

Missing Child Policy

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The purpose and scope of this policy statement

Storyy Homes recognises its responsibility to ensure that all reasonable precautions are taken to identify if a child or young person is at risk of running away or going missing. This policy sets out the steps for prevention and the process if a child goes missing or runs away.

1. Scope

1.2 This policy and procedure applies to young people who go missing who are aged under 18.

1.3 This policy and procedure is intricately connected to and should be read in conjunction with the following policies and procedures:

- Child Safeguarding
- Support Planning and Risk Management
- Non engagement

2. Policy statement

2.1 This policy and procedure sets out the principles for recording and investigating missing children (anyone under 18). It defines areas of responsibility and actions to be taken by staff before any children are reported missing to the police.

2.2 If anyone under 18 is living or receiving support from a Storyy Homes, they are required to have a local missing young persons' protocol setting out specific expectations and actions for their service using the template in Appendix 1.

2.3 When a 16- or 17-year-old 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.

2.4 A young person will not automatically be missing simply by virtue of not being where they are supposed to be. Inappropriate reporting as missing can erode a young person's trust in staff and does risk unnecessary criminalisation, create a social stigma for them, or put them at risk from their peers or others, including those who may seek to exploit them.

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3. Safeguarding

3.1 When children go missing from Storyy Homess it must be reported to any statutory agencies within the support network such as social work teams or a health worker. It will then be decided amongst all professionals if a safeguarding alert needs to be raised.

4. Key definitions

Missing

4.1 Being 'missing' is defined by the police as anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established. This is 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.

4.2 This could also be described unplanned non-engagement which is not set out within their Risk Management Plan.

Children

4.3 Any young person under the age of 18 years old living within one of our services.

Non engagement

4.4 We defined non-engagement where a young person is not responding to their support worker or support process. This could be when a young person:

- Demonstrates an absence of need for the services provided.
- Fails to engage with the services, even though they have an identified need for the services.
- Excludes themselves from the move on process.

Contact

4.5 Contact includes:

- Seeing someone.
- Speaking to someone on the phone.

4.6 Contact does not include:

- Speaking to a friend, family member or neighbour who says they are ok.
- A letter, email, text, WhatsApp, or any social media communication.

Emergencies

4.7 Emergencies are situations where action must be taken urgently to protect human life or to prevent severe damage to property.

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5. How often should staff be in contact with young people who are under 18?

5.1 The minimum frequency of contact with young persons under 18 should be as follows:

Type of Service provided.

Minimum frequency of contact

Childrens Home

Outlined in behaviour and care plan

Dependant on if the child is receiving home tutoring, schooling and school holidays this will vary from child to child. Communication with the child's schools is important and any unauthorised absences must be notified immediately.

Supported Housing

At least every 12 hours.

- 5.2 Dependent on service type this may be more frequent given the broad and complex range of support needs with someone who is under 18. The agreed frequency must always be recorded in the local service protocol.
- 5.3 Some young people may have an agreed safety time (also known as curfew) in staffed services and where this is the case staff should ensure that young person has been contacted daily ahead of this time.
- 5.4 There may be specific requests from referral routes such as Leaving Care Teams / Corporate Parenting Teams for contact to be more frequent. This will be agreed within the referral and assessment process or addressed as part of the ongoing joint working between our services and statutory services.

6. Children living within Storyy Homess

6.1 There will be a number of Storyy Homess where children live within the service such as children's homes or supported housing.

6.2 We have a duty to safeguard all children who live within Storyy Homess and a responsibility to monitor their wellbeing, working closely with their parents/carers and any external agencies involved with support.

6.3 Any concerns about the welfare of children who live within a service must always be escalated through the Child Protection procedures, but we would also report them missing where:

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- We had concerns for their safety and wellbeing in line with the Child Protection policy and procedure.
- Concerns were raised through an external agency that is linked to the child.
- Schools and colleges: In Common Law, schools have a duty of care towards their pupils. This duty of care requires that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that pupils are safe and remain within the care of the school at all times throughout the school day, and during school led activities – Absences must be communicated with our staff immediately.

7. Responsibilities

Service

7.1 All services and the staff who work within them are responsible for getting to know their young people from the first time they meet. This includes clearly setting out expectations around consent, assessments and why it is important they keep in contact with us.

Operations Managers

7.2 Operations Managers are responsible for signing off any local 'missing children' protocols.

7.3 They are responsible for ensuring that missing young person cases in their patches are managed correctly and that Registered Manager and Team Leaders have the right skills and resources to do this. They will provide advice to Registered Manager and Team Leaders about this when required.

Registered Manager and Team Leaders

7.4 Registered Manager and Team Leaders are responsible for ensuring local protocols are in place to manage any missing young person cases and that contact details for all relevant local authority Emergency Duty Teams / missing persons teams are available for staff.

7.5 Registered Manager are also responsible for ensuring there are appropriate local documented practices in place in their service to check on young person welfare and ensure that the missing person's procedure is considered as part of other day to day work practices. E.g., daily handovers, daily room checks, vulnerable person's log.

7.6 They are responsible for reporting concerns to the appropriate agencies and for implementing any action plan to address the concerns.

7.7 Registered Manager must ensure that all young persons in their patch have an up to date Looked After Child Information Sharing Form (known as a Grab Pack). These should also be completed for young persons under 18 who are considered at higher risk of harm.

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8. Partnership working

8.1 Each Local Authority has a Single Point of Contact (SPOC). This person shapes policy and ensures staff guidance is clear in this very high-risk area of practice. Relevant Storyy Homess services are encouraged to identify and keep updated the SPOCS in authorities across the services.

8.2 Early and effective sharing of information between professionals and local agencies is essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour. Relevant data may include times and duration of missing episodes, information from return interviews, absence data from schools or college. This may be analysed to identify areas of concern for an individual child, or to identify 'hotspots' of activity in a local area.

8.3 This will help identify risks in their area, such as exploitation, gangs or crime related activity that might not be apparent.

9. Equality and diversity

9.1 Storyy Homes is committed to Equality, Diversity and Human Rights.

9.2 We are committed to helping young persons to access information about their homes and services in a way that suits individual needs.

9.3 If any person believes that they have not been treated in accordance with this policy, or they are unhappy about anything related to the policy, they may complain in accordance with our Feedback and Complaints Policy.

10. Procedure

Prevention

10.1 Going missing can be symptomatic of an underlying issue which staff need to explore in case there is a damaging external influence or source of potential harm which is encouraging the young person to leave home. Staff should seek to build their knowledge of each young person to identify potential risks and vulnerabilities which may lead to a young person going missing.

10.2 All young persons should be made aware of the missing children procedure at the start of their placement, or in floating support services during their initial assessment.

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10.3 Staff should explain their duty of support and agree an individual plan with the young person should concern arise about their whereabouts.

10.4 Young persons should be made aware of Storyy Homes's definition of "contact" and what we require of the young person.

10.5 Young persons should be clear that after the designated time period of "no contact" staff will contact the next of kin and other local steps that will be taken including contacting the police.

10.6 Staff should make young people aware of the impact to their friends, family, and staff when the procedure is used in their absence.

10.7 Young persons should be encouraged to carry personal identification and their address and telephone number in case of accidents.

10.8 Where the young person is known to spend frequent periods away from the service, this should be documented in their Risk Management Plan.

10.9 The Support Plans for young persons who frequently go missing should include areas they frequent; anyone they are known to associate with and any other additional factors and actions that should be taken following any missing episode. Staff should consider use of a Trigger Plan where several agencies are involved.

10.10 The purpose of handovers is for staff to come together as a team, debrief on the day and ensure there has been meaningful or at least either visual or spoken contact with all young persons within the minimum contact period.

10.11 All young persons must be discussed. Where there are no concerns, it is just a matter of making sure there has been contact within the specified times.

10.12 Some young persons will be discussed in more detail with relevant updates and actions recorded on the handover debrief (these might relate to their wellbeing, moods, appointments, incidents, complaints, and anything that needs following up or monitoring).

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[Next of kin / emergency contact](#)

10.13 All young persons will be asked for the details of their next of kin and permission to contact them in the event of an emergency or if they are missing for an agreed length of time.

10.14 Next of kin or emergency contact details for every young person will be recorded at the front of their file on the young person Information Sheet and efforts made to ensure it is always up to date.

10.15 If a young person says they have no next of kin details, staff should inform their line manager of this to agree an appropriate emergency contact person for the young person, this could include a Social Worker, CPN, a housing officer or another relevant professional.

10.16 Staff should also ensure they complete the “description” of the young person section of the young person Information Sheet, and an up-to-date photo wherever possible.

High risk young people

10.17 Some young persons may be at higher particular risk, if this is the case all staff working in the service must be made aware of who these individuals are.

10.18 These young persons should have a detailed risk management plan detailing appropriate support.

10.19 Any young persons under 18 considered at higher risk should have a Looked After Child Information Sharing Form (known as a Grab Pack) completed when they moved in. This should be reviewed each time the Risk Management Plan is reviewed. This is shared with the police if they do go missing. See Appendix 2 for a template.

11. What to do if a young person goes missing

11.1 If staff become concerned that a young person is missing it is important that staff make every attempt to confirm whether the young person is missing or not before contacting the Police or Social Services. Staff are expected to be proactive in searching for children or young people believed to have run away, or to be missing, shadowing, and remaining in communication with the child/young person wherever suitable.

11.2 If a young person has not returned home by an agreed safety time (also known as curfew), staff should not assume the young person is missing, but they should begin the checks below to establish if they are missing or not.

11.3 The first check should be to try and call the young person on their phone, but if they have no response, they should complete the following checks:

Records

11.4 It is essential that the staff check the young persons:

- File
- Support Plan
- Risk management plan for details of any know patterns of behaviour.

11.5 It will be important to establish if this is normal behaviour for the young person, and whether there is cause for concern.

Check the young person's room.

11.6 It is essential to consider what the known risks relating to that young person such as hoarding or potential drug paraphilia, and whether any additional safeguards need to be put in place before going into the room.

11.7 Where staff do hold the master key or fob staff should use it to access the room.

11.8 Staff should always ideally check the room in pairs but if staff do complete a check whilst lone working, they should not enter the room or flat and just complete a visual check at the door.

11.9 Staff should knock or ring the doorbell, call out before entry, and wait for a response at least twice and try to contact the young person by calling to them before going into the room or flat.

11.10 Check the missing young person's room or flat for signs of planned departure, for example missing clothes.

11.11 Look around the service and the immediate grounds.

Continue to attempt contact.

11.12 If staff become concerned that a young person is missing it is important that staff attempt to contact the young person. This may include phoning all numbers connected to the young person, sending them a text message asking them to make contact, sending an email and any other known ways of making contact.

11.13 Staff should continue to regularly make contact but also need to be aware that if a young person answers the phone or responds to a message, they can still be considered missing if staff remain concerned about their safety or wellbeing and are unable to confirm their location.

Assess current wellbeing.

11.14 It is also important to ascertain whether the young person was upset, distressed, or feeling unwell prior to going missing.

Establish last known contact.

11.15 Staff should seek to establish the last time the young person was seen. Check CCTV where it is available to see if it is possible to see when they were last in the service. If CCTV is available, make a note of the exact time the young person was last seen at the service, what they were wearing when they left and whether they had any other belongings with them (e.g., bag).

Check the area.

11.16 If possible and safe to do so, look around nearby streets, ensuring the service is appropriately staffed while the search takes place.

Speak to people and services.

11.17 Sensitively ask other young persons and staff if the young person in question said they were going away without disclosing any personal information.

11.18 Contact any organisations or agencies that have links with the missing young person, or where they normally spend time.

11.19 Sensitively contact any friends or relatives who the young person regularly visits. However, staff may feel they should call the police before speaking to friends or relatives.

11.20 Contact local hospitals to see if the young person has been admitted.

11.21 If staff have access, they could check the young person's social media accounts to see if they have posted updates on where they are.

11.22 Staff should inform their line manager at earliest opportunity of concerns that a young person is missing and agree actions. If this is out of hours, staff should contact the On Call Manager if they have concerns that the young person may be at risk of serious harm.

11.23 Document all steps taken and include names and contact details of all persons spoken to as part of the initial investigation.

11.24 This should be documented on an Incident Form (if the young person is reported missing to the Police).

12. When to report a young person missing

12.1 If staff have completed the above checks and still have had no contact, they should consider reporting the young person as missing when any of the following conditions have been met:

- Young person has not had any contact within the required contact timescale as set out in the local protocol (see 5.1).
- The young person has left the service after their safety time.
- There is unusual or out of character changes to their routine. For example, a young person always returns home from school at 4pm, and always answers calls from the service, however on this occasion has not returned by 5pm and is not answering their call. Staff should not wait until their safety time to begin the procedure in these cases.
- Staff contact the young person, and they say they are not returning, and staff do not know where they are.
- Staff contact the young person, and they said they will return but staff remain worried about them.

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12.2 Staff should check that the young person has not been authorised to stay away from the service, which should be indicated on the handover.

12.3 When staff know a young person is at a specific address, they are not a missing person. They may still be at risk, but this should be addressed through Safeguarding procedures rather than Missing Children procedures.

Police

12.4 If, after carrying out all the above steps the young person still appears to have gone missing staff should contact the police. Where possible, staff should speak to the next of kin before the police do, to alleviate potential distress.

12.5 If you are extremely concerned for the welfare of the child then dial 999 and ask for the police.

12.6 Staff should report the young person as missing online where that is available. Staff should make sure they download a copy of any online report they make, as they do not initially receive a CAD reference number when reporting online.

- For services in the Thames Valley this can be done at <https://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/ro/report/>

12.7 If the service is outside of the Thames Valley, and/or there is no online reporting available staff should dial 101 and inform them you would like to make a missing person's report, alternatively you can attend your local police station.

12.8 If the young person has a completed Grab Pack, please inform the police of this detail when making the report. The following information should be given to the police:

- Name (make sure it is spelt correctly), age and date of birth of the missing young person.
- Any other names that may be used, for example nicknames or aliases.
- When and where the young person was last seen.
- General description and a photograph if possible.
- Details of clothing last seen wearing.
- Details of identification usually carried.
- Any known mental or physical health problems.
- Any medication needed and effects of not taking it.
- Places the young person is known to frequent.
- Places the young person has expressed a desire to visit.

- Details of ability level, for example are they used to going out alone, can they communicate.
 - Actions taken by staff to establish young person was missing.
 - Whether any items have been taken from room or flat.
 - Details of whether young person has gone missing before.
 - Name of next of kin and contact details.
 - If they are in care
 - If English is not their first language / translation needs
 - Why they are vulnerable (i.e., why are you concerned for them)
- 12.9 Do not forget to record any reference numbers (CAD) relating to the case on an incident report. Circulate a copy of the incident report to the team and to your line manager so that everyone working in the service is aware that a missing person's report has been made.
- 12.10 Details of how the police are likely to respond can be found in Appendix 3.
- 12.11 Complete a Missing Person report using the Incident Management System and the incident and accident book.
- 12.13 Update and review the young person risk management plan with each missing episode.
- 12.14 All Storyy Homess should keep a Missing People log which tracks all missing episodes in the service. This will help the service identify specific young persons which may have regular missing episodes.

Commissioners

- 12.15 In most services we may need to inform commissioners if a young person goes missing. This will vary from service to service and the process should be outlined in your local protocol.

Social Services

- 12.16 When reporting children missing a large proportion will be a Looked After Child and you will be required to inform social services immediately if contact has not already been made as part of the initial checks before formally reporting a child missing to the police.
- 12.17 if the report is during office hours, then staff should contact the social worker or personal advisor directly. If it is outside of office hours, they should contact the Emergency Duty Team (EDT).

13. If the young person is found or returns

13.1 If the young person is found or returns to the service the Police will need to be informed. This can be done by phoning 101 or by using the same online form as recorded in 12.6 above. However briefly a young person may return (e.g., even just 10 minutes) this will end the missing episode, and if they then go missing again a new missing case would need to be initiated.

13.2 In all cases Police will want to complete a welfare check of the person as they have been reported missing. This is not always done in person and may be done via a phone call.

13.3 All stakeholders and team members that have been notified of the missing person's report should be informed of the person's safe return and any relevant information. When Social Services have been informed, if they return during office hours then staff should contact the social worker or personal advisor directly. If it is outside of office hours, they should contact the Emergency Duty Team (EDT).

13.4 Staff should contact the assigned Social Worker and request a return home Interview. The Social Worker does not always complete these interviews, but they should be requested in all instances.

13.5 A member of staff (often the assigned Support Worker) must meet with the young person to review their welfare, what has happened and if there is anything that the young person or team could do differently in the future to prevent them going missing again. They should also speak to the young person about their wellbeing and any additional support that may need or help accessing other services.

13.6 Support Workers should make observations on the young person's return to understand what may have happened and whether there are any ongoing Safeguarding risks. This should consider:

- The young person's general appearance, are they wearing clothes that they have been known to wear before, do they have any new property (e.g., clothes, mobile phone, trainers, jewellery).
- How they returned to the service and whether they were with anyone. If necessary, staff should check CCTV to see if it shows how they returned, and if it was by car to try and identify the make, model, and number plate.
- Any signs of harm or injury and whether the young person appears to have been under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- The general mood of the young person compared to how they usually present.

13.7 All observations must be recorded on an incident report and the relevant risk management plan must be updated. If any Safeguarding concerns are identified, the staff member should follow the procedures in the Child Protection Policy and Procedure.

13.8 The incident report for the missing person's report should be closed by the Registered Manager / Team Leader on the Incident Management System.

14. If the young person is found but refuses to return to service

Young people under mental health orders

14.1 If a young person is not subject to an order which requires them to live at a Storyy Homes, then Storyy Homes cannot make them return to the service.

14.2 If they are subject to an order then the police need to be contacted and they will accompany the young person either back to the Storyy Homes or to a hospital.

Young people not under mental health orders

14.3 Staff should consult with any professionals working with the young person to agree the next appropriate steps.

14.4 If they have a new address then their Team Leader or the Registered Manager will write to them, to inform the young person that they have indicated that they wish to terminate their occupancy agreement.

14.5 The letter should ask the young person to contact the office (either by phone, letter or in person) and confirm that this is what they want.

15. If the young person is not found or does not return to the service

15.1 If a young person is reported missing to the Police and does not return to the service or is not found, this is a missing persons matter, and the Registered Manager will consult with the Social Worker and the police.

15.2 After three days the Registered Manager should request a strategy/action plan with the relevant Social Worker. If Social Services are not involved the Registered Manager should still complete a plan with any relevant professionals and make a separate Safeguarding referral.

15.3 A Strategy Meeting should be called, usually led by social services or police, when a young person has been missing for a week. If this meeting has not been arranged, the Registered Manager or Support Worker should request this meeting.

15.4 Each service will have different protocols around how long they will hold the service open for a missing young person and this will be reflected in the local protocol for missing persons. With regards to Looked After Children the protocol must include the notification to social work teams and continued communication until the child has been found.

16. Abandonment

16.1 Some people living within Storyy Homes may decide to abandon their rooms or flats without notice.

16.2 If you suspect a young person has abandoned a property then the Ending an Occupancy policy and procedure must be followed.

APPENDIX 1.

Risk factors - Does the child need essential medication or treatment not readily available to them e.g.,

Placing local authority:

Social Worker name:

Contact: (phone / mobile / email)

Detail of child protection plan if relevant:

Childs next of kin: (Including relationship and contact)

Bank account details and access to funds: E.g., debit card etc

Does the child smoke, consume alcohol or illegal / recreational drugs? Provide full details:

Provide details of the child's friends, include their home address, and contact details:

Details of other associates and family members that the child has contact with, include their home address, and contact details:

Locations frequented if the child has been missing before: (include where they were found)

Risk factors:

Victim or potential victim, of forced marriage, FGM or trafficking, or sexual exploitation

At risk from gang involvement, consider new acquaintances, unexplained cash funds, regular travel patterns.

Is the child previously known for suicide attempts or self-harm tendencies: Provide details including dates?

Section 2

To be updated when the child goes missing:

Circumstances:

Risk Factors - Recent behaviour or incidents that have occurred leading up to being missing victim of crime or bullying, problems with school / college, bereavement / life changing events. Include recent absence details.

Appendix 2: How the Police are Likely to Respond

- Police will usually use the term MISPER (Missing Person) to describe a missing person.
- When a person is reported missing the initial information provided will be reviewed and risk assessed by police.
- A good initial risk assessment relies heavily on the reporting person, providing an accurate and concise summary of:
 - The circumstances
 - The risks
 - And what they have done to try and locate the child.
 - What comes next depends on the outcome of the risk assessment.
- Each case will be judged on its own merits and the response may vary from case to case however Police will always seek to provide a proportionate response to every case.
- What is a proportionate response?

Low risk

Cases should not generally require the deployment of police, but the case will still be managed and reviewed. Tasks may be passed to the informant to complete, such as phoning the child's friends and checking social media.

Medium risk

Cases will generally require the deployment of police to progress investigative actions. All children (under 18s) reported missing start at medium risk.

High risk

All high-risk cases will demand a police response.

In all cases police will:

- Assess the risk posed to the missing person!
- Respond proportionately according to risk.
- Treat every case on its own merits.
- Circulate the missing person on the police national computer (PNC)
- Inform social services for children.
- The first 48 hours are responded to by regular police, after 48 hours these transfers to the Missing Person Unit (under CID)
- During the investigation, the police are the lead professional.

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- If police are deployed to investigate one of the first things, they will do is attend the place where the missing person resides.

The same process will be followed each time even for those reported missing regularly or even daily because a missing episode can be the first indicator that a serious crime has occurred or is in progress. There have been many high-profile cases where missing people have either hidden themselves or have been concealed by others in their own homes. Police officers are trained (as dramatic as it sounds) is that the starting point for every missing episode should be – “THINK HOMICIDE,” until you are reasonably happy that it is not.

Police searches will include looking through bedrooms and physically looking for the person. It is important to locate diaries, phones, documents and passport, suicide notes etc. the extent should be influenced by the circumstances of a case.