

Children Missing from Care, Home and Education

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1. Introduction and Definitions

Introduction

Children running away and going missing from care is a central issue for statutory agencies on the Isle of Man and although there are no research findings on the Island, it is estimated in the UK that 25% of children who go missing are likely to suffer significant harm.

There are specific concerns about the links between children running away and the risk of criminal and sexual exploitation, particularly Looked after Children who go missing from their placements. Care Leavers are also known to be particularly vulnerable and are likely to be at risk of significant harm when they go missing.

The reason why children run away and go missing varies and can often be complex and should be considered within the context of their home or care experiences. Circumstances are different for each child and therefore individual risk assessments that are reviewed regularly and updated are seen as a critical part of planning to prevent missing episodes and provide an understanding of the child's risks, vulnerability and resilience.

Definitions

The definitions used on the Isle of Man for children who go missing from their home or placements are set out as follows:

- **Child:** anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. The term Child/Children and young people is used throughout this guidance to refer to anyone under the age of 18;
- **Missing child:** a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers;
- **Looked after child:** refers to children accommodated under Section 25 of the Children and Young Person's Act 2001. This also includes children subject to Care Orders and Interim Care Orders (Section 31 of the Children and Young Person's Act 2001) or children on remand and children subject to a Supervision Order with a residence requirement;
- **Off island Placement:** when a child or young person is placed off island outside the jurisdiction of the Isle of Man, for example residing in a specialist placement within the UK;
- **Care leaver:** a young person who has been subject to care arrangements who has moved from their foster or residential placement to live independently as defined by the Children and Young Person's Act 2001;
- **Missing from care:** a looked after child who is not at their place of residence or the place they are expected to be (e.g., school) and their whereabouts is unknown and a risk assessment determines a level of risk;
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- **Missing –** anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be the subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another; and
- **Absent:** a looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or a place they are expected to be and it is determined that there is no apparent risk.
- **Away from placement without authority –** do we have this on IOM

2. Specific Risks when Children and Young People go Missing

Going missing is a significant risk factor in relation to sexual and criminal exploitation (drawn into offending behaviour), trafficking, grooming, radicalisation and becoming homeless:

- A child may go missing because they are being exploited;
- A child or young person's risk of being exploited may increase because they are missing and they are associating with other's who may seek to involve them in exploitation;
- The risk may further increase whilst they are missing because the protective factors of family or care are not available to them.

Other risks include:

Being drawn into offending behaviour

Children who go missing from care, home and education also need safeguarding against the risk of being drawn into offending behaviour by gangs or criminal groups, such as county lines where gangs and organised criminal networks are likely to exploit children to move and store drugs and money, often using coercion, intimidation, violence and weapons. As with sexual exploitation there is a strong link between children going missing and the risk of criminal exploitation.

Trafficking

Trafficked children are at risk of going missing, as are unaccompanied or asylum-seeking children who may potentially be at risk of being sexually or criminally exploited. If a child is accommodated and is vulnerable due to the reasons outlined above then the assessment that informs the care plan must establish:

- Relevant details of the child's background before they came to the Isle of Man; and
- Why they came to the island.

There needs to be a clear analysis of the level of vulnerability of a child who has been trafficked or otherwise.

Grooming

Many children and young people don't understand that they have been groomed, or understand what has happened to them is abuse. Children and young people who are missing are more vulnerable to being groomed and may also go missing as a result of being groomed.

Homeless 16 / 17 year olds

When a 16/17 year old young person runs away or goes missing they are no less vulnerable than younger children and are equally at risk, particularly of sexual exploitation or involvement with gangs.

When a young person presents as homeless, initially the Children and Families Division should assess the current situation to establish whether there is actual or a risk of significant harm. Their needs will be assessed the same as they would for any other child.

Section 23 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2001 require the functions of the Children and Families Division to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Where the assessment of a young person who is presenting as homeless indicates that they are in need or at risk of significant harm then arrangements should be made to ensure they are sufficiently safeguarded.

3. Children Missing from Home

When a child or young person is reported as missing by either their parent or carer/relative, a coordinated response is required by all those involved to conduct a search, especially as there are specific concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual and criminal exploitation.

If it comes to the attention of any agency or organisation that a child or young person is missing, they must advise the parent/carer of their need to report this matter to the Police. They also need to inform the parent/carer of the agency's duty to ensure a report is made to the Police.

When a child is located and returns home to their family or carers it is important that they are seen as soon as possible by a police officer to ensure they are safe and well. A consistent and coherent response must be given to the child on their return to offer reassurance.

It is important that parents and carers are supported appropriately to understand the risks associated to their child running away and for a safety plan to be created to attempt to prevent further missing episodes.

Children within this group may be:

- Those who are not known to targeted services, although it is likely they will be known to a universal service, for example their GP;
- Children who are receiving support from a targeted service, for example a child or young person assessed as requiring a 'Child with Complex Needs

Plan' who is an open case to the Children and Families Division or who is supported by the Early Help service;

- Children and young people who are subject to Child Protection Planning;
- Children who, because of their age or learning difficulties/disabilities become separated from their parent or carer (lost) where the parent/carer and child want to be found.
- Children and young people who for no reason fail to return home when their parent or carer expect them to do so.

Professionals across all organisations should always consider potential safeguarding issues surrounding children who may either be lost or missing, particularly if episodes of going missing increases. A referral should be made to the Initial Response Team, Children and Families Division if the child or young person is not already known to targeted services.

If it is suspected or known that the child or young person is the victim of grooming, being exploited or the victim of radicalisation, has been trafficked or at risk of being trafficked then the Police and Children and Families Division must be informed without delay whether or not the child or young person is an open case to Children and Families Division.

Referrals should be made according to the [Referrals Procedure](#).

Because of the risks associated to children and young people who run away and go missing, all professionals should be alert and make every effort to establish whether a child or young person is being sexually or criminally exploited or there are other known risks, particularly where there are frequent missing episodes. For example, a child or young person may be living at home but subject to a Child with Complex Needs plan or Child Protection Planning and already vulnerable due to other risk factors. Consideration must be given to:

- Discussing the child or young person within the Daily Exploitation Meeting and;
- Completing the CEAM (risk assessment) to determine the level of risk

Refer to the : [Procedural Protocol for Children and Young People who are at risk of or experiencing exploitation](#)

4. Children Missing from Education

If a member of the school/educational establishment/college staff becomes aware that a child has run away or gone missing, they should in the first instance establish with the parent or carer what has happened before formally reporting the child missing to the Police and alerting Children and Families Division if it is known that a child is known to that service.

5. Children Missing from Care and Care Leavers

Looked after children are particularly vulnerable when they go missing. Children and Families Division have a duty to place looked after children in the most appropriate placements to safeguard and minimise the risk of running away.

- The care and placement plan should include details of arrangements that should be in place to keep children safe and minimise the risk of the child or young person going missing from their placement. Where a child already has an established pattern of going missing, the care plan should include a strategy to keep the child safe and minimise the likelihood of future episodes. This should be fully discussed with the child, parent and carers;
- It is important to have a clear safety plan in place with practitioners having a clear understanding of what the associated risks are as determined by the risk assessment. The level of concern, risks and the safety plan should be shared with the child or young person and parent where it is safe or appropriate to do so;
- Risk assessments should be regularly reviewed and updated after every missing incident;
- Designated health and education professionals should always be informed of children missing from care and should be included in any strategy discussions convened in response to a missing episode.
- When a child who is looked after is placed off island the social worker on the Isle of Man is responsible for ensuring they have access to support and any services they need in advance of the placement being made.
- Should a child or young person who is placed off island go missing it is essential that missing from care protocol is followed in the area where they are placed. It is essential that there is close liaison between the police and professionals with a notification process in place for any missing episodes between the placement and the social worker on the Isle of Man.
- Independent Reviewing Officers should always be informed about any missing/absent episodes and should address this during statutory reviews.

Care Leavers

The Isle of Man does not have legislation which mandates service provision for children who have been in care after they have reached 18 years old. However, internal procedures used by Children and Families Division relating to care leavers are based on best practice from the UK which are used as a guide when planning for young people.

It is important that the case manager for the young person ensures the pathway plan clearly sets out when a young person is particularly vulnerable to going

missing, exploitation, trafficking or radicalisation. Support should be put in place to assist young people to live in a safe environment and develop skills to manage their independence and increase resilience to minimise risks associated to exploitation etc.

See [Leaving Care Procedure for additional information: Isleofmanchildchildcare.proceduresonline.com](https://isleofmanchildchildcare.proceduresonline.com).

6. Notifying the Police

The Isle of Man Constabulary

The police classification of a person as ‘missing’ or ‘absent’ will be based on an on-going risk assessment. Note that ‘absent’ within this definition would not include those defined as away from placement with authorisation” above; a child whose whereabouts are known would not be treated as either ‘missing’ or ‘absent’ under police definitions. (Police guidance issued by ACPO April 2013)The Isle of Man Constabulary are the lead agency for investigating the whereabouts and finding missing children and young people.

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 ‘absent’ the details will be recorded by the police who will also agree review times and any on-going actions with child’s family, carer or responsible local authority.). The case will remain the subject of constant review particularly in the light of new information and changes in circumstances.

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 missing child incident would be prioritised as ‘*medium risk*’ where the risk posed; Is likely to place the subject in danger or
- They are a threat to themselves or others.

This category requires an active and measured response by police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting. This

will involve a proactive investigation and search in accordance with the circumstances to locate the missing child as soon as possible.

It is important that professionals or others reporting a child missing to the police do not make the judgement themselves as to whether the child is missing or absent. This decision will be made by the police based on the information provided and their assessment of the risk.

When a child goes missing, parents, foster carers, residential homes and those with Parental Responsibility are expected to undertake measures to locate the missing child or young person where it is safe for them to do so. Anyone else who has care of the child, including school, should also take reasonable steps to locate the child or young person. It is important not to delay reporting the matter to the police however the following actions should be undertaken before the child or young person is formally reported as missing:

- Search the bedroom or any places where the child or young person could be;
- Contact friends and relatives;
- Visit known places where the child or young person goes.

The police will require consent of the person with Parental Responsibility for a photograph to be used in the missing person investigation.

Information required by the police to assist in locating and returning the child to a safe environment is as follows:

- The Child's name, date of birth and status;
- When and where they went missing;
- Who (if anyone) did they go missing with;
- What the child was wearing
- Description – recent photograph
- Medical history if relevant
- Time and location last seen;
- Circumstances around why they went missing
- Details of family, friends and associates.

If there is any suspicion that the child or young person is to be or has been removed from the Isle of Man then urgent legal advice will need to be sought to ensure appropriate safeguarding measures are in place.

7. Protective Action when a child goes missing from Care

Children and Families Division are at all times responsible for children and young people in their care. This responsibility remains after they have reported the child or young person missing. It is important that all significant information pertaining to the child or young person such as, their full name, description, time and location last seen etc. is made clear to the police officer when the missing report is made.

The parents or carers with Parental Responsibility must be informed that their child is missing and consent from them will be required if the Police and Children's Services agree that a Social Media appeal should be released.

When the child or young person is subject to an Interim or Full Care Order and there is shared Parental Responsibility then good practice determines that consent should still be sought from a parent and from a Senior Manager before a Social Media appeal is made.

Because there is such a strong link between children going missing and the risk of exploitation, professionals should always assess whether a child or young person is being sexually or criminally exploited or there are other known risks, particularly where there are frequent missing episodes. Consideration must be given to:

- Discussing the child or young person within the Daily Exploitation Meeting and;
- Completing the CEAM (risk assessment) to determine the level of risk

Refer to the : [Procedural Protocol for Children and Young People who are at risk of or experiencing exploitation](#)

Where a child or young person has been missing from home, care or education and risk assessed as high they should be considered at the DEM.

Once they have been discussed within the DEM with a CEAM risk assessment completed then a CEAM strategy meeting must be convened with all involved agencies attending.

If circumstances are such that the child or young person is perceived to be at immediate significant risk as determined by the CEAM risk assessment and if there is suspicion that the child could be removed from the island then a CEAM strategy meeting should be convened as soon as possible to agree a plan to ensure appropriate safeguarding measures are in place.

Where there is reasonable cause to believe that the child or young person has been harmed or is likely to suffer significant harm the Police can, once they locate the child use their powers to take the child into Police Protection

according to the Children and Young Person's Act 2001 and place in suitable accommodation as determined by the Children and Families Division.

There may be occasions when a child is found in a location that is deemed unsuitable however the grounds to take the child into Police Protection may not be met. It is crucial that the next steps are agreed between the Police and the Children and Families Division to ensure that sufficient safeguards are in place to ensure the child's welfare needs are met.

Any child or young person unlawfully at large from Cronk Sollysh (Secure Care Home) detained on welfare or criminal grounds will, once located by the Police be returned to Cronk Sollysh.

Data on Children and Young People who go Missing.

Early and effective sharing of information between professionals and agencies is essential for the identification of patterns of risky behaviour. This may be used to identify areas of concern for an individual child, or to identify 'hotspots' of activity in a local area, as well as concerns about any individuals who children run away to be with.

Data should be regularly collected on children who are reported as missing from care including those who repeatedly go missing, unauthorised absences from care placements, and other relevant data should be regularly analysed in order to map problems and patterns. This should include identifying patterns of sexual and other exploitation.

8. Actions when a Child or Young Person has been Found

The police will conduct a safe and well check as soon as possible after the child has returned home. Their purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm and where and with whom they have been. The child will be given the opportunity to disclose any offending against them.

Safe and Well checks

Safe and well checks are carried out by the police as soon as possible after a child reported as missing has been found. Their purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them.

Return Home Interview

Responsibility for return interviews;

The police should consider offering return interviews to children that have been missing. While this may not primarily be the responsibility for the police it is

expected that police forces work with partner agencies to ensure these are completed and the information is shared.

Where available the return interview should be provided by a professional from an independent agency is;

- **Trained to carry out these interviews**
- **Able to follow up any actions that emerge with the agency responsible for the individual's care**

The interview will take place in the following circumstances;

- In all high risk cases, but should be considered for all others
- Is frequently absent from their placement.
- Where it has been identified that the child has engaged, (or believed to have) in criminal activities during their absence.

The interview should:

- Help the child feel safe;
- Identify and respond to any harm the child has suffered;
- Understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away;
- Try to establish where they have been and who with;
- Provide the child with information on how to keep safe if they decided to run away again;
- Gather the views of the parent/carer if appropriate
- Understand what the child would like to happen next.

Return Home Interview for Children who are looked after

In order to ensure wider strategic planning and for professionals to have an insight into the child's view the return interview will be recorded on the appropriate Return Interview form which should be submitted to the Social Work Manager and Care Provider.

Following the return interview, a professionals meeting should be held with all relevant agencies present. This meeting will be known as the Missing from Care Meeting. The purpose of the meeting being to:

- Build up a comprehensive picture of why the child went missing;
- Who were they missing with and where were they found;
- What future support is required.

Where children refuse to engage with the interviewer, parents and/or carers should be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence they may be aware of. This should help to prevent further instances of the child running away and identify early the support needed for them.

9. Relevant Legislation and Statutory Guidance

Children and Young Person's Act 2001

The Education Act 2001

Education (Young Peoples Welfare Act) 1944

Police Powers and Procedures Act 1998

Sexual Offences Act 1992

(UK Dept of Education Act 2014)