

**SERIOUS  
ABOUT  
SOCIAL WORK**

# **Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care: Practice Guidance**

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## About this document

<b>Title</b>	Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care: Practice Guidance
<b><u>Purpose</u></b>	This guidance is for Social Workers working with children who run away or go missing from home or care. It should be read in conjunction with the Southend Essex and Thurrock protocol on this subject.
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# 1. Introduction

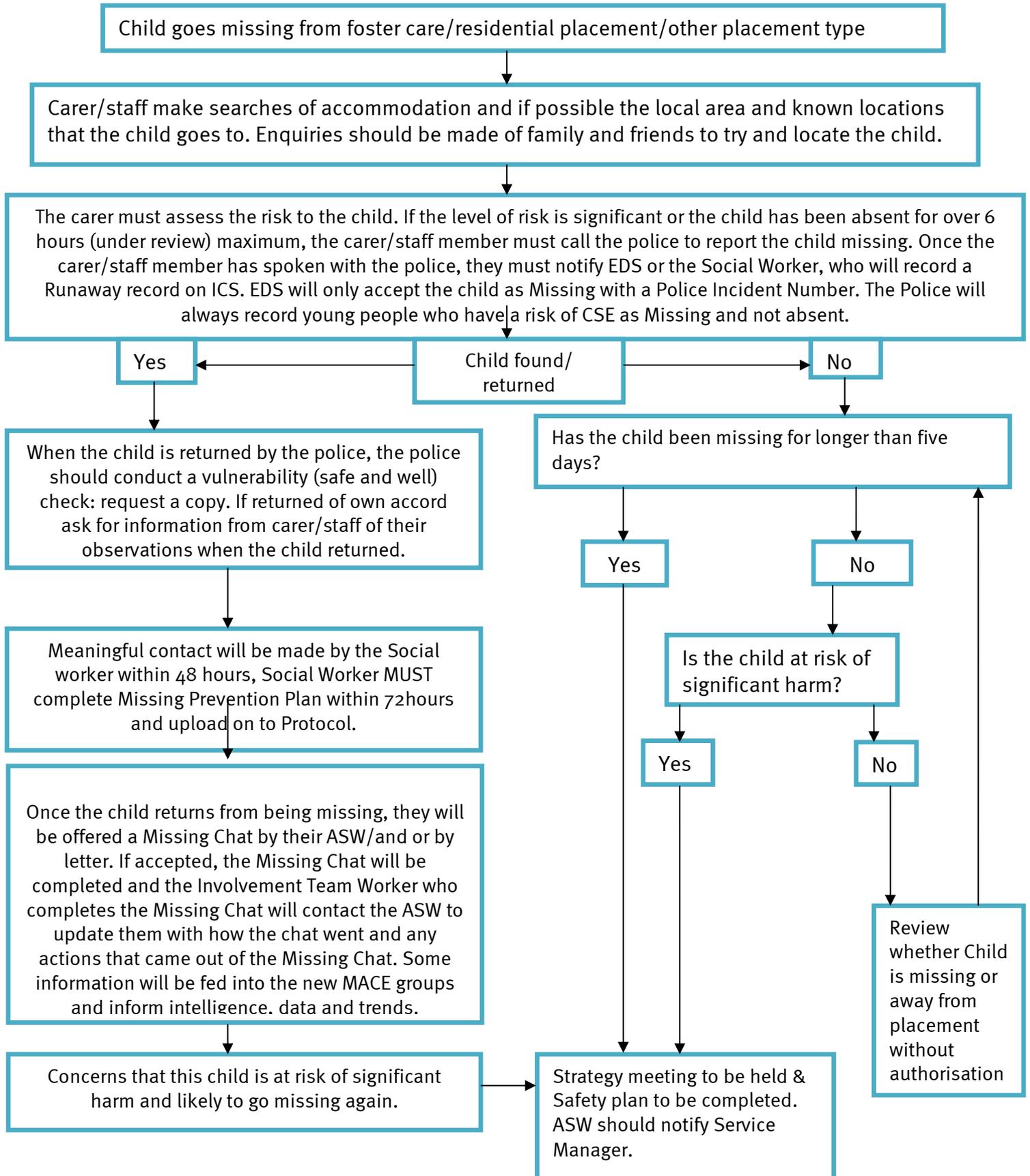
- 1.1 This guidance is intended to support Social Workers, who are working with children who run away or go missing from home or care. It should be read in conjunction with the statutory guidance and the Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) Protocol on this subject.
- 1.2 Flow charts have been provided within the guidance to help Social Workers take the correct steps, when responding to a child who has run away and gone missing, from home or care; and to help put appropriate safeguarding measures in place.
- 1.3 Most children reported to Family Operations as missing are in care, so this guidance begins with children in care.

# 2. Children in Care (Planning & Review)

- 2.1 If a child has an established pattern of running away a safety plan with a clear strategy should be written, highlighting any risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE), offending behaviour, gang involvement or trafficking.
- 2.2 The child's placement should be supported to prepare for the child going missing, this will include;
  - Having a photo of the child
  - Having contact numbers for any family members or friends
  - Having details of potential addresses that the child may go to
  - Discussions within the placement planning meeting regarding the plan and arrangements should the child go missing
- 2.3 It is important to maintain the frequency of social work visits, and offer independent advocacy as an important part of the support network. The care plan should consider how other professionals working with the child, especially the school, can contribute. The Social Worker is responsible for consulting with relevant agencies during the planning and review of a child who has an established pattern of running away.
- 2.4 The Independent Review Officer (IRO) should be involved in ensuring that there is an appropriate strategy in place to address the risk of the child running away and statutory reviews should be arranged quarterly, until the risk is being effectively managed. The Social Worker must keep the IRO informed of any liaison with the Police and relevant partner-agencies to ensure that there is a joint approach during the review process to manage the risks identified.

# When Children in Care Run Away

## Flowchart for responding to a child who goes missing from their placement



- 2.5 The carer should assess and keep under review the level of risk at least every two hours; and follow the steps required by the ESCB's Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) Protocol. The Social Worker (or the Emergency Duty Service, if out of hours) should assist the carer to assess the level of risk if this is requested.
- 2.5.1 The child is always to be reported as though missing, if s/he has been absent for over 6 hours but the amount of time will be considerably less if the child is particularly vulnerable, e.g. the child has a severe learning disability, or is very young.
- 2.5.2 If the child is considered to be missing, the carer is expected to provide information and an up to date photograph and risk assessment to the police (please refer to the Foster Carer's Missing Children Guidance for more information).
- 2.5.3 The carer should notify the following:
- the local police
  - the authority responsible for the child's placement
  - the parents and any other person with parental responsibility, unless it is not reasonably practicable or to do so would be inconsistent with the child's welfare; and this has been agreed with the Social Worker.
- 2.5.4 The Social Worker should ensure that the carer has notified those in 3.1.3 and contact:
- the IRO;
  - the child's school
  - all those with parental responsibility; and
  - the host authority, if the child is placed outside of Essex.
- 2.6 How to record the episode on ICS is set out in Appendix 3.
- 2.7 The Social Worker, carer and parents, where appropriate, should plan for the child's return, including consideration of:
- offering an Missing Chat\* prior to a return to placement;
  - whether the child should return to the placement and whether the placement remains appropriate;
  - who with and how will the child be transported home;
  - the appropriate support needs of the family, as identified by the Social Worker
  - any immediate health needs, e.g. emergency contraception;
  - if the whereabouts of the young person is thought to be known, a Recovery Order should be considered
  - a media strategy.
- 2.7.1 On return, carers are expected to continue to offer warm and consistent care. Running away is not to be seen as a behaviour that should be punished.
- 2.7.2 The training and support to foster carers, staff working in children's homes or other arrangements, in relation to children who run away and go missing from care, is covered

in the statutory guidance on this subject and the National Minimum Standards for those services.

2.8 When the child is found, the Social Worker and carer should notify:

- the local police;
- the IRO;
- the 'host' authority, if the child is placed outside of Essex;
- the school; and
- update Protocol and, where the child was missing, end the missing episode.

2.8.1 The Social Worker should try to establish meaningful contact with the child within 48 hours of the child's return, in order to establish the reasons why the child ran away. This should be through a visit to the child. Where this is not possible, telephone contact will be made and the Social Worker should visit the child in placement within one week.

2.8.2 The Social Worker should offer the carers and the child's family the opportunity to contribute their views about the child running away, within 48 hours of the child returning. The Social Worker should liaise with the police to ascertain the outcome of the vulnerability (safe and well) check. Where possible, this should be done before the visit to the child, as it may provide information useful for the discussion with the child.

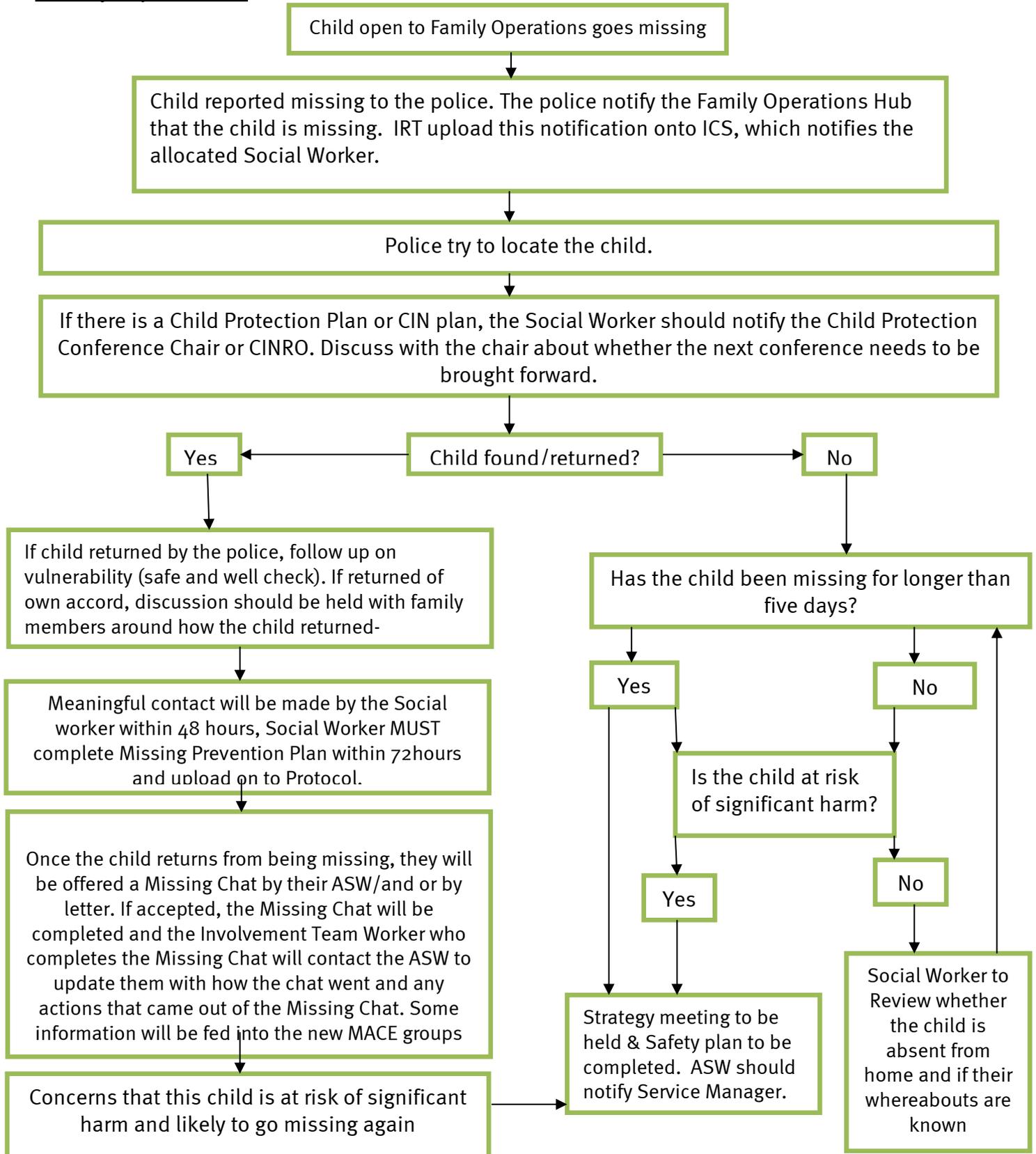
2.8.3 The Social Worker should identify any additional assessed needs arising from the child running away, taking into account the record and action plan from any independent Missing Chat e.g. the provision of advice and information for the child; 1:1 support for the child; advice on parenting.

2.8.4 In the event that the child is considered to be at risk of significant harm, the social work team will follow the SET Child Protection Procedures for a strategy meeting and s.47 investigation, as required.

2.8.5 If the child's placement appears to be or is considered to be unsafe, the Social Worker should seek approval from a Director for Local Delivery (or the manager covering the role), to make arrangements for alternative accommodation to be sought for the child pending the outcome of investigation and inform the IRO.

### 3. Children Living at Home Open to Family Operations

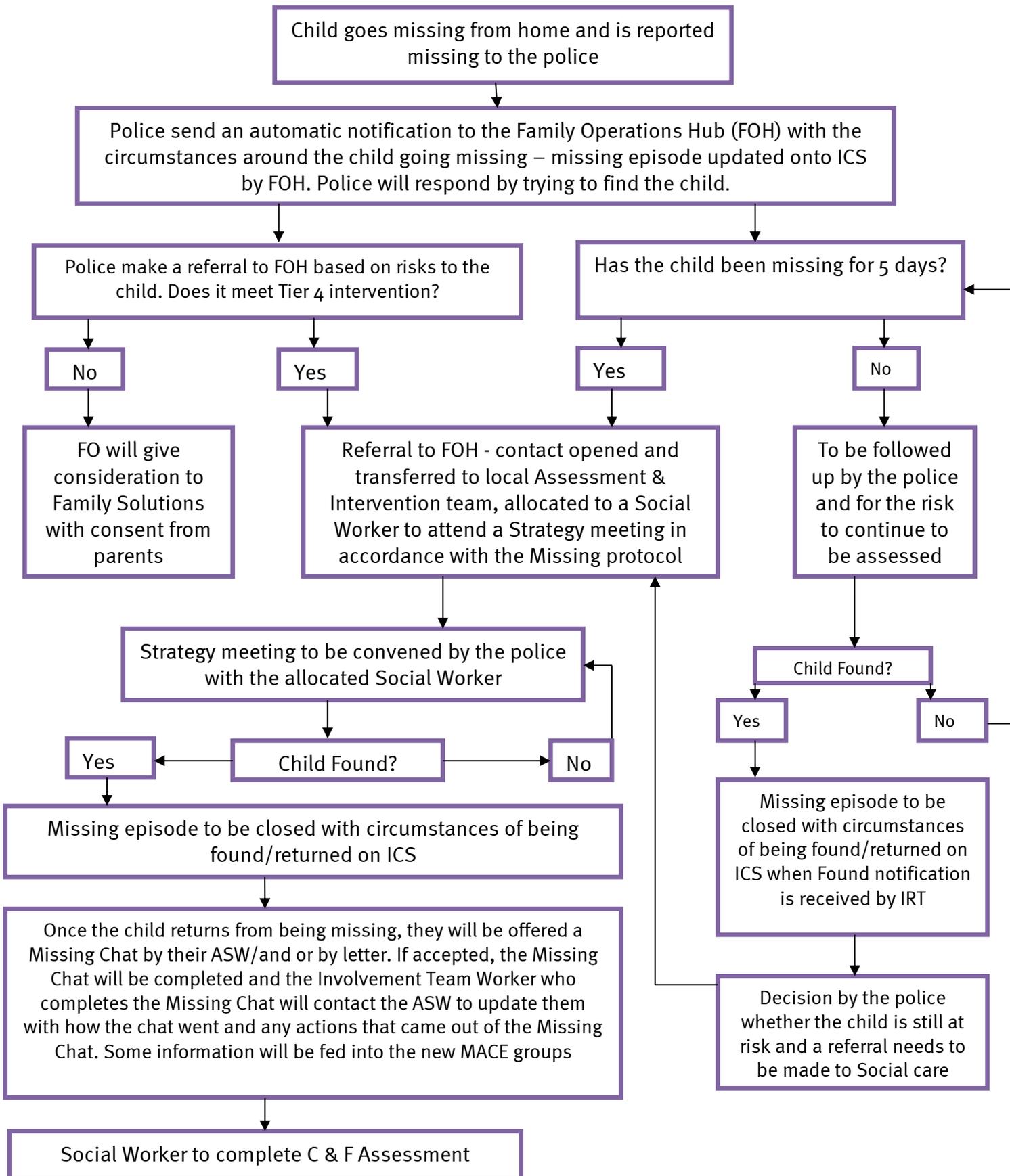
#### Flowchart for responding to a child who has gone missing from home and open to Family Operations



- 3.1.1 The Social Worker needs to (re-)consider the current assessment and plan for the child in light of the information received.
- 3.1.2 A strategy meeting should be arranged to consider a s.47 investigation within 5 days of the child being reported missing or if the circumstances indicate that the child is likely to be at risk of significant harm. This meeting will consider the arrangements for the child's return and the parents must be involved with the plan of this.
- 3.1.3 Regardless of whether a s.47 investigation is deemed necessary, **a professionals' meeting with the police must be considered** in order to look at the current circumstances of the child going missing and to put in place measures to prevent future missing episodes, e.g. developing a trigger plan, sharing information of addresses/associates etc.
- 3.1.4 If the child is subject of a Child Protection Plan, the Social Worker should inform the Child Protection Conference Chair and the Core Group about the child running away.
- 3.1.5 The Child Protection Conference Chair may arrange an early child protection conference to take into account the circumstances in which the child ran away, after the first episode the child is missing.
- 3.1.6 The Social Worker will present an updated analysis of risk(s) to the child to the conference.
- 3.1.7 If the child is subject of a Child in Need Plan and is open to the CIN Reviewing Officer Service, the Social Worker should inform the CINRO. A Child in Need Review should be considered to take into account the circumstances in which the child run away.
- 3.1.8 Consideration will need to be given to a media strategy if the child is or is thought to be likely to be missing for some time. This must always be in discussion with the Director of Local Delivery.

## Missing from Home – Not Open to Family Operations

### Flowchart for responding to a child who has gone missing from home not open to Family Operations



- 3.2 At first contact it is necessary for the Family Operations Hub to establish whether the case should be directed to the Assessment & Intervention Team; the Family Solutions Team; and if it involves persistent absence from school, notify the child's school and Education Welfare Service (EWS), where they are involved.
- 3.2.1 Where there is a concern that a child may be at risk of suffering significant harm, the case will be referred to the Assessment & Intervention Team. The Assessment & Intervention Team will decide whether the case should be managed under s17 or s47 Children Act 1989.
- 3.2.2 Managing school attendance is the responsibility of the school in the first instance. However, if the young person is a persistent absentee (i.e. with less than 85% attendance) the school may refer to the Family Solutions Team or EWS, should the referral criteria is met. If the young person is considered to be at risk of significant harm, the school must contact the Family Operations Hub.
- 3.2.3 Where the police inform Family Operations that they intend to arrange a strategy meeting, this should be attended by a Social Worker and other relevant professionals. A Social Worker from the Assessment & Intervention team will be allocated to attend this strategy meeting in line with SET procedures. The parents must be consulted and involved in the process of finding the child and the arrangements for the child's return.

#### **4. Missing Chats**

- 4.1 Offering a Missing Chat is an important process in ensuring that young people have the opportunity to speak to somebody other than their Social Worker about going missing. This will provide an opportunity to uncover additional information that can help protect the child from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing, or from risk factors in their home (pull/push factors).
- 4.2 All children open to Family Operations or Family Solutions will be offered a Missing Chat by the Missing Children Co-ordinator (MCO). The ASW will be updated during the co-ordination of the Missing Chat.

#### **5. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)**

- 5.1 In respect of UASC, the Social Worker will also need to refer to the process for UASC, who may have been trafficked. However, children who go missing within a week of their arrival in the UK will always be treated as potential victims of trafficking.
- 5.2 Both the child's status as UASC and that they may have been or are known to have been trafficked will be included in their assessment and Care Plan, together with any actions that are to be taken to make them safer.

## 6. Notification to Senior Managers

- 6.1 The Director for Local Delivery or their delegated representative should be notified in respect of a child who is missing, if:
- The missing child is a child in care; or
  - The missing child is at risk of child sexual exploitation; and
  - The Director for Local Delivery has not reviewed the case within the previous three months
- 6.2 The Director for Local Delivery will review progress with the Service manager responsible in supervision.
- 6.3 In exceptional cases, e.g. those involving children from more than one Quadrant, the Executive Director for Family Operations will be notified, by the Director for Local Delivery.
- 6.4 Progress will be tracked at a strategic level, by senior managers on receipt of reports from the Essex Missing Children Partnership.

## 7. Missing and Child Exploitation (MACE 1 and 2) Group

- 7.1 The purpose of these bi-monthly quadrant groups are to understand the picture of CSE and runaways in the Quadrant by:

### Mace 1

- Analysing intelligence and identifying 'hotspots'.
- Learn from individual cases to improve practice across agencies
- Communicate issues and facilitate the co-ordination of resources

### Mace 2

- Identify children and young people who are currently missing from care or home and all highly vulnerable to CSE.
- Share responsibility across all agencies to identify children and young people who are vulnerable and to oversee what plans are currently in place to manage the risk
- Review Safety Plans to ensure that practitioners are responding appropriately to children and young people who are frequently running away from home or care
- Provide the allocated worker with guidance and advice around responding to missing episodes and possible preventative measures that can be put in place
- Identify children and young people who may be at risk of sexual exploitation and to share this information and intelligence with relevant agencies to safeguard the

child or young person through the use of the CSE SET Risk Tool Kit and disruption strategies

- Ensure that a robust multi-agency Safety Plan is put in place for children and young people who are discussed at the panel

## Appendix 1: Definitions

It is important to understand that the terms missing, absent, high and medium risk, have specific meanings in the guidance, so that we communicate effectively with partner agencies.

- **Child:** *'anyone who has not yet reached their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people'...'*
- **Young runaway:** *'a child who has run away from their home of care placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.'*
- **Missing child:** *'a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.'*
- **Looked after child:** *'a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.'* In Essex, Family Operations refers to all of these children as *'children in care'*.
- **Responsible local authority:** *'the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning.'*
- **Host local authority:** *'the local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority's area.'*
- **Care leaver:** *'an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.'*
- **Missing from care:** *'a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (eg, school) and their whereabouts is not known.'*
- **Away from placement without authorisation:** *'a looked after child [child in care] whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.'*

In addition, the Police use the following definitions:

- **Missing:** *'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.'*
- **High Risk:** *'a risk that is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability; or may have been the victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.'*
- **Medium Risk:** *'the risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.'*
- **Absent:** *'A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.'*

Absent children should have their circumstances constantly under review and may later be regarded as missing.

The Police definitions of missing and absent **do not** include those away from placement without authorisation. The arrangements for working with these children are set out in the Protocol.

**Carer:** for the purpose of this document, '*carer*' means the adult with whom the child usually lives e.g. a parent, foster carer, supported lodgings provider or manager of residential home or semi-independent unit.

## **Appendix 2: Missing Documents:**

[..\Missing Prevention Plan Documents\Essex Missing Child Prevention Plan.docx](#)

[..\Missing Prevention Plan Documents\Missing Prevention Plan Guidance.docx](#)

[..\Missing Chat Process Information\Missing Chat - Info for SW's when making an offer to Children and Young People.docx](#)

[..\Missing Chat Process Information\Missing Return Interview \(Missing Chat\) Request Form.docx](#)

## Appendix 3: Services

**NB: This list of services is not an exhaustive list.**

### 1. Helplines and Useful Contacts

ECC CONTACT DETAILS	0845 606 1212
<p>Missing People Helpline – Helpline number to call for advice, support and options if you, or someone you love, goes missing or runs away - it's free, 24 hour and confidential.</p> <p>Young people can also call this number if they have gone missing or are thinking about going missing.</p>	<p>Free phone <u>116 000</u></p>
<p>“Message Home“is a confidential, national 24-hour Freephone Helpline for anyone aged 18 or over who is away from home.</p>	<p>Freephone 0800 700 740, <u><a href="http://www.missingpersons.org">www.missingpersons.org</a></u></p>
<p>“The Runaway Helpline” is a confidential, national, 24-hour Freephone Helpline for anyone aged 17 or under who has run away or been forced to leave home.</p>	<p>Freephone 0808 800 70 70</p>
<p>Re-unite Children abducted from the UK.</p>	<p>Advice line 0116 2556 234 Telephone 0116 2555 345 <u><a href="http://www.reunite.org">www.reunite.org</a></u></p>
<p><u><a href="http://www.missingkids.co.uk">www.missingkids.co.uk</a></u></p>	<p>020 7230 4029</p>
<p>“Parentline” is a UK registered charity offering support to anyone parenting a child.</p>	<p>0808 800 2222 <u><a href="http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk">www.parentlineplus.org.uk</a></u></p>
<p>“International Tracing Service” is the joint initiative of 9 UK organisations, set up to make it easier to find help and advice on finding missing persons, and relatives with whom contact has been lost.</p>	<p>020 736 4747 <u><a href="http://www.look4them.org.uk">www.look4them.org.uk</a></u></p>
<p>Samaritans – This is the telephone helpline that provides free, confidential, emotional support.</p>	<p>08457 90 90 90 <u><a href="http://www.samaritans.org.uk">www.samaritans.org.uk</a></u></p>
<p>Childline is the free helpline for children and young people in the UK. Children and young people can callon <b>0800 1111</b> to talk about any problem –counsellors are always there</p>	<p>0800 1111 <u><a href="http://www.childline.org.uk">www.childline.org.uk</a></u></p>
<p>National Domestic Violence Line” – an organisation offering advice on domestic violence issues.</p>	<p>Freephone 0808 2000 247</p>
<p>The Trafficked Children Toolkit for use in referral to the National Referral Mechanism is produced by the London Safeguarding Children Board</p>	<p><u><a href="http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/files/2010/trafficking/london_safeguarding_trafficked_children_to_ols_mar_2011">www.londonscb.gov.uk/files/2010/trafficking/london_safeguarding_trafficked_children_to_ols_mar_2011</a></u></p>
<p>NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre (provides advice to professionals)</p>	<p>0808 800 5000 (09.30-16.30 Mon-Fri) <u><a href="mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk">help@nspcc.org.uk</a></u> <u><a href="http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/ctail/ctail_wda84866">www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/ctail/ctail_wda84866</a></u></p>



## Appendix 4: Recording Runaway Children on ICS

### Definitions – from the DfE January 2014 guidance:

**Young Runaway** – a child who has run away from their home or care placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.

#### **Child has run away from care:**

- **missing from care:** a child in care who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts is not known
- **away from placement without authorisation:** a child in care whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been **notified to the local authority or the police**

#### **Child has run away from home:**

- **missing from home** - a child other than a looked after child who is not at their home or the place they are expected to be (eg, school) and their whereabouts is not known.
- **absent from home without authorisation** - a child other than a looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their home or place they are expected to be and the parent/guardian has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police

Recording is **not only** for children in care, **but for ALL** cases of a runaway child (even cases without an open referral).

**Person Reported Missing or Away/Absent – red if contacts are not recorded**

	Child in Care		Not in Care		Closed or Not Known
Protocol Process	Missing	Away	Missing	Absent	Missing or Away
<b>Contact Record</b>	●				If required a Contact and Referral is completed and passed to A&I Team Follow relevant Missing or Absent process as required
Case Note	●	●	●	●	●
Additional Tab – Missing or Away Generates an Alert to the ACW	<b>Auto fills from the Contact</b>	●	●	●	All notifications, regardless of whether or not a Contact and Referral has been completed
SET Risk Assessment	●	●	●		
<b>Location Unknown Process</b>	●				
Strategy Discussion if Missing for 5 days	●		●		●

**Child Missing or Away Absent status changes**

	Child in Care		Not in Care		Closed or Not Known
Protocol Process	Missing	Away	Missing	Absent	Missing or Away
Absent/Away Child now deemed to be Missing		End the Away Status on Additional tab and record the new Missing Status Follow Missing Process		End the Absent Status on Additional tab and record the new Missing Status – Follow Missing process	
Missing Child now deemed to be Away/Absent	End the Missing Status on Additional tab and record the new Away Status Follow Away Process		End the Missing Status on Additional tab and record the new Absent Status - Follow Absent process		

**Person Found**

	Child in Care		Not in Care		Closed or Not Known
Protocol Process	Missing	Away	Missing	Absent	Missing or Absent
Case Note	●	●	●	●	●
Update Missing/Absent Status	From Missing CLA task	On the Additional tab			
Safe & Well Check – Case Note	●	●	●	●	
Missing or Absent from Care or Home - Return Interview Record	●		●		
Referral for Independent Interview if required	●		●		



Protocol Recording Chart.docx