Every missing episode should attract proper attention from the professionals involved with the missing child or young person and they must collaborate to ensure a consistent and coherent response is given to the missing child/young person on their return.

When children go missing from care or home, this is a clear signal that something is wrong in their lives. Running away has serious implications for a child's welfare as it puts them at risk of harm in the short term and may affect longer term outcomes. Research also indicates that children who go missing are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, substance misuse and involvement in crime.

## **3.0 Purpose and Scope**

The Redbridge LSCB has produced this policy to ensure that all agencies in Redbridge work together to:

- Prevent children going missing wherever possible;
- Take action to safeguard the welfare of children who go missing; and
- Monitor patterns of missing or absent episodes
- Understand why children/young people go missing

This policy covers all children who are missing from care or home, including children who are forced out of the family home.

## **4.0 Multi-agency working**

As documented in the [Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care \(DfE, 2014\)](#), and to ensure a high quality of integrated working and joint responses when children go missing, all agencies will:

- Share information in a timely manner and in accordance with legislation.
- Base decisions and actions on missing children risk assessments.
- Make appropriate referrals to agencies for services for children, including child protection referrals where the child is at risk of significant harm.
- Work jointly to share information and intelligence that enables the development of services for missing children in Redbridge.
- Appoint a designated officer with lead responsibility for missing children and for the implementation of this Policy.
- Ensure staff have the appropriate training and support to carry out their role under this Policy.

## **5.0 Definitions & actions to be taken**

In line with the [Statutory Guidance](#) and local agreement across partners, Redbridge will adopt the following definitions in order to allow all professionals and carers to clarify whether a child is missing or absent.

### **5.1 Definition of Missing**

The term 'missing' refers to a child or young person (up to the age of 18) whose whereabouts are not known. Incidences of missing should always be reported to the police.

Children whose whereabouts are known and are considered to be at risk should also be reported as missing to the police.

If the missing child/young person is a Looked After Child, then the incident should also be reported to the allocated Social Worker or, if out of hours, the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) within the borough that has placed the child.

### **5.2 Definition of Absent**

The term 'absent' refers to a child or young person (up to the age of 18) who is not at a place where they are expected or required to be but it *is* known where they are.

Where the absence relates to a Looked After Child, this should be reported in the first instance to the allocated Social Worker for the child/young person concerned, or if the absence occurs out of hours, it should be reported to the EDT. The absence should be risk assessed by the allocated Social Worker or EDT and if at any point there are concerns for the safeguarding of the child/young person, the risk should be escalated to the police.

Examples of absence include children/young people who do not come home when expected but their whereabouts are known or are quickly established through contact with family or friends. Unless there are concerns about the place where the child is, these children and young people would not normally fall within the definition of missing since if a child/young person's whereabouts are known then they cannot be missing. Sometimes children and young people stay out longer than agreed as a boundary testing activity, but come home shortly after their curfew. This is within the range of normal teenage behaviour and would not normally come within the definition of missing. Absences must be carefully monitored as the child/young person may still be putting themselves at risk.

## **6.0 Responding to Missing Children – roles and responsibilities**

### **6.1 Reporting missing children: responsibilities of care homes, semi-independent units, parents and carers**

Incidents of Missing children/young people must always be reported to the police, Before contacting the police, parents and carers are expected to undertake the following basic measures to try and locate their child/young person if considered safe to do so:

- Search bedroom / house / outbuildings / vehicles;
- Contact known friends and relatives where the child or young person might be;
- Visit locations that the child or young person is known to frequent.

Once it has been established that a child is missing, the police should be contacted. When contacting the police to report a child missing, Redbridge care homes and semi-independent providers should also email a copy of the Police Risk Assessment Record Form (**Appendix 1**). This has been circulated to all care homes and semi-independent providers within Redbridge and is widely used.

Furthermore, parents/carers not using the Police Risk Assessment Record Form should provide the following as a minimum when contacting the police to report a child missing

- Child/young person's name and date of birth.
- Where, when and who they went missing with, if known.
- Description of child/young person and clothing.
- Recent photograph.
- Medical history.
- Time and location last seen.
- Any previously identified risks or additional vulnerabilities.

- Details of efforts to locate the child/young person.

## **6.2 Role and responsibilities of the Local Authority when a child/young person goes missing**

When a child / young person is missing from care or home in Redbridge, a notification is sent by the police to Children's Social Care, via the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Team.

Where it is a Redbridge Looked After Child, the allocated Social Worker, Team Manager (LAC), Service Manager (LAC), Lead for Missing Children (EIFSS) and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) are all informed by the MASH Team or EDT, following notification from the police. Additionally, alerts will be placed on the Integrated Children's System (ICS) Protocol.

Where the child is a Looked After Child placed in Redbridge by another local authority, the Screening Officer in the MASH contacts the allocated Social Worker in the placing authority. The allocated Social Worker in the placing authority is required to review the case and request an independent return interview.

If a Redbridge child is missing from home, the MASH will establish whether the child is already known to the local authority and review the child's case history, if known, to establish what safeguarding concerns have previously been raised.

Details of all Redbridge children missing from home are sent via Protocol to the Missing Children's Team inbox to be allocated by the Practice lead for Missing, then allocated to a worker to arrange an independent interview.

On the day the notification a MERLIN is received, the screening social worker will contact the Police Missing Unit to ascertain if the child has returned. If not returned, the screening social worker informs the Screening Manager and reviews whether a strategy discussion is required based on the child's vulnerability, and circumstances. If the child has returned the screening social worker will check if the police have conducted the debriefing and if any safeguarding issues were identified by the police.

A MASH record is completed on all repeat missing children.

- If an assessment is required, the contact will progress to a referral and be passed to the duty social work team, who will locate the social worker who then refers to the Missing Team. If no safeguarding issues are identified, the case will be passed directly to the Missing Children team. In all cases, if a child or young person goes missing from home and it is considered that they are at risk of significant harm, are subject to a Child Protection Plan or Section 47 Enquiry then the [London Child Protection Procedures](#) (Sections 5 – 8) will be followed and the [Supplementary Procedures for safeguarding children missing from care and home](#) and [ACPO, Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons, 2013](#) should be followed. These issues will be considered when notification is made to the MASH.

Additional actions also required include:

The MASH Team (or EDT if out of hours) will create the contact and missing children episode and this will be assessed by a Team Manager. The Team Manager will decide if the episode is either an absence or missing and will direct which "Missing Child Record" should be completed. The decision making throughout will be informed by the definitions outlined above.

A risk assessment should be conducted whether by the allocated social worker, regardless of whether the case is 'missing' or 'absent'.

Risk indicators include:

- The age of the young person.
- A previous history of child protection concerns.
- Repeat pattern of running away over a short period of time.
- It has been identified that a young person has been harmed or been involved in significant risk taking behaviour (including sexual exploitation)
- Alcohol or substance misuse.
- Young person has a disability or learning disability.
- History of mental health issues involving CAMHs.
- Significant parental vulnerability such as mental illness, learning disability, alcohol or substance misuse or domestic abuse.

Children and young people living at home who go missing are often known to services. There is an expectation that parents/carers will report the child/young person missing to Police; failure to do so may prompt further enquiries under Child Protection procedures.

## 6.3

The Missing Children Panel:

3.1 The Missing Children Panel is a multi-agency forum comprising an invited group of professionals from specialist areas, who encounter or work with young people who are missing from home. The primary aim of the Missing Children Panel (MCP) is to plan strategic actions to minimise and resolve the incidences of young people going missing from home and care. This is achieved through sharing and collating information between those agencies, and providing a clear and joined-up plan for preventing or deterring further missing episodes. The panel is currently chaired by the Service Manager for the Early Intervention and Family Support Service, and has management representatives from the Police, Child Protection, Looked After Children, Community Social Work, Youth Offending, Schools and Health Services. There is also a Social Worker attached to the panel who is able to take forward actions from the meeting.



3.2 The panel reviews cases of concern that have been assessed at medium or high risk in line with the 'LSCB Thresholds for Referral June 2016' document. This includes Redbridge 'Looked After' young people who are placed outside of the borough. The Panel will share information in order to inform action planning to safeguard the young person and to prevent further missing episodes.

3.3 Where other authorities have placed looked after children within Redbridge, the Panel asks that the placing authority attends to feed-back at the next panel regarding their risk management plan.

3.4 The panel does not address risks relating to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) which are considered by the Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation Panel (MASE). Where there are concerns about both CSE and missing, referrals are made to the MASE and dealt with at this forum.

3.5 The aims of the panel are to share intelligence and information about young people at risk when missing. Attendees provide suggestions for interventions that reduce the risk to children and young people who are considered at risk when missing. The panel also tracks and monitors missing young people most at risk of harm. The primary goal is safeguarding children and reducing the number of young people who go missing.

### **Additional Actions by the Police**

It is the responsibility of the police to investigate allegations of crime and within Redbridge the police have lead responsibility for children or young people who go missing from other local authorities. The police will act on missing person's reports in line with police procedures. The police officer undertaking the investigation must complete a form P78 for missing children and young people who are reported to them. On the child or young person's return, the police should conduct a "safe and well" interview in order to establish if any crimes have taken place. When the child or young person returns home the police will notify the designated agency for return interviews, the Education Welfare Service (EWS) and Children's Social Care.

### **Safe and Well Interview**

Where possible, a missing child or young person who has been located must be physically seen by police. This will be carried out by a police officer or member of police staff. The objective of the de-brief with the subject is twofold, to ascertain why the subject went missing and to ascertain where they were when missing and whether they came to any harm.

The following information should be ascertained:

- The person being spoken to is in fact the person reported missing?
- Why did the person go missing?
- Is there any assistance we can give to prevent the person going missing again?
- Where did the person go?

- What did they do whilst missing?
- Who did they go missing with (if applicable)?
- Is there anything else the person would like to discuss with police or partner agencies?

This is not an exhaustive list.

The purpose of these questions is to:

- Ensure that the subject was missing of their own accord and not by kidnap or abduction.
- Ascertain whether there was any trigger event that precipitated the missing episode and which requires recording and investigation.
- Gather intelligence to assist enquiries should there be a repeat missing episode.
- Establish whether they were the victim of any crime whilst they were missing.

A missing child or young person is under no obligation to answer these questions and under human rights legislation their privacy is protected. The purpose of these enquiries is to ensure their wellbeing.

Officers must record the details of the above conversation on the debrief screen of the Merlin and bring the entry to the attention of a supervisor. If the interview is carried out by another professional they should be given guidance regarding the benefit of making a written record of what was said during the interview.

## **7.0 Additional responsibilities for residential care homes/semi-independent units when a child / young person goes missing**

Care homes in Redbridge are required, as a condition of their registration, to have a procedure agreed with the local police for the management of missing incidents. In addition, Redbridge police have briefed and distributed to all care homes and semi-independent units in Redbridge, a Police Risk Assessment which they ask all homes/semi-independent units to complete when they are reporting a child/young person missing. Care homes and semi-independent units are also expected to contribute to any care plans designed to reduce the risk of the child/young person going missing and to carry out joint risk assessments with social workers of children missing from placement.

## **7.1 Additional responsibilities for children's services when a child/young person goes Missing from care**

Children's social care (the allocated Social Worker) will:

- Carry out an assessment of the child's needs when there has been a

- missing incident;
- Update the child's assessment, inform the independent reviewing officer (IRO) and hold an earlier review for a Looked After Child;
- Ensure preventative planning and appropriate responses to missing incidents are included in the child's plan; and
- Arrange an independent return interview.

## **7.2 Missing children / young people who are placed in other boroughs by Redbridge**

Children who are placed at a distance from their home borough are more likely to be vulnerable to going missing and at increased risk of sexual exploitation, substance misuse and involvement in criminal activity than looked after children who are placed closer to home. It is important that their vulnerability is recognised when planning for placements and that social workers remain vigilant to the increased risks during placement, which should be analysed as part of the risk assessment and the information shared with the carer.

The Redbridge Placements Team who are responsible for commissioning and working with social workers to choose placements for looked after children who are being placed out of the borough, should contact the receiving local authorities to get information about the local area and whether there will be any increased risks to the child, especially where the child has a history of missing/absence

Although carers and workers in the host authority will follow their own local procedures, this policy applies to all children who are looked after by Redbridge regardless of where they are placed. A copy of the policy must be provided to all out of borough placement providers and social workers should stress the importance of foster carers and providers notifying social workers of all absences and missing episodes.

## **7.3 Missing Children and Young People Placed in Redbridge by Other Local Authorities**

All local authorities placing a child/young person in Redbridge will be advised that they are expected to adopt the Redbridge Missing Children protocol for any child/young person placed in this Borough. A letter has been sent from the Director of Children's Services to her counterpart in all London boroughs advising them of this requirement. This clearly outlines who has the lead for communicating with the placing authority and who to contact if there are child protection issues in Redbridge and information on local services and support. Redbridge is clear that we will investigate an immediate child protection concern until there is a clear transfer of responsibility.

It is important that information and intelligence is shared across the LSCB partnership to improve the protection of children in Redbridge and to increase the rate of prosecutions.

## **8.0 The return of Children and Young People Missing from Home or Care**

Children's social care, the police and other agencies work in partnership to locate children and young people and ensure their safe return. When a child or young person is found, whether by family, foster carers, residential care homes, semi – independent providers, the police, social workers, or when a child or young person returns of their own accord, the process of assessing their wellbeing and gathering information about their disappearance is conducted.

### **8.1 The return of a child/ young person missing from care or home in Redbridge**

Following a missing child's return, the police will undertake a 'safe and well' interview.

An independent return interview will be offered to the child/young person missing from home or care. The views of the carers will also be sought and included in the return Interview.

The Early Intervention and Family Support Service will carry out return interviews with Redbridge children both residing in the borough and placed outside who have gone missing from home and care. Other local authorities who place children in Redbridge are responsible for arranging return interviews for those children.

The person carrying out the interview will follow up on any issues or risks that emerge during the interview. This would include informing the allocated social worker, recommending referrals to the MISPER panel and also make direct referral to the Early Intervention Panel following consultation with the social worker if the case is open. The Early Intervention Panel (EIP) is a multi-agency panel that arranges suitable packages of support for young people and their families.

#### **What is a return interview?**

The purpose of the missing return interview is to determine the following:

- To listen to the voice of the child and understand why they went missing
- To identify any safeguarding issues for that child
- Where the child went to when missing
- Who the child was with when missing
- What they were doing during the time they were missing
- The risks to the child during the missing episode
- The push/pull factors that led to the missing episode

2. To offer support to the child to prevent missing episodes recurring by:
  - Referral to the Young Person's group
  - Referral to the Early intervention panel for a bespoke multi agency support package
3. To ensure that any concerns for the child's safety are addressed including:
  - Referral to Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
  - Contacting the Allocated Social Worker with any concerns that emerge during the interview

## **8.2 The return of Looked After Children**

Returned missing looked after children should receive a police 'safe and well' interview and be offered an independent return interview. The person carrying out the return interview should be independent of the child's placement. In Redbridge, the Missing Children's Team has been established to undertake all interviews of Redbridge children. The team comprises one part time senior social worker, two part time social workers and a full-time missing team worker. The team is overseen by the Practice Lead for Missing.

## **8.3 The return of Looked After Children placed in other boroughs by Redbridge**

Returned missing looked after children placed out of borough should also receive a police 'safe and well' interview and be offered an independent return interview from the Redbridge Missing team

## **8.4 The return of children/ young people placed in Redbridge by other local authorities**

Children/young people placed in Redbridge who go missing should receive a 'safe and well' police check on their return and an independent return interview should be arranged by their allocated Social Worker in the placing local authority. Their Social Worker should share any information which may have safeguarding implications for other children and young people in Redbridge.

## **9.0 Planning and Prevention**

All partners to this policy need to work together to identify vulnerable children and young people at risk of going missing as early as possible so that risk factors can be identified and addressed and any protective factors in the child/young person's life strengthened. Through early intervention, further and more serious negative outcomes for the child/young person may be prevented. Professionals should make themselves aware of the current body of knowledge about children who go missing. The DfE Statutory Guidance provides research information, case studies and practice information.

Intervention at an early stage when a child or young person goes missing is likely to be most effective as going missing can be associated with a gradual detachment from adult authority. Children and young people at risk of going missing are likely to become disengaged from agencies and may become hard to reach. Children and young people need to know about the dangers of running away and where they may get help if they are considering it. LACs should be supported and alerted to the risks by their social worker.

In Redbridge people who have completed return interviews after they have gone missing from home are invited to join a young people's group facilitated by the Early Intervention and Family Support Service (EIFSS), Fusion and the Youth Service, covering support around the risks of running away, staying safe and how to access support.

It is important that children who are thinking of running away are able to speak to someone about their situation e.g. teacher, youth worker, social worker, etc. and get support to help them deal with issues that may cause them to run away. These concerns may be addressed within the service that has identified the risk but it is likely that a multi-agency response may be required. With consent of the young person and their parents, in a case of a child or young person who is not in the care of the local authority, a Common Assessment Framework (CAF) should be considered and information shared with the Team Around the Child (TAC) to formulate a plan to address the significant factors identified.

Information is shared on a regular basis between police and children's social care within the MASH to enable detailed individual patterns and risks to be identified, to include: incidences of missing episodes, individuals who have been missing, particular care homes or semi-independent providers with a high incidence of missing episodes, incidents that have generated a Child Protection Conference or professionals meeting.

Information and intelligence is shared proactively with partners to improve the protection of children in Redbridge, as well as informing commissioners and decision makers on ensuring sufficient appropriate therapeutic support being available. Missing episodes will be collated and mapped and analysed and reported back to the LSCB. Additionally the LB Redbridge Director of Children's Services (DCS) gets a fortnightly report and breakdown of numbers of episodes of children reported missing (both missing children and missing looked after children). This continues to sharpen the focus and prioritisation in overseeing the numbers; frequency; risk assessments and reasons for children going missing in Redbridge. This will then inform a targeted preventative strategy to ensure the protection of children in Redbridge.

## **10.0 Additional Guidance and Associated Procedures**

This policy and protocol should be read in conjunction with the following:

- [London Child Protection Procedures](#)
- [Department for Education \(DfE\) Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care](#)

- [Department for Education \(DfE\) Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation: supplementary guidance](#)
- [London Safeguarding Children Board \(SCB\) Guidance on Child Trafficking](#)  
[London Safeguarding Children Board \(SCB\) CP Procedures, 10. Safeguarding Trafficked and Exploited Children](#)
- [LBR Children Missing Education \(CME\) Guidance](#)

## 11.0 Review

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition of the Policy was endorsed by the LSCB on 11 July 2017 and will be reviewed as required.

### Appendix 1 Met Police Missing Child Risk Assessment Record

Click [here](#) to access the Met Police Missing Child Risk Assessment Record from the Forms Library on TriX or request from [CPAT.Referrals@redbridge.gov.uk](mailto:CPAT.Referrals@redbridge.gov.uk)

### Appendix 2 LB Redbridge Children's Services Missing Child Risk Assessment Record

Click [here](#) to access the Missing Child Risk Assessment Record from the Forms Library on TriX or request from [CPAT.Referrals@redbridge.gov.uk](mailto:CPAT.Referrals@redbridge.gov.uk)

### Appendix 3 Children Missing from Care or Home Return Questionnaire

Click [here](#) to access the Children Missing from Care or Home Questionnaire from the Forms Library on TriX or request from [CPAT.Referrals@redbridge.gov.uk](mailto:CPAT.Referrals@redbridge.gov.uk)

### Appendix 4 Referral Process for Return Interviews

Contact or request from [CPAT.Referrals@redbridge.gov.uk](mailto:CPAT.Referrals@redbridge.gov.uk)

### Appendix 5 Referral for Return Interview

Click [here](#) to access the Referral Form for Return Interviews from the Forms Library on TriX or request from [CPAT.Referrals@redbridge.gov.uk](mailto:CPAT.Referrals@redbridge.gov.uk)

### Appendix 6 [Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons](#), Association of Chief Police Officers, 2013