MISSING FROM CARE/HOME POLICY

1. **Introduction**
   1. Omega Care Group believes that safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in our care is paramount to ensuring we create an environment that allows our young people to grow, feel safe and valued as well as feeling that they are listened to and that their wishes/feelings are at the forefront of our care and support.
2. **External Guidance and Legislation relevant to this policy is as follows:**
   1. Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care 2014
   2. The Children Act 2004
   3. Children Regulation 2015 (Updated 2017)
   4. Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)
3. **Clarification of Terms used in this guidance:**
   1. Definition of Missing

* The term ‘missing’ refers to a child or young person (up to the age of 18) whose whereabouts are not known. Incidences of missing should always be reported to the police. Children whose whereabouts are known and are at risk should also be reported as missing to the police.
* If the missing child/young person is a Looked After Child, then the incident should also be reported to the allocated Social Worker or, if out of hours, the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) within the borough that has placed the child.
  1. **Definition of Absent**
* Absent refers to a child or young person (up to the age of 18) who is not at a place where they are expected or required to be but it is known where they are. Where the absence relates to a Looked After Child, this should be reported in the first instance to the allocated Social Worker for the child/young person concerned, or if the absence occurs out of hours, it should be reported to the EDT. The absence should be risk assessed by the allocated Social Worker or EDT and if at any point there are concerns for the safeguarding of the child/young person, the risk should be escalated to the police.

1. **Police definitions**
   1. Since April 2013 police forces have been rolling out new definitions of ‘missing’ and ‘absent’ in relation to children reported as missing to the police. These are:

* *Missing: anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be subject to crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another; and*
* *Absent: a person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.*
* *The police classification of a person as ‘missing’ or ‘absent’ will be based on on-going risk assessment. Not that ‘absent’ within this definition would not include those defined as ‘away from placement without authorisation’ above: a child whose whereabouts are known would not be treated as either ‘missing’ or ‘absent’ under the police d*efinitions.

1. **External Agencies Roles and Responsibilities:** 
   1. Local Authorities:

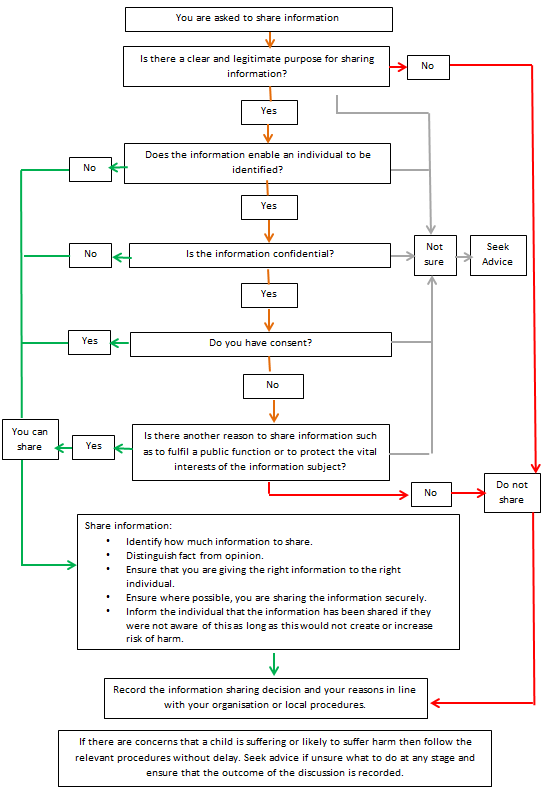
* They should have a named senior children’s services manager as responsible for monitoring policies and performance relating to children who go missing from home or care. The responsible manager should look beyond this guidance to understand the risks and issues facing children missing from home or care and to review best practice in dealing with the issue.
  1. **Safeguarding Partners:**
* Safeguarding Partners will give consideration to the safeguarding risks and issues associated with children missing from home or care. To do this, they will need to see that partners from children’s social are, police, health, education and other services work effectively together to prevent children from going missing and to act when they do go missing.
* They ensure that the local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocol is adequate and up to date.
* They should receive and scrutinise regular reports from the local authority analysing data on children missing from home and from care.
* They should review analysis of return interviews
* They should also review regular reports from children’s homes used by the local authority or within the local authority area on the effectiveness of their measures to prevent children from going missing.

1. **Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) Protocol:**

* This is an agreement of protocol between local authorities, local police and other partners for dealing with children who run away or go missing in their area. It is good practice for each partner to have agreed protocols with neighbouring authorities or administrators.
* The protocols are agreed and reviewed regularly with all agencies and be scrutinised by Safeguarding Partners.

1. **Omega Care Group, as a provider the culture will encourage:** 
   1. An environment that children are less likely to abscond, become missing or absent themselves without consent where they feel secure and safe, able to express their feelings and wishes, make appropriate choices and develop positive relationships with the staff and their peers, which are free from bullying.
   2. Children also should have a clear understanding of expectations, upon them, that their personal plans are being progressed, that they have a positive future and that staff are working enthusiastically to advise, support and listen to them.
   3. They should have clear understanding of the routines of the home and the house rules; to this end they should know whether it is acceptable to leave the home without permission or consent and they should be advised and informed of the risks that are presented to them if they become missing, abscond or absent themselves, and agencies that may be able to help them, such as Children’s Commissioner or Childline if they want the additional support and of the consequences that their actions have.
   4. Should homes experience high levels of absence, or incidents of children being missing, managers should ‘take stock’ – they should undertake a formal review of the culture and strategies being used in the home and take steps to reduce the incidents.
   5. The home will also:
      * Maintain currency in knowledge of safeguarding procedures
      * Maintain effective multi agency relations to support information sharing
      * Work to reduce factors relating to children going missing from care
      * Provide effective and early intervention and prevention strategies to help reduce the potential of repeat cases;
      * Be aware of the name of the lead Safeguarding Partners
      * To embed early intervention to reduce missing from care and risk of missing from care
      * Utilise solution focussed approach to address factors which may trigger MFC
      * Ensure a Designated Safeguarding Lead within Omega Care Group
      * Ensure that all new employees receive safeguarding training that explains the potential vulnerability of all categories of missing children and the procedures to follow.
2. **Omega Care Group believes that:**
   1. The welfare and wellbeing of the child or young person is paramount, as expressed in the Children’s Act 1989 and we adhere to this in relation to all the work we do and in all decisions we take.
   2. All children and young people have the right to a safe and supportive home environment.
   3. All children and young people have the right to equal protection from all types of harm and/or abuse.
   4. That this right is an absolute, and is regardless of sexual identity, sexual orientation, racial heritage, belief system, disability, or socioeconomic background. This includes all protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010.
   5. Some children and young people have additional vulnerabilities as a result of the impact of past experiences, levels of dependency, communication needs or other issues.
   6. All children and young people should be valued, respected and their voice heard.
   7. Working in partnership is essential in promoting the welfare and wellbeing of each young person.
3. **Risk Assessments, Monitoring and Notifications:** 
   1. Having established the child is absent or missing and assessment should be carried out to determine the level of risk that is posed to the child i.e. if the risk is ‘Low’, ‘Medium’ or ‘High’ Risk.

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| Note: Missing children/young people will be classified by the police as either ‘Missing’ or ‘Absent’ after a risk assessment has been carried out by police call handlers-please be aware that this does not mean that local procedures or notifications are in anyway altered. Please remember, in order to promote the safety of the absent/missing person, you are required to support the police call handlers by offering them all the information that you have available; for more detail see: Police Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons (2013). |



**Prolonged Periods of Absence or Being Missing**

* 1. 24 hours or on the first working day after the child has been reported missing/absent, the Line Manager for the home must be notified.
  2. Also, the home should consult/update the Police and social worker/YOT Worker every day for the first 7 days, or as new information is available, to review the Strategies that can be adopted to find/return the child.
  3. After 72 hours, the Police will notify the National Missing Persons Bureau.
  4. If the child is still absent after 7 days, the Designated Manager (Absence) and child’s Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) must be notified/consulted to decide what actions to take. This may include:
     + The convening of a Strategy Discussion;
     + Police of their powers to recover the child, for example, placing a child in Police Protection.
     + An application for a Recovery Order.
     + An application for a Secure Accommodation Order
     + The use of publicity.
  5. Children who repeatedly go missing this is not seen as normal pattern of behaviour and could be indicators of the following:
     + Child Sexual Exploitation
     + Child Criminal Exploitation

1. **Children Residential Procedure**

**Planning and Prevention:**

* 1. Prior to any placement a written Placement Information Record (PIR) should be completed which outlines
  2. Child’s Needs:
     + Strategies to maintain positive routines
     + How they will be supported to reach their full potential
     + Every looked after child will also have a care plan which is reviewed regularly in conjunction with the PIR.
     + Both documents must highlight measures in place to prevent the child/young person running away from home.
     + The Care Plan is a full assessment of the child current and future needs. It is a key document in outlining what is in place to minimise risk, what services that are required for the management and support for missing, how return interviews will be carried out and the pathway to inform the social worker. The care plan further outlines how the child needs and wishes have been taken into account, the purpose of care, notes of key factors likely to cause MFC.
  3. The Home Manager is responsible for outlining Omega Care Group response and action plan through:
     + Residential Care Plan
     + MFC Risk Assessment
     + MFC Child/YP Protocol
  4. Omega Care Group operates a MFC tracker which highlights correlation of locations, dates, times and other factors. Such correlation will be used to develop knowledge around repeated MFC and then used to develop strategies to support a reduction of MFC
  5. Where there are child protection concerns relating to a child and/or where the child has gone missing from the placement or from any previous placement, the Placement Plan must include information agreed between the local authority and the placement provider about the day-to-day arrangements put in place to keep the child safe.
  6. The child’s Looked After Review should be brought forward in the following circumstance:
     + Where the child is, or has been persistently absent from the placement;
     + Where the Home, parents or area authority are concerned that the child is at risk of harm;
     + Where the child so requests, unless the Independent Reviewing Officer considers that the review is not justified.
     + At the request of the child, or where there are concerns about a child who frequently becomes absent or missing, the home’s manager should consider raising concerns with the Child’s Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) or arranging a meeting between the child and the placing authority to consider the reasons for the child going missing and agree strategies to reduce the risk.
     + It is advisable that a Police ‘Misper’ form should be completed for all children, at the point of admission. The Child’s Placement Plan should be reviewed regularly and after any absence.

**Leaving without consent**

* + - If a child indicates that they intend to leave the home without consent, staff should remain aware that a child might want a staff member to stop them or at least give them a good excuse for not going. However, staff are responsible for taking all reasonable steps to prevent children from leaving, especially if it will result in the child or others being placed at risk.
    - As a last resort, this can include the use of Physical Interventions, if this is immediately necessary to prevent significant harm or serious damage to property. However, the use of such interventions may only be used as a last resort, if they are immediately necessary and the harm or damage to property is likely in the predictable future; in any case, the restrictions or interventions must be proportional and must be conforming with Restrictive Physical Intervention Procedure. Personnel must also consider the behaviour management plans or individual Placement plans for individual children, which may state that specific strategies must be used.

**Immediate Actions of staff if a Young Person is Absent or Missing**

* + - If it is safe to do so, staff should carry out enquiries locally and with the other young people within the home as to the whereabouts of the young person to establish that s/he is absent. This should include a thorough search of the home/garden/outbuildings and vehicles and may include contacting people who know the young person and undertaking a search of the local area if safe to do so.
    - Searches beyond the local vicinity may only be undertaken with the approval of the manager.
    - If staff are satisfied that the young person is absent, or missing but are aware or suspect the whereabouts of a young person, they should consult a manager with a view to recovering the young person. This may include attempting to communicate with the young person on his/her mobile phone, searching for the young person and/or obtaining information from others about the possible whereabouts of the young person.

**Recovering the Young Person**

* 1. Actions taken to recover the young person and return them to the home must focus on promoting the young person’s welfare and must take account of their care or legal status, age, understanding and level of risk posed to the young person or others. If young people are found but refuse to return to the home, staff must consult the manager (on-call if out of hours) who should consult the child’s social worker (Emergency Duty Team if out of hours) or, in an emergency/where the young person or others are seriously at risk, call the Police. The use of physical interventions, such as restraint should not be used unless there is an immediate risk of significant harm, serious damage to property, as a last resort and if staff are confident that such interventions will work/de-escalate the situation and make the young person safe; if this outcome is not likely, they should withdraw and immediately consult their manager or the Police.

**Children returning home**

* + - If a child’s whereabouts become known, staff should decide to consult the Social Worker/YOT Worker and Police about the most appropriate way to return to the Child to the home or care.
    - Upon their return the Police, Social Worker/YOT Worker and others notified of the absence must be informed when the child returns.
    - The child must be welcomed back and must have the opportunity to talk about their reasons for leaving.
    - At the request of the child or where there are concerns about a child who frequently becomes missing or absent, the home’s manager should consider arranging a meeting between the child and the placing authority to consider the reasons f or the child going missing.
    - If the social worker is unable to see the child, an independent professional or the manager/supervisor of the home may meet the child on the social worker’s behalf.
    - Police may wish to carry out a ‘Safe and Well’ check, to check for any indications that the Child has suffered harm; where and whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them. Nevertheless, where the child goes missing frequently, the Police are unlikely to see them every time they return. However, a reasonable decision will be taken with regard to the frequency of such checks.
    - An Independent Return Interview should be carried out by an independent professional or a social worker. Children sometimes need to build up trust with a person before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they ran away.
    - The person conducting the interview should usually be independent of the child’s placement and of the responsible local authority. An exception maybe where a child has a strong relationship with a carer or social worker and has expressed a preference to talk to them, rather than an independent person, about the reasons they went missing. The child should be offered the option of speaking to an independent representative or advocate.

**Recording, Notifications and Review**

* 1. Throughout the missing process staff must update the following records
  2. Complete all Omega Care documentation – update as appropriate
  3. A chronology of the Missing from Care episode should be created. This should include date and time, specific concerns (e.g. CSE, CCE), any contact with young person made/attempted, any updated and details of the young person’s Return to Home.
  4. The chronology should be accurately maintained until the Return to Home of the young person
  5. Missing from care risk assessment updated
  6. Home Manager to submit MFC template to hosting authority if the child is from another borough
  7. Staff will maintain and update absence records and the Home Manager will notify the Placing Authority
  8. The record will include actions by employees/circumstances of the child’s return/any reasons given by the child for the absence/any action taken in light of those reasons.

**Notifications**

* 1. When the child returns, all those notified of the absence must be informed of their return.
  2. If the child was involved in sexual exploitation, the Regulatory Authority must be notified
  3. It there is a pattern of persistent incidents or the circumstances gave rise for serious concern, the Home’s Manager must notify the Child’s Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

**Review:**

* 1. If a child is, or has been, persistently absent without authority from the Home and/or the Manager considers that the child is at risk of harm, the Manager will ask the placing authority to review the child’s Care Plan. The Manager will consult the Child’s Social Worker/YOT Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) with a view to reviewing the Care Plan.
  2. If it is decided not to review the Care Plan, the Home’s Manager should still review the Placement Plan.

1. **Missing from Home: Supported Accommodation Independent Living 16 plus**
   1. **Clarification of Terms**

***A Missing Person is defined as:*** Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established

***An Authorised Absence is defined as:*** Where the young person’s social worker has undertaken a Risk Assessment process and determined that it is safe and appropriate for that young person to remain overnight at a specific, agreed address. The social worker would agree the parameters of any authorised absence with the young person and the provision. Any such determination must be in writing and maintained on the young person’s file.

***Away from placement without authority:* *(this should only require contact from professionals with social worker* *or EDT unless a known risk is present*)** When a young person provides an address of where they will remain overnight and this address has not been Risk Assessed or approved by their social worker and/or where a young person has been authorised a set amount of overnight stays at an address and exceeds these parameters.

***Concern for Safety:*** A reporting procedure used to inform police via 101 that although we are aware of the young person’s location and they are away from placement without authority we do have concerns for their safety ***(E.G – we could hear an altercation in the background during telephone call with young person) – this does not require a missing report to be filed.***

**A Missing is defined as** the whereabouts of the young person cannot be established

* When young people are away from the home, welfare checks should commence at a time you would expect to see them but they have not arrived ( If no parameters for an expected time then this may begin at 21:30 hours ) with the reporting process initiated where appropriate at 23:30.
* This may be mitigated when, for example, staff have contact with the young person and are informed that a bus has been missed and that the individual is returning but will be late. In this instance, a return time would be agreed and ongoing contact maintained until arrival back at the provision. If the young person fails to return at this time and/or contact cannot be re-established they should then be reported as Missing.

**Before reporting a young person as Missing from Home:**

* Ensure young person is not on site by carrying out physical checks of the building and surrounding areas such as the shed, garage, gardens etc.
* Staff should undertake standard welfare checks by telephone from 21:30 onwards.
* If contact had been established with the young person at any point before failure of return to placement a pre-UAFH form should be completed and fully risk assessed.
* If the young person is located through such enquiries, they should not be reported as missing to the police unless there are significant safety issues with the person being there.
* If contact cannot be established, staff should attempt to locate the young person using the individual’s ‘contacts file.’ This should include phone numbers for any authorised addresses, relevant family members, friends and hospitals located in home location or known locations of association.
* If after undertaking the above, the young person remains out of contact and has not returned to the provision, they should be reported as Missing from Home.

**Reporting a young person as Missing from Home**

**Merseyside:**

1. Complete Switch Egress for Missing Person Report - e-mail to Merseyside police at [MFC@merseyside.pnn.police.uk](mailto:MFC@merseyside.pnn.police.uk) using Egress encryption.
2. Staff should receive a confirmation e-mail from the force contact centre within 30 minutes. This will include an incident log number.
3. If confirmation e-mail is not received within 30 minutes, call 101 - log call and name of PC taking the call.
4. On receipt of incident log number, contact relevant authority Out of Hours Emergency Duty team (EDT). Pass on all known details, concerns and the log number of the incident. Record the name of the person taking the report and time of call.
5. Complete all Omega Care Group documentation (Appendix H) - update as appropriate.
6. A chronology of the Missing from Care episode should be created. This should include date and time, specific concerns (e.g. CSE), any contact with young person made/attempted, any updates and details of the young person’s return to home.
7. The chronology should be accurately maintained until the return to home of the young person.

Knowsley Local Authority require additional documentation such as a Liaison Form which acts as a Notification of LAC Relevant Information. This is to be used for young people placed by Knowsley local authority or placed out of borough in Knowsley. Each individual home would need to check with the hosting authority and placing authority regarding requirements.

**Cheshire:**

* If reporting a young person as missing in Cheshire then staff should call 101 to log this and take a log and collar number from police.
* On the return of the young person staff should dial 101 to alert police of the young person’s return.
* Relevant EDT should then be called, and all information passed on to them and the social worker should be notified via email and RTH interview requested.
* Cheshire police do not use Switch Egress.

**Omega Care Group Documentation MFH**

* Appendix H Chronology
* Safeguarding Chronology – if appropriate
* Liaison Form – Knowsley only
* YP recording sheet – MFH section & RTH interview requested

**If there is any information to suggest that the young person is at risk of immediate harm (e.g. suicide, immediate risk of Child Sexual Exploitation, imminent assault) do not follow the above. Staff should telephone 999 immediately and provide all details and information to the emergency services.**

**Return to Home**

1. Confirm wellbeing of the young person.
2. Address any needs or concerns - this may be medical, support or engagement with emergency services.
3. Telephone 101 to inform Merseyside Police of return to home - ask for new log number (close)
4. Contact Out of Hours Duty Team – record time and name of individual taking report.
5. Confirm with e-mail to social worker.
6. Complete relevant documentation. Close chronology.
7. If a liaison form has been used, notification of the young person’s return should be sent on form 1b (e-mail as above).
8. Merseyside police should undertake a ‘Safe and Well’ check of the young person on their return. This will include asking them where they have been, are they well etc.
9. Young people should be offered a Return to Home Interview by an independent body within 72 hours of their return from a Missing from Home episode. This should be arranged through the relevant placing authority and MUST be requested by Omega staff when contacting relevant authority informing of return.

**Reporting a young person away from placement without authority:**

If the young person informs staff that they do not intend to return to the home overnight, and provide an address that they state they will be staying at which has not been authorised by their social worker and therefore not risk assessed, staff should:

1. Encourage the young person to return
2. Inform them that, this constitutes an Absence without authorisation and as such will have to be reported to social worker.
3. Open a pre-UAFH assessment
4. Take full details, including any available phone number and name for the address given and ask to speak with an appropriate adult.
5. Complete checks on address (google), call back telephone numbers given to validate.
6. If there is a known risk present report to 101 as a concern for safety and obtain log number, for immediate danger or risk to life call 999.
7. On receipt of log number, contact appropriate Out of Hours Team (EDT). Pass on all details, contact details and the police log number. Record the name of the person taking the call and the time of the call.
8. Complete all Omega Care Group documentation - update as is appropriate
9. A chronology of the absence without authorisation episode should be created including; date and time informed, any address and contact details given, specific concerns, any telephone calls or updates and details of the young person’s Return to Home.
10. The chronology should be accurately maintained until the young person Returns to Home

If the young person has been placed by, or has been placed in the borough of Knowsley a liaison form (1a) (Notification of LAC Relevant Information) should be completed and sent to:[5bp-tr.knowsleyLAChealthteam@nhs.net](mailto:5bp-tr.knowsleyLAChealthteam@nhs.net) and the young person’s social worker.

**Return to Home**

Once a child has returned to the home staff must:

1. Confirm wellbeing of the young person
2. Address any needs or concerns
3. Telephone 101 inform Merseyside Police of young person’s Return to Home-obtain new log number.
4. Contact relevant Out of Hours Duty Team – inform of return and circumstances. Record time and name of individual taking the report.
5. E-mail young person’s social worker (request RTH visit)
6. Complete relevant documentation. Close chronology.
7. If a liaison form has been used, notification of the young person’s return should be sent on form 1b.

Police should undertake a ‘Safe and Well ‘check of the young person on their return to home.

**Authorised Absences**

A young person may have an address (or addresses) authorised by their social worker as a place that they may remain in overnight. This would follow a Risk Assessment undertaken by the social worker and would reflect the young person’s specific and individual circumstances. Any determination made by the social worker must be recorded and maintained within the young person’s file-this should include the agreed parameters of the stay e.g. 2 nights a week.

**If the young person remains overnight at an Authorised Address staff should:**

1. Contact the young person to confirm details of their stay.
2. Contact the person responsible (an identified adult) at the authorised address to confirm the details, and that the young person will remain at the address overnight.
3. E-mail the young person’s social worker with details of the absence.
4. Complete all documentation.
5. Record the young person’s Return to Home on their return.
6. E-mail the young person’s social worker of their return.
7. If the young person states that they intend to remain at the authorised address for several nights within any one week, exceeding those agreed and recorded with the social worker, staff should:
8. Inform the young person that they are not authorised to remain at that address for more than the prescribed number of nights and should return to the provision.
9. If the young person remains adamant, contact the person responsible (the identified adult) and explain the situation.
10. Ensure that all parties understand that if the young person exceeds the authorised number of nights, the young person will be reported as being absent without authorisation.
11. If the young person remains overnight, follow the procedure for: **Reporting a young person as away from placement without authority.**
12. Contact the young person’s social worker.

**Note:**

* Staff should not visit any unauthorised addresses given by a young person as an address that they will be staying at. These have not been subject to a Risk Assessment by social care and Merseyside Police, and therefore cannot be identified as a safe address.
* 16 Plus settings is primarily based on lone working. This does not permit the visitation of authorised addresses by staff members and any such visit should be undertaken by the (corporate parent) designated practitioner (social worker)
* Individual provision should retain all relevant procedures and contact details for the local authorities placing young people with them.