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# Introduction

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children - and in particular protecting them from significant harm - depends on effective joint-working between agencies and professionals that have different roles and expertise. Individual children, especially some of the most vulnerable children and those at greatest risk of social exclusion, need co-ordinated help from health, education, children's social care and preventative services, the voluntary sector and other agencies.

This protocol describes how agencies and professionals will work together when a child is missing. It has been developed and adopted by the South Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board for the use of all agencies, organisations, professionals and carers with a responsibility to safeguard children in this local authority.

**This document will be revised in April 2019**

# Part 1 – Police definitions and responses

## Definitions

**Missing:** A person will be defined as 'Missing' when their whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests that they may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.

**Absconder:** An absconder is a 'looked after child (LAC)' who is absent from the placement without permission and who is subject to an order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process (e.g. remand, curfew, tagging, conditions of residence, other bail conditions, PACE detention or ASBO), or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings. A child in this category must be reported to the police without delay. Carers must also inform the child's social worker or EDT. All missing cases where the child absconds should be subject to a police lead multi-agency meeting (Police Critical Incident Review).

**Police response:** Once a report of a missing child is made to police, a series of set questions will be asked in order to determine a risk assessment of low/medium/high and an officer deployed to commence inquiries proportionate to that level of risk. Initial inquiries will include visiting the scene (where child is missing from) to gather further information. Upon the missing person's return a police debrief will be conducted. This is a basic safe and well check and not a return interview. Police missing persons coordinators are responsible for identifying safeguarding issues, and will work with partner agencies to tackle and reduce the incidence of repeat absence/missing episodes.

It is for the police to advise the media regarding a missing child and will do so in the best interests and welfare of the missing child. A decision to use the media to publicise the case of a LAC should always be taken in consultation with children's social care.

# Part 2 – Responding to the needs of all children and young people who go missing

## Key principles

- The safety and welfare of the child is paramount
- Locating and returning the child to a safe environment is the main objective
- Effective communication and information sharing between agencies is key
- Child protection procedures will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child who is missing may be at risk of significant harm
- The police will act on any report of a child missing
- Every 'missing' child who returns will be interviewed by someone other than the direct carer
- Information from return interviews will be analysed for causation patterns to inform prevention activity

## Strategy and procedure

South Gloucestershire's approach to managing missing episodes is a key element of the authority's wider strategy to ensure that it is a responsible corporate parent and effectively safeguards children.

Service leads:

- Service Manager, Corporate Parenting is the senior lead for working with partner agencies to ensure that there is a systematic response whenever a looked-after child goes missing from their care placement.
- Service Manager, Social Care is the senior lead for working with partner agencies to ensure that there is a systematic response whenever a child not in care goes missing, and for young people at risk of sexual exploitation.
- Service Manager, Strategic Safeguarding is the senior nominated lead for all missing children in South Gloucestershire.
- Service Manager, Preventative Services is the senior lead for working with partner agencies to ensure there is a systemic response whenever a child known to preventative services goes missing and for overseeing the return interview process.

## Information sharing

When there are concerns about a child's safety or well-being, it may well be necessary to share information with other agencies. The safety and welfare of a child must be the first consideration when making decisions about sharing information about them.

Specific additional procedures apply if a child is in the care of the local authority (looked after children), or is receiving a service from Children's Social Care (see Part 4 below). Agencies working with children and their families and carers must use well established, comprehensive, transparent and consensual information sharing systems and processes that place the individual at the centre

of how their information is used.

This must be delivered in accordance with:

- Data Protection Act (1998)
- Children Act (1989)
- Human Rights Act (2000)
- Children Act (2004)
- And other relevant legislation and guidance.

All information obtained and shared in support of this protocol must be fully recorded within the organisation's management systems and be clearly referenced to the evidence and the information upon which decisions have been made. This must include details for any third parties and full details of all the information/evidence that they have supplied/been given.

### Aggregated information

Information relating to children missing from home, care and school helps South Gloucestershire Children's Services and partners to have a picture of missing patterns in their area. Through reporting this information, South Gloucestershire's Safeguarding Children Board can use this information to inform local service provision and to ensure that the necessary procedures are in place to respond to the needs of children who go missing. The Missing from home, care and school subgroup of the Safeguarding Children Board will be responsible for collating and analysing this information.

Procedures and protocols are in place to ensure that information about children who are reported missing (from home as well as care) is shared between the police, children's social care and specialist commissioned services.

This information is used strategically, with patterns of missing individuals or by groups of children identified and with local services responding appropriately to reduce the instances of going missing by these children.

### Regional arrangements and cross-border issues

Where children missing from one local authority area present themselves in another local authority, it is important that the authority where the child is found (also known as the receiving authority) works with the authority where the child usually resides (also known as the home authority) to ensure they get access to the help and support services they need. Responsibility for making safeguarding enquiries rests with the 'receiving' local authority. If this local authority is not the one in which the child normally resides, it may negotiate with the 'home' local authority to continue with these enquires.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary works closely with relevant forces to ensure that children who go missing and present themselves in another area are protected and returned to their family or placement with due care and consideration being taken for their welfare.

## Children who may be at risk if returned home

If there is concern that the child may be at risk if returned home, the child should be referred to Access and Response Team (ART) or their allocated social worker in order for an assessment of their needs to be undertaken and appropriate arrangements made for their accommodation.

If a police officer has reasonable cause to believe that a child would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm if returned home (an immediate risk), under Section 46 of The Children Act 1989 they may remove the child to suitable accommodation and children's social care must be involved in this decision making process.

Not all children who go missing from home or care are in need of emergency accommodation. However, if a child is deemed to be at risk of sleeping rough or with someone they have just met, these children need somewhere safe to go and need to know how to access that provision, so that they are not put at even greater risk. It is the responsibility of South Gloucestershire Children's Social Care to ensure that such accommodation is genuinely available in an emergency, and can be accessed at any time of the day or night. Access to this accommodation will be via a referral to social care.

## Other related issues

**Child abduction:** Where a child has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence, this is a 'crime in action' and should be reported to the police immediately.

**Forced marriage:** Some children go missing because they are at risk of abuse. Forced marriage in particular can lead to young women going missing from home. [South West Child Protection Safeguarding Procedures re Forced Marriage](#).

**Grooming for potential sexual exploitation:** In some cases children may go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them sexually. Evidence suggests that 90 per cent of children subjected to sexual grooming go missing at some point. The CSE guidance and SERAF should be used to assist in identifying those children who may be at risk and to assist in informing what action practitioners should take. [CSE SERAF and guidance](#).

**Child trafficking:** The trafficking of UK born or foreign children may be for the purposes of sexual exploitation, domestic servitude or for other reasons. Children may be trafficked within the United Kingdom, or brought in from abroad. For example a child may be trafficked from Bristol to South Gloucestershire, or within South Gloucestershire. [South West Child Protection Procedures in relation to exploitation and trafficking of children](#).

## Push/pull factors – addressing the causes for children going missing

### Push factors

- Problems at home – ranging from arguments with parents to long-term abuse or maltreatment
- Family break-up – children drawn into their parents' conflicts are less likely to do well at

school and more likely to truant or go missing from home

- Mental health problems – a disproportionate number of children who go missing from home have a mental health problem
- Bullying – children who are being severely bullied are more likely to go missing from school and home or care
- Teenage pregnancy – some young women go missing or are forced to leave home because they become pregnant (or fear that they may be pregnant). They may also be in denial about their pregnancy, meaning that they are not getting the advice they need about pregnancy options. There is also a greater risk of pregnancy when girls go missing, and those working with them will need to ensure they have rapid access to confidential contraception and sexual health services to prevent unwanted pregnancies

## Pull factors

- Going missing to be near friends or family – especially when a child is in care and there are problems in contact arrangements with family and friends
- Grooming for potential sexual exploitation or child trafficking – children may go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit and/or harm them

## Assessment of need Single Assessment Framework (SAF)

The use of the SAF as a means of analysing the child's needs enables practitioners to combine their assessment with that of any other professional who might already be working with a child or have completed a specialist assessment for them. With consent from the child (where it is considered they are competent to do so) and in most cases their parents, practitioners from different agencies are able to share information about a child's needs, enabling them to work more effectively together, build up a holistic picture and develop a better co-ordinated response. The lead professional provides a main point of contact for the child and where appropriate their family and helps the child and their family to access services.

Where an individual needs assessment indicates the child may be at risk of harm, a referral should be made to Access and Response Team (ART). An evaluation of whether the child is likely to go missing from home in the future will be one of the factors that informs the level of risk posed to the child, and the decision as to whether a referral to children's social care is appropriate. The assessment of whether a child might go missing again should be based on information about their:

- individual circumstances, including family circumstances in which the child has gone missing
- motivation for going missing
- possible destination
- recent pattern of absences (if any)

When children missing from home are located but have not been reported missing to the police by their families, further investigation might be warranted. It may be necessary to inquire into whether there are any continuing safeguarding concerns, or whether the child and their family should be offered family support services.

Consideration should be given to carrying out a new assessment every time a child goes missing.

The persistence of this behaviour would suggest at least that the action following from earlier assessments should be reviewed and alternative options considered.

Where a child is identified as at risk of significant harm, a referral should be made to Access and Response Team (ART).

It may be that the child is already allocated to a social worker, as either a child in need or subject of a child protection plan. If this is the case the process for children missing from home is followed but with the involvement, assessment and support of the allocated social worker.

## Assessing risk

Professional judgement will need to be used in deciding the level of risk a child is at in relation to either a single episode of going missing or repeat episodes and should take into consideration the circumstances of the child and their absence(s). This will include detailed consideration of:

- The legal status of the child
- Age of child - e.g. 10 years or under; 11 to 14 or 15 up to 18 years of age
- The maturity and general vulnerability of the child
- The circumstances of the absence, especially concerns about state of mind e.g. unusual behaviour prior to disappearance, disappeared with no prior indication, or seemed troubled
- Environmental factors including weather, time of year, time of day, community events
- Family or relationship problems, or recent history of family conflict or abuse
- Previous behaviour patterns and history of the child, especially previous history of absence
- Whether the child:
  - Lacks reasonable awareness of the risks associated with going missing, including learning difficulties
  - Needs essential medication or treatment not readily available to them e.g. inhaler, insulin
  - May not have the physical ability to interact safely with others or in an unknown environment, e.g. visually impaired
  - Has a mental illness or psychological disorder that increases risk of harm to themselves or others
  - Has previously disappeared and suffered or was exposed to harm whilst missing
  - Has a history of suspected suicide or self-harm
  - Has a tendency to drug, alcohol, or substance misuse/dependency
  - Is perceived as missing to or from someone or a situation
  - Is known to associate with adults or children who present a risk of harm e.g. sexual offenders, offenders against children
  - An ongoing victim of bullying, harassment, or exploitation e.g. racial, sexual etc.
  - A victim or potential victim, of abduction, forced marriage, female genital mutilation or trafficking, including for sexual exploitation
  - At risk of posing a danger to others and the risk of offending
- Any circumstances within the home/foster home that may be relevant to the absence, such as:
  - Involvement in violent and/or racial incident or confrontation prior to disappearance



- The influence of peer groups, families or friends
- The predatory influences on the child e.g. others want to use the child for crime, sex or drugs
- Details of any locations, where the presence of the child will or will not be permitted, or that may be a cause of concern
- Financial problems
- Use of Facebook or any other social networking sites
- School, college or employment problems
- Any other particular circumstances at the time of the incident which might be relevant

## Management of missing episodes

Children are reported missing due to concern for their welfare; the reasons behind any missing episode can be vastly variable. The key to reducing future missing episodes is understanding the causal factors behind the episode and then ensuring that advice and support is offered to address these.

Within any missing episode there are sources of information that can assist in understanding any ongoing needs of a child; the police missing person report, any information from social care files, which could be current or historical and the information gathered as part of the return home interview (RHI) process.

Where needs are identified as part of the RHI process, these will be acted upon, either by informing the child care social worker or preventative services (PS) worker if the child's case is already open, or by an internal referral to preventative services. Where there is an identified need for the case to be considered for assessment by children's social care, the RHI will act as a referral to ART, who will process the referral in the usual way.

Some children will go missing on more than one occasion and others will go missing frequently. For this group of children, it is important that their missing episodes are scrutinised through the convening of a missing management meeting by the lead professional, which enables the police to devise a Trigger Plan for response to future episodes. All missing management meetings should involve the Team Around the Child, including parents/carers and the police missing person co-ordinator. [There is a standard proforma for these meetings](#). The format of these meetings must be followed as it enables the police to be provided with the information they will need to draw up a Trigger Plan, if for any reason they are unable to attend the meeting.

The need for a missing management meeting needs to be made on a professional assessment of risk about the episode in question and the likelihood of future missing episodes. Factors that need to be considered when making the decision about whether to hold a missing management meeting are:

- the number of episodes in 6 months
- a single episode of 24 hours or more which is of concern
- periodic episodes which appears to be continuing with no evidence of any change in push/pull factors
- they are requested by the police

- a first formally reported episode makes reference to previous unreported episodes which raises concerns about carer/parent responses when the whereabouts of their children are unknown
- clear messages about inappropriate reporting by parents/carers are not being adhered to and there may be benefit of holding a meeting to ensure parents/carers understand their roles in seeking to find their children prior to reporting.
- associations or locations highlighted within the report give rise to concern about a young person

Some missing episodes will provide evidence or suspicion that a child has or may have suffered significant harm whilst they were missing. In this circumstance a strategy discussion should be held. Whilst it is important that the management of future missing episodes are considered, this should not take precedence over ensuring the child's immediate safety. Where a strategy discussion is held and it is not possible or appropriate to complete the trigger plan at the same time, the manager who chairs the strategy discussion is responsible for ensuring the communication with the police missing person co-ordinator to ensure there is a Trigger Plan on file within one week of the strategy discussion.

# Part 3 – Children missing from home

## What to do if a child has gone missing from home

If a parent or carer or other family member reports that their child has gone missing, they should be advised to report this information to the police. If a professional is concerned about a missing person, it is recommended that they contact the police. However reasonable steps should first be taken to attempt to establish the whereabouts of the child/young person prior to reporting the matter to police. This may include attempts to contact family and friends, checking social media and checking places they are known to go.

- If a child may be at risk of immediate harm, dial 999
- If you are worried about a child who you think might be missing, you should call 101

Parents/carers and other professionals and agencies involved should then work together to respond to the incident in a timely way to locate the child as quickly as possible.

## Managing the return

While the child is still missing, plans should be put in place across relevant agencies to ensure that the return is managed effectively. This will be especially important for those children who are considered as high risk, are being harmed and/or are frequently reported as missing. In particular, in planning for their return, consideration should be given to:

- how the child will be dealt with on the first contact
- appropriate accommodation for their return should the place from which they went missing not be safe
- how the child should most appropriately be debriefed

If it is considered that the place where they live is no longer appropriate, the location to which they are to be returned should be considered at an early stage. It might be necessary to consider options such as an emergency placement to cover the initial period following their return.

Once the child has returned the police should be notified at the earliest opportunity.

## Police Safe and Well Check

This is carried out by the police as soon as possible after the child has returned. Its 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. Where a child goes missing frequently a reasonable decision should be taken with regard to the frequency of such checks. This will mainly apply to children missing from care who are likely to have other people responsible for their welfare to check this. Every effort should be made to visit those children missing from home on every occasion.

## Return interview

South Gloucestershire Integrated Children's Services will endeavour to ensure that a return interview takes place within 72 hours of the child being located or returning from absence. These interviews will be conducted by trained staff within Preventative Services following notification from ART

The return interview is an in depth interview carried out by an independent person who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow up any actions that emerge. A pro forma is used to ensure consistency. Many children who go missing need to build up trust with somebody before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they decided to go missing. The interview and actions that follow from it should:

- identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered – including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the Safe and Well Check (his/her medical condition should be discussed and any need for medical attention assessed)
- understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away
- try to prevent it happening again

Due to the research that tells us that children who are at risk of CSE will usually go missing at some point, workers undertaking RHI should always consider whether the information being shared with them leads them to believe there is a risk of CSE for that young person. Where this is the case, workers should consider whether completing the SERAF (sexual exploitation risk assessment tool) would be beneficial to further inform their assessment. This consideration should be based on:

- Whether a SERAF has recently (max last three months) been completed and the information contained within it covers the FYPS workers concerns about risk.
- Whether there is a lead professional (LP) involved who would be better placed to complete the SERAF in light of the information the preventative workers have gathered as part of the RHI. In this circumstance, the PS worker should recommend this as part of their conclusion of the RHI. NB. Where the LP is a social worker it is the expectation that the social worker takes responsibility for the completion of an updated SERAF.
- Whether there is no LP and as such the assessment of CSE risk falls to the PS worker undertaking the RHI.
- The worker is so concerned about information being shared, that it is necessary to help the worker think about immediacy of need for action.

In all cases where PS workers complete a SERAF, they **must** ensure that they complete the professional analysis section as this will assist the LP/ART in making an informed decision about next steps.

The same independent person will undertake further return interviews with the same child if possible.

[Appendix 2](#) shows the process to be taken in referring for a return interview.

## Missing from a private foster home

Most private fostering arrangements will be settled and supportive environments. However, some children may have 'entered' a private fostering arrangement in an attempt by a family to address difficulties in the relationships within the family. These issues may be unresolved and the child may in some circumstances be more vulnerable to going missing from the private foster home. It is important that these children receive the same prompt and comprehensive response as children missing from home and from care.

Where a child has been reported missing from a 'private foster home', there may already have been a referral to children's social care (in respect to the private fostering arrangement). All children in private foster care whom the local authority have been made aware of, will already have an allocated social worker. The child will be receiving social worker visits, at a minimum, every six weeks (or 12 weeks if they have been in the private fostering arrangement for over 12 months) and there will also be a private fostering assessment in place.

Where a report of a missing child reveals that they have been living in a private fostering placement which was not known to the local authority, a referral must be made to ART in respect of the private fostering arrangement. The social work assessment will also need to look at the fact that the child has been reported as missing from their private fostering arrangement.

When a social worker for a child in a private fostering arrangement receives a referral/notification that the child has gone missing a review of the child's needs should be arranged immediately. This will ensure that the placement is still able to meet the child's needs and arrange for any necessary further support to the carers and child. This review should also involve the private foster carer's social worker.

Where there are concerns that a child may be at risk of or suffering significant harm in a private fostering arrangement immediate action to safeguard the welfare of the child may be required.

## Support for 16 and 17 year olds

As 16 and 17 year olds have greater independence from their parents and carers and can choose to leave home, it may be necessary to involve other services such as housing officers in the assessment of their needs. South Gloucestershire must provide accommodation for any 'child in need' within their area who meets the criteria in section 20(1) of the Children Act 1989. Local authorities must also provide accommodation for a 'child in need' who is over 16 and whose welfare is likely to be seriously prejudiced if they do not provide him or her with accommodation (section 20(3)).

The Judgement of the House of Lords in May of 2009 (The Southwark ruling) sets out the responsibilities of housing and children's services, in relation to 16-17 year olds who present to a local authority as homeless.

When a 16-17 year old presents as homeless, the Southwark ruling states that it should be children's social care rather than housing who undertake an assessment.

# Part 4 – Children missing from care

## Introduction

When children are missing from their care placements (residential and foster care), it is essential that the professionals and agencies concerned work closely together to respond to the incident in a timely way to locate the child as quickly as possible. The child's independent reviewing officer (IRO) must be informed of all missing episodes.

Once the child has been located, it will be essential to assess their needs so that they can be referred for appropriate services – which may include independent advocacy and support. It may also be necessary to convene a statutory review chaired by their IRO.

## Child's care plan

Every child in care has a care plan based on a comprehensive assessment of their needs that takes into account their wishes, feelings and aspirations for their future. The care plan informs the decision as to which placement (e.g. foster care or children's home) will be most suited to meeting the child's needs. Where children have established a pattern of going missing from placements, their care plan should include a strategy to minimise the likelihood of the child going missing in future and how to respond if they do.

## Looked After Child (LAC) Review

All care plans are kept under review. The review meeting (LAC Review), chaired by an IRO, considers the plan for the welfare of the child, monitors the progress of the plan, and makes decisions to amend it as necessary in light of changed knowledge and circumstances. The IRO is also responsible for monitoring the implementation and management of the plan outside of the LAC review.

When children have gone missing from their placements, then their statutory review provides an opportunity to check that their care plan has been appropriately amended to address the reasons why the child was absent and includes a plan (which should be informed by a missing management meeting) to prevent re-occurrence should the child go missing in future. For example, where a child goes missing from their placement to have more contact with their family, then the review provides an opportunity to consider the child's views about how contact might be managed in future. Similarly, where there is evidence that a child is vulnerable to sexual exploitation, it may be necessary to convene a review (in addition to a strategy discussion or missing management meeting) to consider whether the placement is able to put in place a plan to minimise any risk to the child, or whether it may be necessary to look for an alternative placement in order to keep the child safe. The LAC Reviews provide a check that the placement remains suitable for meeting the child's needs.

## Placement matters

The national minimum standards (NMS) for children's homes (2011) and fostering services (2011)

set out basic expectations about how providers should take into account the needs of the children who rely on their services. The NMS for fostering services and for children's homes, and the statutory regulations relating to these, require providers to have explicit policies and procedures in place that must be followed whenever a child is missing from their care placement without consent.

These policies are expected to be compatible with South Gloucestershire's missing from home, care and school protocol. Standard 5 of The Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011) specifies the responsibilities of fostering services and foster carers in relation to children who go missing from care. It is expected that fostering services and foster carers follow local guidance and procedures and take appropriate action to find children who have gone missing.

Standard 5 of the Children's Homes: National Minimum Standards (2011) specifies the responsibilities of children's homes and the staff employed within each children's home in relation to children who go missing from care. It is expected that children's homes and staff follow local guidance and procedures and take appropriate action to find children who have gone missing.

## Communication

Whenever a child goes missing from a children's home or foster home, the foster carer or the manager on duty in the children's home will ensure that the following individuals and agencies are informed:

- the local police
- the authority responsible for the child's placement. Notification is likely to be by phone in the first instance followed up by email/written confirmation. It is not enough just to notify the child's social worker. The registered manager of the children's home or the fostering service must be responsible for ensuring that the accountable manager in the local authority has received the notification that a looked after child is missing and has initiated the appropriate actions
- Parents and any other persons with parental responsibility must be informed as soon as possible that their child is missing unless there are good reasons connected with the child's welfare for this to be inappropriate. At the point where the responsible authority is informed, agreement must be reached as to which professional will be responsible for informing the child's parents – this will usually be the child's social worker. A record must be made as to when parents have been informed, and what information has been given to them

## Out of area placements

For some of South Gloucestershire's children in care, an appropriate placement may be one outside of South Gloucestershire. In these cases, South Gloucestershire Children's Social Care should make sure that these children have access to all the services they need. Providers of care for children living outside of South Gloucestershire have a similar responsibility for making sure that the children they care for are able to make use of appropriate local services. Information about these services must be recorded in the placement plan that should match the information about the child's needs included in their care plan. In the case of a child being reported missing to the

police the carer should inform the child's social worker and ART in order to ensure that a return interview can be offered on their return. Where young people are placed outside of CUBA (Counties that used to be Avon) this will be offered by telephone.

### Action to be taken when children go missing from care

It is expected that all foster carers and residential workers will take all the steps a reasonable parent would take if a child they are looking after fails to return home when expected. This will include, calling friends (and family where appropriate) and checking known locations (when safe to do so). This is part of the assessment of risk that the carers need to present to the child's social worker or EDT in order that a decision is made jointly about the necessity (or not) to report the child as 'missing' to the police. Where a decision is made to report the child 'missing' the carer should provide the police with all of the details of the enquiries they have made. Where there are believed to be specific issues of risk to the carer in checking locations, contacting people or returning the child to placement, the carer should discuss this with the social worker/EDT and where necessary the police should be contacted and asked for their assistance.

Where children do not return to placement when expected and are refusing to return and the carer is able to establish their whereabouts, the child should NOT be reported missing to the police unless:

- The circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the young person may be subject of a crime or at risk of harm to themselves or others
- Where children are not reported as missing, their absence should still inform the child's social worker/EDT as soon as possible so that these incidences can be logged as the child may subsequently go missing. All periods of absence should be kept under review by the carer, social worker/EDT in order that consideration can be given to whether there has been a change in possible risk factors that would warrant the child subsequently being reported as missing

### Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who go missing from care

Whilst not exclusive to this group of children, UASC may have additional vulnerability factors that must be considered for any missing episode - the risk of being trafficked and the risk of being radicalised. Any period of absence for a UASC must therefore be risk assessed immediately so that appropriate safeguarding measures can be undertaken. Where there is a concern that there is risk of trafficking or radicalisation for a UASC, the PREVENT and trafficking guidance should be followed alongside the safeguarding procedures.

The links to the trafficking guidance can be found on the South Gloucestershire icon of the South West Child Protection Procedures and PREVENT can be found on the [South Gloucestershire LSCB website](#).

### Return of the child

When a child has been missing from their care placement, Children's Social Care will ensure that plans are in place to respond promptly once the child is located. If the child is located, but the



professionals involved are unable to establish meaningful contact with the child, perhaps because they are under duress or being harboured, then the accountable staff will need to consider whether it is appropriate to apply to the court for a recovery order.

When the child has been located, children's social care will be responsible for making the decision about whether they should be returned to their placement children's social care will also ensure that they have taken full account of the circumstances that led to the child going missing from their placement to avoid the child being returned to an abusive environment.

The police must be notified at the earliest opportunity that the child has returned.

### Return of the child to their placement

It is the responsibility of the carer to notify the child's social worker and police of a child's return. The carer should also record the circumstances of the child's return and any reasons given by the child for being away from the placement.

When a child is found or returns to their placement, the carer will need to reassure the child of their commitment to them, as well as expressing their concern for the child's safety. The child might need to have the opportunity to talk to a person independent of the placement, ideally prior to returning to the placement. It will be essential to assess their needs so that appropriate services and additional support can be provided.

### Police Safe and Well checks and return interviews

The same processes as described in [Part 3 - missing from home](#) will be applied to those missing from care.

# Part 5 – Children missing from school

It is strongly recommended that schools have risk assessments in place to cover the following:

- Students leaving school during the day
- A student being separated from the class during a school trip

The risk assessments should consider the sequence of the planned actions in these circumstances and the person assigned to carry out the different actions.

- The risk assessment needs to take into account a number of circumstances including:
  - The age of the student
  - The location
  - Specific factors associated with the student e.g. medical issues, child protection issues

If a school is involving the police they will need to be able to inform the police of:

- Details of the clothing the student is wearing
- Details of the student appearance e.g. hair colour, hair length etc.
- Age of the student
- Name of the student
- The student's home address
- Last known location of the student
- Where the student appeared to be heading

## Students not arriving for registration

Schools should have clear procedures in place to ensure that students who do not arrive at school are safe.

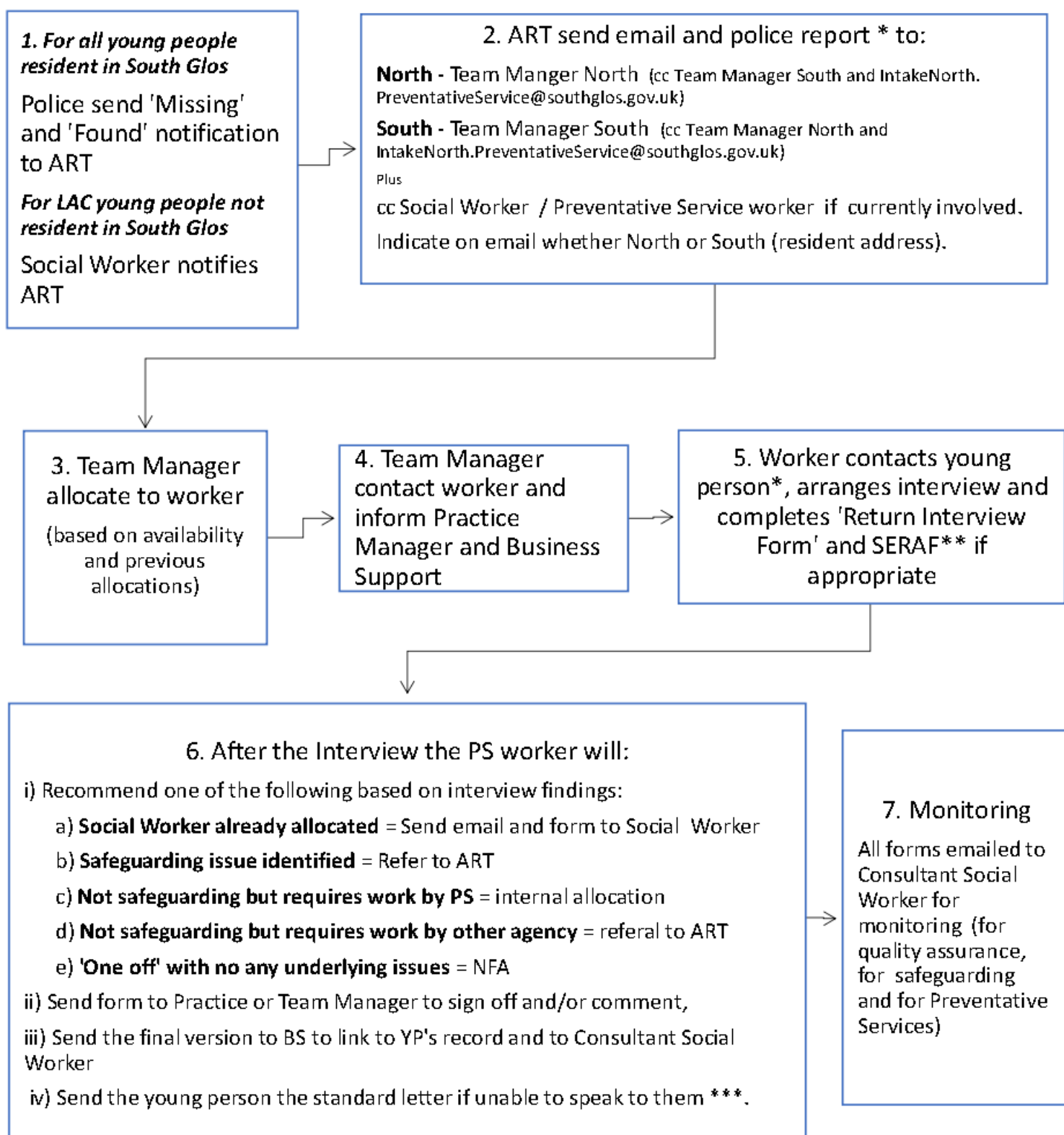
## Part 6 – Children missing education

Please follow the link below for guidance regarding Children Missing Education:

<http://www.southglos.gov.uk/education-and-learning/schools-and-colleges/behaviourand-attendance/children-missing-education/>

# South Gloucestershire Missing Children Return Interview Process

For all young people resident in, or looked after by, South Glos (whether currently open to ICS or not)



\* The statutory requirement is that an interview must be offered and that the interview should be carried out within 72 hours of return. Initial contact should be made swiftly after allocation and details added to Capita. For young people who are LAC and placed out of area the interview may need to be undertaken by phone.

\*\* From May 2017 a SERAF will completed by the Lead Professional if this is a recommendation from the Return Home Interview. Where there is no Lead Professional but the RHI indicates risk around CSE then the Preventative Services worker will complete SERAF

\*\*\* If a young person refuses an interview or is not contactable (having tried a minimum of 3 times on different days /times and contact numbers) the Preventative Services worker will send a letter to the young person explaining the offer of an interview and including a contact number. This will then be linked to the case by Business Support in the normal way.