

Redbridge Safeguarding Children Partnership (RSCP)

Children Missing from Home or Care Multi-Agency Policy, Protocol and Procedures

V3

September 2026

This protocol is a live operational document. It will be reviewed and updated to reflect changes in legislation, statutory guidance, local partnership arrangements, and operational systems, including case recording processes. Updates will also be informed by learning from audits, reviews, missing episodes, Return Home Interviews, and feedback from children, families and partner agencies, to ensure that practice remains current, effective and responsive to risk.

Date Updated	Review date	Reviewer
September 2026	April 2027	LBR Head of Service for Contextual Safeguarding

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1. Introduction

Redbridge's policy, protocol and procedures for safeguarding children missing from home and care set out a clear, multi-agency framework for preventing missing episodes, responding appropriately when a child goes missing, and reducing risk and harm.

The protocol explains the roles and responsibilities of agencies, carers and professionals, and describes the actions required to locate a child, support their safe return, and identify the underlying factors that may contribute to repeat missing episodes.

This Policy provides a local context to the London Child Protection Procedures (Part B3) for Children Missing from Care and Home and should be read in conjunction with these: [PG34. Children Missing from Care, Home and Education](#)

2. Principles

The following principles apply to all agencies responding to children who go missing:

- The safety and welfare of the child is paramount.
- Locating and returning the child to a safe environment is the primary objective.
- Child Protection Procedures must be initiated where there are concerns that a child may be at risk of significant harm.
- Police will respond to all missing notifications in line with the nationally agreed definition of 'missing'.
- The RSCP is committed to the Philomena Protocol
- A clear and proportionate risk assessment must inform information sharing and joint working with the police.
- All children who return following a missing episode must be offered an independent return interview.
- Where the child is known to Children's Social Care (CSC) or meets the criteria for referral, the local authority will ensure appropriate services are in place to respond to identified needs following the child's return.

3. Lead Persons Responsible

Strategic oversight of children missing from home or care sits within the Redbridge Safeguarding Children Partnership (RSCP) governance arrangements.

The Head of Service for Contextual Safeguarding is the Strategic Lead for Missing, with responsibility for partnership oversight, escalation, assurance and reporting into the MACE-Harm Outside the Home (HOTH) and Strategic MASCE.

Police responsibility for missing children is held by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), Local Missing Persons Hub. Health and Education contribute through agreed safeguarding escalation arrangements.

Role / Function	Name	Responsibility
Strategic Chair (MASCE)	Daniel Phelps Daniel.Phelps@redbridge.gov.uk	Provides strategic oversight of safeguarding arrangements for children missing from home and care through MASCE, ensuring partnership accountability and assurance.
Lead Member (LBR Children's Services)	Cllr Lloyd Duddridge Lloyd.Duddridge@redbridge.gov.uk	Provides political leadership and oversight for Children's Services, including scrutiny of safeguarding arrangements for children who go missing.
RSCP Independent Scrutineer	Eileen Mills Eileen.Mills@redbridge.gov.uk	Provides independent scrutiny and challenge of safeguarding practice and partnership effectiveness, including arrangements for children missing from home and care.
Head of Service – Family Help & Contextual Safeguarding, LBR	Sabina Samad Sabina.Samad@redbridge.gov.uk	Strategic Lead for Missing Children. Responsible for strategic oversight, escalation, partnership working, and assurance regarding children missing from home and care, including reporting to MACE, MASCE and senior leadership.
Police Lead – Local Missing Persons Hub, EA BCU MPS	Hannah Isaksson-Hurst hannah.isaksson-hurst@met.police.uk	Police operational lead for Local Missing Persons Hubs, responsible for policing response, investigation, and liaison with partner agencies in relation to missing children.

These roles ensure clear strategic and operational accountability for the prevention of missing episodes, effective responses when children go missing, and multi-agency oversight across Redbridge.

4. Missing Definitions

The Police definition of 'missing' is:

‘Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.’

In 2021 the MPS introduced the Philomena Protocol, Op Resolute, which adjusted the use of the term “absent” previously defined as ‘**A person is not at a place where they are expected or required to be**’, when referring to children in the care of the local authority, aged 13 to 17 and placed in Semi-Independent or Residential Accommodation within London.

The decision is now whether the child is either “**missing**” or “**away from placement without authorisation**”. If considered “**away from placement without authorisation**” the understanding is that Social Care rather than police will take the lead to locate the child and conduct appropriate risk assessments.

Children that are away from placement without authorisation for a short period and return, often with their whereabouts known or quickly established, and where there is no indication of significant risk will not automatically be considered missing virtue of not being where they are supposed to be. In addition to creating unnecessary demand, it can also be damaging to a child. For example, it could lead to an erosion of the trust in children’s homes and police, social stigma amongst peers, risk unnecessary criminalisation, or increase vulnerability to exploitation. Such behaviour maybe boundary-testing behaviour that falls within expected adolescent development.

Only if it is deemed to be proportionate to a child’s risk and vulnerability, and the circumstances of the incident, should a report be made to police. Where a child’s whereabouts is known but they are believed to be in a situation of danger and cannot be safely removed by those with parental responsibility, police and partner agencies may still need to be involved to safeguard the child.

The police classification of a person as ‘**missing**’ or ‘**away from placement without authorisation**’ will be based on going risk assessment.

The police will prioritise all incidents of children categorised as ‘**missing**’ from home or care as medium or high risk. Where a child is categorised as ‘**away from placement without authorisation**’, the details will be recorded by the police and will subject to a review with child’s family, carer or responsible local authority.

- **Unauthorised Absence / Away from placement without authorisation**

Where a child has breached a home curfew and is not believed to be at risk, the home or foster carer should consider whether the allocated social worker or Emergency Duty Team (EDT) should be informed if this takes place out of hours. Breaking an agreed curfew is not, in itself, a reason to report the child to the police or EDT.

A missing child incident would be prioritised as ‘high risk’ where:

- the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child is in danger through their own vulnerability; or
- the child 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.

A child (under the age of 18 years) that police have classified as missing will be considered missing until they are located and their well-being or otherwise is established. Missing episodes that cause concern are those where:

- Staff or carers have no indication as to the child's whereabouts and/or
- There is no indication that the child is likely to return within a reasonable period and
- There is immediate concern for the child's safety.

There may be circumstances when a child who goes missing from care is experiencing harm or is at risk of harm. This includes children subjected to fabricated or induced illness, female genital mutilation, abuse by children, abduction by family or others, domestic abuse, sexually exploited children, suspected involvement in criminal activity such as county-lines, trafficked children and asylum-seeking children.

Cases where the child has been classified as **“away from placement without authorisation”** by the Police will be risk assessed regularly but no active response will be deployed. Cases where a child is **“away from placement without authorisation”** will be resolved when they return or new information comes to light suggesting he/she is at risk. If at risk, they will be reclassified to **“missing”**.

- **Harbouring:** To safeguard children who repeatedly go missing and are found to be with the same person, the police may issue a Child Abduction Warning Notice to any persons considered to be harbouring a child who has run away. The Police may ask the named Social Worker for the child to provide a Witness Statement to assist in the production of the Child Abduction Warning Notice. Repeated incidents may lead to their arrest and prosecution under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984.
- **National Missing Person's Helpline:** Local Authorities in England and Scotland together fund the Helpline's Missing from Care Team, which provides a specialist service to Children's Social Care when children in the care of the local authority go missing, including asylum-seeking children. This working arrangement with local authorities forms the basis of an information sharing agreement with Social Care. The Missing from Care Team can be contacted on 020 8392 4527. The National Missing Persons Helpline (NMPH) is dedicated to helping missing people, their families and those who care for them. It has information sharing agreements with the police. The NMPH 24-hour Freephone confidential Helpline 0500 700 700 takes calls from families and police reporting missing people.

5. High Risk Children

Some children who go missing are at significantly increased risk of harm due to their age, vulnerabilities, circumstances, or known safeguarding concerns. The following children **must be considered high risk** child's family, carer or responsible local authority and reported to the police as missing without delay.

- Any child aged 12 years or under whose whereabouts cannot be established.
- Any child in the care of the local authority, including children placed in or outside the borough.
- Any child subject to a Child Protection Plan, a Section 47 enquiry, or identified as a Child in Need (CiN) where there are safeguarding concerns.
- Any child who is considered vulnerable due to special educational needs or disabilities, mental health needs, learning disability, physical disability, or emotional or behavioural difficulties.
- Any child where there are known or suspected concerns relating to sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation (including county lines), trafficking, radicalisation, or abuse.
- Any child who goes missing frequently or for prolonged periods, particularly where patterns indicate increased vulnerability or risk of exploitation.
- Any child who is unaccompanied or an asylum-seeking child, where risks related to trafficking and exploitation may be present.
- Where a child's whereabouts cannot be established and there are indicators of exploitation or serious harm, the child must be classified as missing. Requests to withhold information must not delay safeguarding action where a child may be at risk.

Disabled children may face increased risk when they go missing because of their individual needs and potential vulnerability to exploitation, coercion, grooming or abuse. This includes children with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, communication needs, neurodivergence or sensory impairments, who may be more reliant on adults or peers for care, support and decision-making, and may find it harder to recognise risk, seek help or disclose harm. Missing episodes involving disabled children must therefore be treated as high risk and supported by timely safeguarding action and management oversight.

All missing risk assessments must prioritise the child's safety above all other considerations.

6. Responding to an Incident

When an agency becomes aware that a child is absent, the first consideration must be whether the child meets the definition of **missing** or **away from placement without authorisation**.

While only the police can formally determine the classification, agencies, carers and parents must apply professional judgement and share relevant information to support an accurate assessment of risk. Children whose whereabouts are known, and where there is no indication of immediate risk or significant harm, should not be inappropriately reported as missing.

However, where there is any uncertainty about the child's safety, vulnerability or circumstances, safeguarding action must not be delayed.

If the child is missing:

- 1) The police must be notified as soon as possible using 101, or 999 in an emergency.
- 2) A missing episode must be recorded on LCS (Protocol). Where the child is already open to Children's Services, the allocated social worker should trigger the missing episode. Where the child is not currently open, Family Help Front Door will trigger the missing episode on receipt of the missing contact.
- 3) A professionals meeting should be considered at the earliest opportunity to gather and share relevant information.
- 4) A strategy discussion must be considered where threshold is met.
- 5) The case must be escalated to the relevant Team Manager, who will maintain oversight and determine whether further escalation is required.

Response for children in the care of the local authority:

Foster carers and home staff must take all reasonable steps a responsible parent would take to locate the child and support their safe return. This may include contacting the child, friends, relatives, known associates or known locations, where it is safe and appropriate to do so. Where the carer believes the child is at risk, or where they are unable to make an informed judgement due to limited knowledge of the child or the circumstances, the child's allocated social worker or the EDT must be informed immediately. The LCS risk assessment must be updated by the allocated social worker to inform the response and any further safeguarding action.

Need to Know notifications and senior escalation

A Need to Know must be completed for all children in the care of the local authority who are reported missing, and for any child assessed as high risk. The notification must be sent to the relevant Head of Service, who will review the circumstances and determine whether further action or escalation is required.

Where the child is in the care of the local authority, the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and relevant health and education colleagues, including the virtual school should also be informed where this is relevant to safeguarding need and risk.

Where a Child Protection Information Sharing (CP-IS) alert or notification is received during a missing episode, this must be considered as part of the live risk assessment and information-sharing response. Practitioners should refer to Section 9, Children Missing and Health Notifications: Child Protection Information Sharing (CP-IS), for the actions to consider.

The notification should be completed:

- **on the same day, or within 24 hours**, where the child is at immediate danger or significant risk;
- **fortnightly**, where the child is a regular missing person or is regularly away from placement without authorisation; and
- **immediately**, where there is a significant change in circumstances, risk or known information.

Senior notification must not delay immediate action to locate, safeguard and support the child.

Away from home without authorisation

Children who are away from home without authorisation must remain subject to continuous risk assessment for the duration of their absence. Circumstances may change, and the professional network, including the allocated social worker, home staff, foster carer and EDT where relevant, must remain alert to any new information that may increase risk or require the child to be reclassified as missing.

The child's parents and those with parental responsibility must be kept informed, where appropriate. Any episode of being away from home without authorisation that lasts more than 24 hours must be reported to the relevant Head of Service.

A Recovery Order may be considered where there are significant concerns about the child's welfare or where there are barriers to securing their safe return. This must be agreed through the appropriate formal escalation processes.

7. Recording a Missing Episode on LCS

All missing episodes must be recorded accurately and promptly on LCS on the day the notification is received, through triggering the Missing Pathway. When a child is not open to children social care, the First Contact Officer will trigger the episode when a new missing contact is received by Children Social Care. If the notification is received out of hours, EDT will open the contact and reassign it for review by the Family Help Front Door the next working day. First Contact Officers will finalise the contact with updating information and open the Missing Pathway.

When a child is open to children social care the allocated worker will open the Missing pathway. If the information is received out of hours, EDT will record the missing episodes in case notes and alerting the allocated worker and manager within the system. The allocated worker will trigger the episode the next working day.

For step-by-step guidance on how to record a missing episode in LCS, see [Appendix A](#).

8. LCS Risk Assessments

Risk assessment is a central component of the local authority response to children who go missing and is essential to informing proportionate safeguarding action, information sharing and multi-agency decision-making.

An LCS risk assessment **must be completed** for all children who go missing who are:

- Children in the care of the local authority;
- Children in Need;
- Children subject to Child Protection Procedures; or
- Children open to any team within Children's Services.

The LCS risk assessment must be completed within 24 hours of a child being confirmed as missing and updated for every subsequent missing episode. Each assessment should reflect the child's current circumstances, including age, vulnerabilities, previous missing history, known contexts and any new information that may increase or reduce risk.

Practitioners must apply professional judgement and share the completed assessment promptly with relevant agencies, including the police and the child's school. Schools should always be informed, as they may hold information that supports location activity or helps identify emerging risk. Any new or relevant information must be shared with the police without delay.

The assessment is an aid to action and must directly inform safeguarding responses, escalation decisions and multi-agency planning to locate the child and reduce ongoing risk.

9. Missing Notifications

Children Missing from Care: Philomena Protocol and Notification

The Philomena Protocol

The Philomena Protocol is a national scheme designed to support the safe and timely return of children in care who go missing. It involves recording key information about the child, which can then be provided quickly to the police to support search activity and risk management. The overall aim is to reduce missing episodes and ensure that, when a child goes missing from care, partners act promptly to reduce risk and harm.

The Philomena Protocol form includes:

- The child's physical description, a recent photograph, known associates, and frequently visited locations and contact details.

- Storage: The form should be stored securely (digitally or printed) by the carer or home provider and be accessible 24/7. If a child moves home, the form must be transferred with them.

When a child goes missing, carers should first take safe and reasonable steps to locate the child. It is however expected that prior to any report to police that all reasonable and practical enquiries to locate the child or mitigate concern, are completed. These may include on a case-by-case basis)

- Contacting the child directly.
- Contacting any family (if appropriate) or friends.
- Checking any known social media.
- Checking locations frequented by the child.

If the children cannot be located, the child must be reported missing to the police via 101 (or 999 in an emergency) and the call handler must be informed if a Philomena Protocol is in place.

- Transfer: If a child moves to a new care home, the form should be transferred with them.

If you care for a child (under 18) at risk of going missing, you should complete the [Philomena Protocol Form](#). Full guidance on completing the form can be found [here](#).

Missing Children in Local Authority care: Notification

When a child in the care of the local authority is “missing”, the person who identifies the child is missing **must** immediately inform the supervising social worker or manager of the home provider and **must** notify the police without delay in line with the agreed missing definition.

The allocated social worker **must** coordinate the local authority response, including timely information sharing with relevant partners. Where required, the allocated social worker, in consultation with the home manager, shift leader, foster carer, **must** complete the Philomena Protocol form and provide it to the police to support safe location and return.

The allocated social worker **should** inform the Independent Reviewing Officer when a child is reported missing and notify the education provider and relevant health colleagues in line with safeguarding need and risk.

Where a child is in the care of a local authority and placed in Redbridge, the police will notify the responsible local authority. Redbridge Family Help Front Door may also be notified, and they will confirm notification has been sent to the responsible local authority. Where it has not, they will forward the notification making the responsible local authority aware.

Children Missing from Home: Notification

Parents and carers are expected to take prompt action when a child is missing from home. Where a child cannot be located and there is concern for their safety, the children must be reported to the police without delay.

Children missing from home face similar risks to those missing from care, including exploitation, abuse, and harm. For this reason, all agencies must treat every missing episode seriously, regardless of the child's legal status or previous history. Failure to take appropriate action may be a safeguarding concern and must be considered in line with the London Child Protection Procedures.

Before reporting a child missing, parents and carers should, where it is safe and appropriate to do so:

- Carry out a thorough search of the home and immediate local area (including vehicles/outbuildings where relevant);
- Make reasonable enquiries with family members, friends and known associates.
- Consider whether the child may be at a known or frequently visited location; and gather information that may assist in locating the child (for example, description, clothing, mobile phone, notes, diary entries, or online activity);
- make reasonable enquiries with family, friends, known associates, and relevant locations; and
- check appropriate local services where relevant (for example, local hospitals) and inform the school/education setting as appropriate.

These actions must not delay reporting where there are concerns about the child's safety or vulnerability. When reporting a child missing, parents and carers should provide all relevant information to the police to support a timely and proportionate response.

Professionals who become aware that a child is missing from home must support the parents or carers to report the child missing to the police. Where a parent or carer does not take appropriate action, the professional must escalate concerns and notify the police directly and provide the relevant information.

Where a child is not known to social care and:

- there are repeat missing episodes (three times in 28 days), or
- there are indications of vulnerability, exploitation, neglect, or other safeguarding concerns,

Children's Social Care, in partnership with relevant agencies, will consider whether Targeted Early Help (TEH) is required to address emerging risks and prevent escalation.

Where concerns are significant, persistent or escalating, Children's Social Care **will consider** whether a Single Assessment is required, in line with Section 17 or Section 47 Children Act 1989, based on risks and professional judgement.

Children Subject to a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan: Notification

Where a child living at home is subject to a Child in Need plan or a Child Protection Plan and goes missing, the parent or carer must notify the police without delay as soon as they become aware that the child's whereabouts cannot be established.

Where the parent or carer has not contacted the police or where there are concerns about the appropriateness or timeliness of parental action, the allocated social worker must take responsibility for notify the police directly, ensuring that safeguarding action is not delayed.

Any failure by a parent or carer to take appropriate action must be considered as part of the ongoing safeguarding assessment and addressed within the Child in Need or Child Protection plan. For children subject to a Child Protection Plan, practitioners should recognise that missing episodes may indicate immediate or escalating risk, and managerial oversight and escalation should be considered in line with the level of concern, including whether a strategy discussion is required. All actions, decisions and rationales must be clearly recorded, with professional judgement informed by the child's history, vulnerabilities, and previous missing episodes.

Children Missing from Education: Notification

For children of compulsory school age, professionals **must also have regard to the** Children Missing from Education (CME) procedures, recognising that absence from education may be an indicator of increased vulnerability or safeguarding risk. Where education staff become aware that a child's whereabouts cannot be established, reasonable enquiries should be made with parents or carers in line with CME guidance. The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) should coordinate the response and assess the level of risk, taking account of the child's age, vulnerability, and any known safeguarding concerns. Where concerns remain, or where contact with parents or carers cannot be established, education settings must share information with Children's Social Care and/or the police, in line with local safeguarding procedures. Safeguarding action must not be delayed where there are concerns about the child's safety or wellbeing.

Where a child who is missing from school is subsequently identified as missing from home or care, this Missing from Home and Care protocol must be followed, including notification to the police where appropriate.

Education staff who become aware that a child has returned following a missing episode should establish whether the police or Children's Social Care were aware of the absence. Where this is not the case, they must inform the police and/or Children's Social Care without delay.

The Children Missing from Education (CME) Panel, convened by the CME Lead, reviews all children missing from education, including those who are also missing from home or care. A combined list of missing children is shared monthly to identify patterns, emerging risks and required safeguarding action. Information is shared on a strict need-to-know basis.

Children Missing During External Activities: Notification

Where a child goes missing whilst participating in an external activity, including school trips, educational visits or organised activities, the person in charge of the activity must notify the local police without delay in the area the child was last seen (the investigation will be conducted by the missing persons unit where the child normally resides with the assistance of the unit where the child went missing).

The person in charge must also:

- Inform their line manager or appropriate senior representative; and
- Ensure that the child's parents or carers are notified as reasonably possible.

If the child is cared for by the local authority, the foster carer or home manager must be notified immediately, along with the child's allocated social worker. Where the incident occurs out of hours, the Emergency Duty Team for the local authority holding case responsibility must be notified.

The foster carer or home manager, in consultation with the allocated social worker or Emergency Duty Team, will then follow the procedures contained within this protocol for children in the care of the local authority who go missing, including liaison with the police, completion of relevant recording, and safeguarding planning.

Where the incident takes place outside the child's home local authority, clear communication must be maintained between agencies to ensure safeguarding responsibility is not diluted. Safeguarding responsibility remains with the placing authority until the child is located and their wellbeing is confirmed.

Children Missing and Health Notifications: Child Protection Information Sharing (CP-IS)

Child Protection Information Sharing (CP-IS) is a national system that supports secure information sharing between children's social care and health providers across England. It applies to children who are looked after, including those who have been looked after within the previous 12 months, and children who are subject to a Child Protection Plan, including unborn children subject to a pre-birth child protection plan, or who have been subject to a Child Protection Plan within the previous 12 months.

Where a child who is reported missing attends an NHS healthcare setting using CP-IS, healthcare professionals may be alerted to the child's social care status and provided with

contact details for the responsible local authority. In unscheduled care settings, an automatic notification may also be sent to the responsible local authority children's social care service to confirm the attendance.

CP-IS is an important safeguarding mechanism for children missing from home, care or education, particularly where they present to healthcare services outside their home local authority area. As the only national system providing information on a child's social care status across local authority boundaries, CP-IS may assist in identifying the child's location, wellbeing and any emerging indicators of exploitation, trafficking or harm.

When a CP-IS alert or notification is received in relation to a child who is reported missing, Children's Social Care should consider this as part of the live risk assessment and response under Section 6. The allocated worker, Family Help Front Door or Emergency Duty Team, as appropriate, should review the information and consider whether it is necessary to:

- contact the healthcare professional or safeguarding team who accessed the record to obtain further information about the child's attendance;
- review the location of the healthcare setting and whether this assists in identifying the child's whereabouts or known associates;
- consider the frequency, pattern and context of healthcare attendances;
- assess whether the information increases concerns regarding risk, vulnerability, exploitation, trafficking or harm; and
- share relevant information with the police, health safeguarding colleagues and other safeguarding partners where appropriate.

Professionals must not rely solely on automated CP-IS notifications. Where safeguarding concerns exist regarding a missing child, direct communication between health services, Children's Social Care, police and other relevant agencies remains essential. Any CP-IS information received, action taken, rationale for decisions and information shared must be clearly recorded on the child's case record.

Further information can be found: [PG9. Child Protection Information Sharing \(CP-IS\)](#)
[Child Protection - Information Sharing \(CP-IS\) service - NHS England Digital](#)

10. Working with the Police

Police are the lead agency for the investigation of missing children, while Children's Social Care retains responsibility for safeguarding planning and oversight for all children known to them. Where a child is in the care of the local authority, Children's Social Care retains corporate parenting responsibility. This responsibility is not removed when a child is reported missing to the police.

All relevant agencies must share sufficient and relevant information with the police to enable effective risk assessment, location activity and safeguarding action. Information sharing must be lawful, necessary and proportionate in line with the Children Act 1989, the Children Act

2004, Children Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2026, the UK GDPR, and the Data Protection Act 2018. Where safeguarding concerns are present, consent is not required and must not delay information sharing. [Information sharing to safeguard children and young people - GOV.UK](#)
The rationale and lawful basis for sharing information should be clearly recorded.

Where a child is not open to Children's Social Care at the point, they are reported missing, Family Help Front Door will review the information within 24 hours and determine whether further assessment or intervention is required. All missing contacts are authorised by a Practice Manager or Team Manager.

Until a child is located and no longer considered missing, regular liaison must take place between the police, Children's Social Care and any other relevant agencies involved with the child. Where agencies have contact with a child known to be missing, information about the child's whereabouts must be shared with the police without delay, and the child should be informed that this will occur.

The circumstances of a missing episode must be considered carefully to identify whether the child may be at risk of significant harm. The police may consider searching the address at which the missing child was last seen as part of their investigation. Where this occurs, the approach should be proportionate and where possible agreed to minimise disruption to the child's home.

If the Police or other referring agency believes that the circumstances surrounding the child's missing episode places the child at risk of significant harm, then they should discuss these concerns with Family Help Front Door or with the child's social worker where appropriate, for consideration of escalating the concerns to the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team. Such situations might include:

- parents or carers show a lack of concern or fail to take appropriate action.
- a child under five goes missing from home.
- a child under ten goes missing and parental factors such as substance misuse or domestic abuse are present.
- there are repeat missing episodes, particularly where parental response is inadequate.
- the child is vulnerable due to disability or health needs.
- the child is associating with adults or attending locations of concern; or
- there are indicators of sexual or criminal exploitation.

11. When to consider a Strategy Discussion

When a child goes missing, the level of risk must be assessed and reviewed throughout the episode. A strategy discussion should be considered without delay, and must be convened in the following circumstances:

- Where there are significantly high and complex risks, regardless of the child's age.
- Where the child is missing for more than 48 hours.

- Where the child is aged 12 or under.
- Where the child persistently goes missing and is not receptive to the Return Home Interview (RHI) process.
- Where there is reason to believe the parents have not taken appropriate action to locate their missing child; and
- Where the child is in the care of the local authority, subject to a Child Protection Plan or open Section 47 investigation.

In these circumstances, a strategy discussion must take place as soon as possible and no later than **three working days** from the missing episode. The strategy discussion should involve the allocated practitioner and multi-agency partners, Multi-Agency Child Protection Team and representation from the Police Missing Persons Unit.

To trigger a strategy discussion an 87P form needs to be completed, clearly capturing the risk. This form needs to be sent via email to the East Area (EA) Mailbox - PublicProtectionReferrals@met.police.uk and the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team.

The Multiagency Child Protection Team is responsible for convening the strategy discussion as soon as practicable. The discussion must consider a co-ordinated plan to locate and safeguard the child, including, (but not limited to):

- Further attempts to contact family members, friends and known associates.
- Issuing a National Missing Alert where appropriate.
- Contact with the Missing Person's Helpline. This group provides a specialist service to Children's Social Services for children in the care of the local authority who are missing, including asylum-seeking children. This working arrangement with local authorities forms the basis of an information sharing agreement with Social Services.
- Involvement of the child's school or education provider.
- Consideration of Recovery Orders and how they should be exercised.
- Notification to relevant national agencies, including DWP and Child Benefit where required.
- Consideration of immigration or jurisdictional concerns where there is a risk the child ---may have been taken abroad.
- Support to be offered to the child and family; and whether further strategy discussions are required prior to the child reaching seven days missing.
- Agree supports to be offered to the family.
- Whether a further strategy meeting should be called before the child has been missing for 7 days.

The LCS risk assessment should inform this decision. The decisions of the strategy meeting and the timescales must be clearly recorded; a copy should be kept on the child's case record. All agencies who attend the strategy meetings are responsible for ensuring that there is a clear statement of the actions being taken in respect of the child's absence and should satisfy themselves that all that should be done is being done. Further strategy meetings can be called

whenever the professionals involved wish to hold one, but must take place at a minimum, once per month if the child is missing for an extended period.

Strategy meetings for children missing more than 28 Days

Where a child has been missing for more than 28 days, regular strategy discussions must continue to be convened. Police missing persons files will remain live until the child is located and their circumstances are considered resolved.

For children in the care of the local authority, strategy discussions should be convened by the relevant Team Manager. Children must not be de-accommodated while missing unless this forms part of a multi-agency plan endorsed by the relevant Head of Service, who must ensure that robust safeguarding arrangements are in place to promote the child's welfare and best interests.

12. Use of Publicity

Where a child is missing and assessed as high risk, and the police determine that public appeal or media publicity is required, a Need to Know must be completed immediately to inform the relevant Head of Service. The Head of Service in turn will escalate to the appropriate Director and include the Council's Press Office to coordinate any publicity.

Where publicity is proposed, the child's parents and/or those with parental responsibility must be informed in advance, and consent should be sought wherever possible, in line with the Police procedures.

Use of Publicity: For Children who are in the Care of the Local Authority

All professionals to be aware that it is an offence to publish material that is intended, or likely, to identify a child as being involved in court proceedings under the Children Act 1989. In limited circumstances, the court may grant permission for such restrictions to be waived where this is necessary to promote or protect the child's welfare.

Requests Out of Hours

Where a request is made out of hours and decisions are required urgently on behalf of the local authority, EDT will notify the Out of Hours Children's Social Care On Call Practice Manager (OCPM), who holds responsibility for decision-making and authorisation. EDT will seek the consent of parents or carers who share or retain parental responsibility.

Requests in Working Hours:

The Team Manager will review the circumstances and ensure where parental responsibility is shared with a parent or care giver this has been sought. The decision will then be escalated

to the responsible Head of Service for authorisation. When appropriate, legal services to be consulted before any publicity is agreed.

In all cases, decisions regarding publicity must be clearly recorded on the child's record, including the rationale, authorisation, and consideration of safeguarding, proportionality and the child's best interest.

13. Escalation, Oversight and Review

The purpose of escalation and oversight is to ensure that children who remain missing, or who are repeatedly missing, receive a timely, coordinated and proportionate safeguarding response. Escalation must be informed by the child's individual circumstances, the level of risk, the duration of the missing episode, patterns of behaviour and any new information that may indicate increased vulnerability or harm.

The allocated social worker must provide weekly updates to the responsible Practice Manager, Team Manager and Head of Service for all children who remain missing. These updates must include progress against the agreed action plan, key risks, information shared by partner agencies, and any barriers to locating and safeguarding the child.

Where the risk remains significant as the child remains missing, there is drift in the safeguarding response, or further senior oversight is required, the Head of Service will notify the appropriate Director.

Where a child is subject to repeated missing episodes, practitioners and managers must consider whether the cumulative pattern indicates escalating risk, even where individual episodes appear lower level. This should include consideration of exploitation, harmful associations, locations of concern, changes in behaviour, non-engagement with Return Home Interviews, and any concerns raised by parents, carers, professionals or partner agencies.

In line with the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015, records must be kept of all individual incidents where children go missing from a children's home. This information must be shared with the placing authority and, where appropriate, with the child's parents or those with parental responsibility.

Providers should evaluate missing incidents to identify:

- any gaps in staff training, skills or knowledge; and
- evidence of effective practice or actions that have reduced risk; and
- any learning required to strengthen care planning, supervision, safeguarding arrangements or home stability.

This learning must inform the ongoing review of the quality of care and the child's wider safeguarding plan.

Where there are serious concerns about a child's missing behaviour, particularly where the child is at grave risk due to age, vulnerability, exploitation concerns, prolonged absence or unknown whereabouts, notification to Ofsted should be considered.

Children's homes must assess each missing episode on its individual merits while also considering cumulative risk. Patterns, unusual behaviour, frequency of missing episodes and repeated lower-level incidents may collectively warrant escalation, even where a single episode would not do so in isolation.

14. When Missing Children are Found

Locating the Child and Planning their Return

Where a child is reported as missing, the police, parents or carers, allocated social worker should begin contingency planning for the child's return at the earliest opportunity.

Planning must take into account that a child may be located out of hours, including during the early hours of the morning. The case file should have clear arrangements and contingency plans visible on the file, clearly stating how the child will be safeguarded and returned safely to their home.

Planning should include:

- Whether the child will return to their accommodation address, or whether they are safe in the location where they are found;
- How the child will be transported there, including clear arrangements where carers or home staff are unable to collect the child out of hours;
- Who will take responsibility for transport and supervision until the child is safely returned;
- Where and when the police will conduct the Safe and Well check; and
- Confirmation of who will undertake the Return Home Interview and arrangements for this to take place promptly.

Informing the police and transport arrangements

Where an agency encounters or meets with a child who is known to be missing, the police must be informed without delay. The child should be advised that this information will be shared.

Arrangements for transporting the child back to their accommodation will normally be made by their main care giver. It is the responsibility of the **allocated social work team** to ensure that appropriate **contingency plans are in place**, including clear arrangements for **out-of-hours returns** and all parties are aware of the plans.

Where out-of-hours arrangements are likely to be needed, this must be communicated via an **EDT alert**, so that the Emergency Duty Team is aware of the agreed contingency plan and can **trigger and coordinate the return arrangements** if notified. All arrangements must be clearly documented on the child's electronic record.

Police Protection

Police Protection is a power available under section 46 of the Children Act 1989 and enables the police, in an emergency, to remove a child to, or keep a child in, suitable accommodation. Police Protection may only be exercised where the attending officer has reasonable cause to believe that the child would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm.

This means that there will be occasions when a child is in a setting that may be considered unsuitable, but where the legal threshold for Police Protection is not met and there are therefore no grounds to exercise powers under section 46.

In such circumstances, Children's Services must liaise with the police and relevant partners to agree what steps are required to safeguard the child's welfare. The child's parents or carers and all agencies previously notified of the missing episode must be informed of the child's return without delay. This remains the responsibility of the allocated worker.

Where Police Protection is exercised, the local authority is responsible for agreeing an immediate plan of safety and receiving the child into its care. A strategy discussion is required to understand the circumstances of the Police Protection and ensure that the care plan meets the child's needs within their current context.

Where Police Protection is used out of hours, the Emergency Duty Team will convene a strategy discussion with the attending police officer and agree the interim plan for the child until the next working day. A full strategy meeting will then be convened by Multi-Agency Child Protection Team, with attendance from the allocated social worker and relevant members of the professional network.

15. Interviewing Children after Missing Episodes

Listening to the Child and Understanding Lived Experience

All conversations with children following a missing episode must be child-centred and informed by the child's voice, wishes, feelings and lived experience. Where decisions are made about the child, including whether they should return home, return to placement, or whether alternative safety planning is required, practitioners must clearly record how the child's views have been sought, considered and reflected in the decision-making.

Practitioners should seek to understand why the child went missing in the first instance and what the episode tells the professional network about the child's safety, relationships, home or placement experience, and wider context. This means going beyond questions about

where the child went and who they were with. Practitioners should explore what was happening for the child before they left, what they may have been seeking or trying to get away from, what happened while they were away, and what needs to change to help them feel safer.

Where there are repeated missing episodes, this should prompt professional curiosity about whether something in the child's home, placement, relationships, peer group or professional network needs to change. Repeated missing should not be viewed primarily as behaviour by the child that needs to change, but as potential communication of unmet need, distress, harm, instability, exploitation or lack of safety.

The child's lived experience must inform assessment, planning and the response to the missing episode. Alongside quantitative data about frequency, duration and patterns of missing, practitioners and managers should consider qualitative feedback from children who have experienced missing episodes. This feedback should be used to understand what is driving missing episodes, whether professional responses are helpful, and what changes are needed to prevent further episodes and reduce risk.

Safe and Well Checks

Safe and well checks are conducted primarily by police officers. However, for children assessed as low or medium risk, a social worker or appropriate professional may also complete the Safe and Well check. The check must establish that the child is safe and well, while also providing an initial opportunity to hear from the child about their immediate circumstances and any concerns about harm, pressure, exploitation or fear. This should include asking brief, sensitive questions to understand:

- where the child was while missing.
- what they were doing; and
- who they were with.

If the child discloses an allegation of a crime that occurred while they were missing, or that contributed to the missing episode, this must be reported to the police without delay by the professional conducting the Safe and Well Check. The police will record any allegation and take appropriate action.

Prevention Interviews

Prevention interviews are an essential part of the return process and support effective problem-solving in missing cases. They enable police and partner agencies to identify vulnerability, harm or criminality that may have occurred while a child was missing and to respond proportionately.

For children assessed as low or medium risk, the approach to the Safe and Well Check or Prevention Interview will be determined by the individual circumstances of the case. Within

24 hours of the police locating the child, or being notified of their return, the police will adopt one of the following approaches:

1. Liaison by telephone with the parent, carer or responsible professional to confirm the child's wellbeing (no deployment; aide-memoire completed; Merlin updated).
2. Direct liaison by telephone or video call with the child to confirm wellbeing (no deployment; aide-memoire completed; Merlin updated).
3. Deployment to conduct a formal face-to-face Prevention Interview (police notification updated accordingly).

Children assessed as high risk must receive a face-to-face Prevention Interview, which must take place within one hour of the child being located by the police. Where a child is located by an individual or agency other than the police, the police must be notified immediately of the child's return.

The Missing Persons Unit will automatically notify Family Help Front Door of all children who have received a police Safe and Well Check by forwarding a **Connect Report** to Children's Social Care following the child's return. This must be read and considered by the allocated social worker and cross-referenced with the Return Home Interview (RHI) to inform assessment, safety planning and any next steps.

Where a child in the care of the local authority is placed a significant distance from their home borough, notification of their return may be delayed if the Missing Persons Unit is not informed immediately. In these circumstances, the allocated social worker must ensure the Missing Persons Unit is updated and all relevant information is accurately recorded on the child's record.

Independent Return Home Interviews (RHIs)

Independent Return Home Interviews should be offered to all children who have been reported missing and have returned home or to their Home. RHIs should take place within 72 hours of the child's return, be conducted in a neutral setting where the child feels safe, and be independent of the child's family, Home or care arrangements.

The interview provides an opportunity to identify and understand any risks, harm or vulnerabilities experienced by the child while missing. Providing children with a safe opportunity to talk is central to safeguarding them. The interview should explore the push-pull factors that contributed to the missing episode, alongside identification of risk factors for the child. The interview should:

- Identify and address any harm the child may have suffered, including harm that may not have been disclosed during the Safe and Well Check, either prior to or during the missing episode.
- Understand and, where possible, address the reasons why the child went missing.

- Help the child feel safe and supported and understand the options available to reduce the likelihood of repeat missing episodes.
- Provide the child with information on how to stay safe should they go missing again, including access to relevant helplines; and
- Help identify a trusted person the child can talk to in the future.

Allocated practitioners should also use this opportunity to review and update the child's risk assessment, ensuring it remains a dynamic document informed by learning from the missing episode, and to review and update the Philomena Protocol grab pack where required. For step-by-step guidance on how to record a missing episode in LCS, see Appendix A.

Where a disabled child has returned following a missing episode, the RHI must be arranged and led by the designated Return Home Interviewer once the missing pathway has been opened. Where the child has additional communication or sensory needs, or would be better supported by a trusted professional, the allocated worker should be involved to support the child's engagement.

The allocated worker's role is to support communication, understanding and engagement, ensuring the child's experiences, risks and vulnerabilities are fully captured. The Return Home Interviewer remains responsible for conducting the interview and maintaining its independence. This approach keeps the RHI child-centred, proportionate and responsive to individual need.

Engagement in the Return Home Interview process is voluntary for all children. However, children who persistently go missing, whether from home or care, and who do not engage in Return Home Interviews may be at increased risk. A strategy discussion should always be considered for children who persistently do not engage in RHIs.

Support Beyond Return Home Interview

Any information obtained during an Independent Return Home interview that may inform future risk assessment or assist in locating the child should they go missing again, must be shared appropriately between the police, Children's Social Care and other relevant agencies involved with the child. This information sharing supports the development of a comprehensive understanding of the reasons for the child's absence and the support required to reduce future missing episodes and risk of harm.

Support packages should be evidence-based, time-limited and goal-oriented. Practitioners should also consider if expertise are required from Family Help Specialist Exploitation Team and/or Family Resource Services.

Support packages may include:

- Development of strategies to reduce risk or harm, including disruption of association with exploitative peers or adults, substance misuse prevention, and sexual health interventions.

- Practical and emotional support for children and their families, including mediation and support to promote engagement and success in education.
- Support for parents and carers to help them understand why the child went missing, recognise indicators of criminal or sexual exploitation, and strengthen prevention strategies; and
- Promoting and supporting the child's engagement in positive activities within the local community.

16. Oversight and Governance

Strategic Oversight

At a strategic level, missing children's data is reviewed through the monthly MACE-HOTH Panel, where the review of missing episodes is a standing agenda item. This includes analysis of:

- Uptake and timeliness of Return Home Interviews.
- Themes and patterns of missing.
- Identified push and pull factors.
- Implementation of Philomena Protocol and Grab Packs and
- Indicators and precursors associated with exploitation.

Learning, trends and risks identified through the MACE-HOTH Panel are escalated to the quarterly Strategic MACE meeting, providing senior partnership oversight, assurance and challenge. This governance structure ensures that learning from practice informs strategic decision-making, service development and the partnership response to children who go missing.

Providers

Care providers are required to provide monthly reports to the placing local authority on all incidents where children have gone missing. These reports must be produced by an officer independent of the home and are used to inform local authority monitoring, quality assurance and service improvement activity.

For children in the care of the local authority, the reports should be made available to the allocated social worker and manager, and used to identify patterns, concerns, and actions required to reduce repeat missing episodes and strengthen safeguarding responses.

Operational Oversight

Operational and tactical oversight is maintained through weekly and monthly inter-agency meetings, which support timely information sharing, monitoring of risk, and oversight of practice in line with this policy and protocol. These forums enable professionals to review

emerging concerns, ensure actions are progressing, and identify where escalation or additional intervention is required.

Monthly Missing Children Scrutiny Panel (Pre-MACE-HOTH)

A monthly Missing Children Scrutiny Panel is convened to provide focused oversight, challenge and professional curiosity in relation to children with the most concerning, persistent or high-risk missing episodes. The panel is chaired by the Service Manager for Contextual Safeguarding, in their role as Operational Lead for Missing, and brings together key operational and specialist partners to ensure robust scrutiny of practice and decision-making.

The panel considers a targeted cohort of children, including those who are frequently missing, not engaging in Return Home Interviews, or where there are indicators of exploitation, escalation of risk, or drift in response. The purpose of the panel is to challenge whether risks are being fully understood whether sufficient action is being taken, and what further steps are required to safeguard the child and reduce further missing episodes.

Membership of the panel includes representation at Team Manager level from the allocated team, MACPT and the Return Home Interviewer. While the panel contributes intelligence, analysis and learning, care planning responsibility remains with the allocated team.

The panel's focus includes:

- scrutiny of the most risky and prolific missing cases.
- consideration of patterns, escalations and cumulative risk.
- challenge around professional curiosity and analysis.
- identification of gaps in responses or delays in escalation.
- agreement of actions and follow-up timescales; and
- identification of themes or learning to be escalated.

Key learning, themes and risks identified through the Missing Children Scrutiny Panel are escalated to the monthly MACE-HOTH Panel, providing a single, coherent understanding of missing children from a Children's Social Care perspective. This informs strategic oversight, partnership, disruption activity and wider safeguarding responses.

The panel does not replace existing safeguarding processes. Practitioners must not wait for the panel to report a child missing, escalate concerns, or convene a strategy discussion where thresholds are met.

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Term / Abbreviation	Meaning / Description
87P	Police strategy discussion referral process used to notify the East Area police mailbox and MACPT where the threshold for a strategy discussion is met.
AD	Assistant Director.
BCU	Basic Command Unit.
CLA	Child / children in the care of the local authority.
CME	Children Missing from Education.
CP	Child Protection.
CP-IS	Child Protection Information Sharing: national system enabling secure information sharing between children's social care and NHS healthcare settings for children who are looked after or subject to a Child Protection Plan, including relevant cases within the previous 12 months.
CSC	Children's Social Care
CWD	Children with Disabilities
DSL	Designated Safeguarding Lead
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EA BCU	East Area Basic Command Unit
EDT	Emergency Duty Team
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
HoS	Head of Service
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
LAC	Legacy term: looked after child / children looked after. This protocol uses "child / children in the care of the local authority" wherever possible.
LBR	London Borough of Redbridge
LCS	Liquidlogic Children's System: the local electronic case recording system.
MACPT	Multi-Agency Child Protection Team
MACE	Multi-Agency Child Exploitation
MACE-HOTH	Multi-Agency Child Exploitation – Harm Outside the Home
MASCE	Multi-Agency Strategic Child Exploitation
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
MISP	Missing Person indicator / badge on LCS used to flag that a child is currently recorded as missing.
MPS	Metropolitan Police Service
NMPH	National Missing Persons Helpline
NTK	Need to Know notification: local senior notification process used to alert relevant managers and senior leaders to significant safeguarding incidents, including high-risk missing episodes, repeat missing episodes, serious incidents, or matters requiring senior oversight or escalation.
OCPM	Out of Hours Children's Social Care On Call Practice Manager

PR	Parental Responsibility
RAG	Red, Amber, Green rating used to describe risk, status or progress where applicable.
RHI	Return Home Interview: independent conversation offered to a child following a missing episode to understand their experience, identify risk and inform safety planning.
RSCP	Redbridge Safeguarding Children Partnership
S17	Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 relating to children in need (CiN).
S47	Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 relating to enquiries where there is reasonable cause to suspect significant harm.
S&W Check	Safe and Well Check: check undertaken after a child is located or returns from a missing episode to confirm immediate safety and wellbeing and identify any urgent concerns.
TEH	Targeted Early Help
UK GDPR	United Kingdom General Data Protection Regulation

Appendix A

Recording a Missing Episode on LCS

- All children who are reported missing must have a missing episode recorded correctly on their file.
- On the individuals LCS page, click on the 'Additional Tab' on the left-hand side, then select 'Add missing person record' (highlighted red in the picture). This then allows you to enter the missing dates and times and create the missing record.

The screenshot shows the LCS system interface. On the left-hand side, the 'Additional' tab is selected and highlighted with a red box. The main content area displays several sections: 'Disabilities', 'Categories of Need', 'Legal Statuses', and 'Missing Person records'. The 'Missing Person records' section contains a table with columns for 'Started', 'Ended', 'Missing Status', and 'Finalised?'. The 'Add missing person record' link is highlighted in red in the bottom left corner of the main content area.

Started	Ended	Missing Status	Finalised?
02-May-2020 18:49	02-May-2020 22:24	Found	No
29-Nov-2019 14:54	29-Nov-2019 17:54	Found	Yes
18-Oct-2019 16:12	18-Oct-2019 17:39	Found	Yes

- Once you click 'Add missing person Record', you will come onto a page like this – see image below. Enter the missing dates and times and the found date and times if applicable. Then click 'create'.

Missing Details

Missing Status: [Dropdown]

Episode Start Date: 21-May-2020 15:40 [Calendar Icon]

Missing Reasons:

- ☐ MR1 - Bullying
- ☐ MR2 - Involvement in offending behaviour
- ☐ MR3 - Substance misuse
- ☐ MR4 - Contact with family and friends, including where a child/young person goes missing in order to have contact with their family or friends, to avoid contact with their family or friends, or as a result of having contact.
- ☐ MR5 - Alleged abuse within the foster home
- ☐ MR6 - They are an asylum seeker, for instance includes those who may have been refused leave

Primary Missing Reason: [Dropdown]

Local Authority: Luton [Dropdown]

Additional Information: [Text Area]

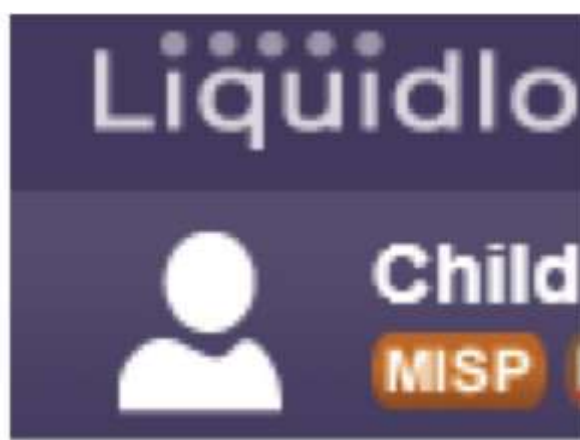
Missing Person Location

Location missing from: [Dropdown]

Location when gone missing: [Dropdown]

Additional Information: [Text Area]

- d. The missing episode is now uploaded/recorded. You will be able to go back in and out of the episode. If the child has not been found, you will only have to add the missing dates and times. A MISP badge will then appear on the main LCS page to indicate a child is missing.

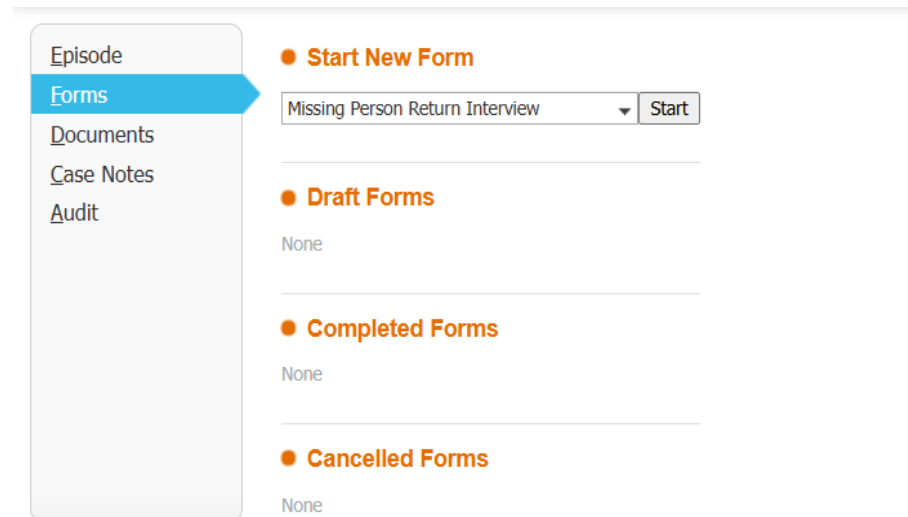


- e. After the missing episode has been created, inform the Return Home Interview Worker via email (bianca.andrew-castello@redbridge.gov.uk). Be sure to share details of the child including their ID number. The Missing Episode then needs to be reassigned to Bianca.

If Bianca is on leave, the allocated worker is expected to complete the Return Home Interview.

- f. Do not finalise the missing episode, until the child is found.
- g. When the child is located, update the missing episode with the 'found' information and finalise the episode.

- h. It is very important the missing episode is concluded at the point the child is found and has a return home interview.
- i. A template can be found in the forms section on the missing episode. See below.



The screenshot shows a web application interface. On the left is a vertical sidebar with a menu containing the following items: 'Episode', 'Forms' (highlighted with a blue arrow), 'Documents', 'Case Notes', and 'Audit'. The main content area on the right is titled 'Start New Form' and features a dropdown menu with 'Missing Person Return Interview' selected, followed by a 'Start' button. Below this, there are three sections: 'Draft Forms' (showing 'None'), 'Completed Forms' (showing 'None'), and 'Cancelled Forms' (showing 'None').