

## **MIDDLESBROUGH N171**

**RUNNING OR MISSING FROM**

**HOME OR CARE**

**NATIONAL INDICATOR 71**

**PROCEDURE**

**VERSION THREE**

**JANUARY 2011**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This procedure is based on statutory guidance issued in July 2009 by the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) under section seven of the Local Authority Social Services Act (1970). This document relates to children who runaway and go missing from their home or care (RMHC).
- 1.2 **The procedure should be read in conjunction with the “Tees” wide protocol agreed by Cleveland Police and the four unitary Tees authorities of Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Stockton on Tees and Redcar & Cleveland for children who become RMHC.**

## **2. IMPLEMENTATION**

- 2.1 The procedure is effective from the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2010.

## **3. PURPOSE**

- 3.1 The purpose of the procedure is to outline an effective safeguarding response when a child goes missing from their home or care within Middlesbrough and for those children placed by Middlesbrough outside of the town boundary

## **4. OBJECTIVES**

- 4.1 The objectives of the procedure are to:
- Promote the prevention of children becoming RMHC.
  - Support Cleveland Police to locate and return children who are RMHC.
  - Outline the actions Cleveland Police and Barnardo’s on behalf of Middlesbrough Local Authority will take when children are RMHC and return home,
  - Outline the responsibility and actions those working with children who become RMHC will take to ensure their well being and to prevent further episodes of RMHC.
  - Promote the exchange of accurate and consistent data about RMHC between Cleveland Police, Barnardo’s and Middlesbrough Local Authority.
  - To ensure that Middlesbrough children placed outside of the Middlesbrough boundary receive the support as specified in the N171 guidance.

## **5. SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

5.1 The protocol is based on information from the following sources:

- The DCSF (now D of E) statutory guidance as outlined in s.1.1
- Guidance issued by the National Policing Improvement Agency on The Management, Investigation and Recording of Missing Persons (2010)
- Information from two research reports from The Children's Society: 'Still Running 2' (2005) and 'Stepping Up' (2008)
- Learning and advice was sought from the 'SCARPA' RMHC Project based in Newcastle. This project was established and is managed by the Children's Society in partnership with Barnardo's.

## **6. CATEGORIES AND DEFINITIONS**

6.1 The following definitions have been agreed by the Tees Local Authorities and Cleveland Police in order to assist with a consistent response to children RMHC. The definitions are:

### **Age**

The protocol & procedure applies to children up to the age of 18 years.

### **RMHC**

The term refers to children who have runaway from their home (RMH) or care placement (RMC), have been forced to leave, or whose whereabouts is unknown. Every child aged under 18 years of age reported missing from home or care should be classified as a young runaway.

### **Looked After Child**

A child is looked after if they are the subject of an Interim Care Order (Children Act 1989 s.38), a Care Order (Children Act 1989 s.31), accommodated by the Local Authority (Children Act 1989 s.20), Bailed to reside as directed by the Local Authority (Family Court Ruling 1994 1153), Remanded to Local Authority Accommodation (Children & Young Person's Act 1969 s.23) or subject of a supervision order with a condition of Residence, Criminal Justice Act (Criminal Justice Act 1991 s. 63.) Therefore, this definition includes children aged 16 or 17 who are care leavers who are subject of a Care Order and may live semi-independently or independently with support from a Leaving Care Team in the community.

## **Unauthorised Absence**

Where a looked after child's whereabouts is known and a risk assessment identifies that they are not at risk (see s.13), they are not RMC and may instead be considered as absent without authorisation from the placement.

Any episode of unauthorised absence by a looked after child should not be reported to the Police as RMC but must be carefully monitored by the relevant Social Worker, Team Manager and Head of Service. This must be done within the framework of this local procedure in liaison with other agencies within a risk assessment process. This is because the child may subsequently become categorised as RMC. However, it is agreed that when a period of continuous unauthorised absence reaches a maximum of **(72)** hours the child will be reported as RMC to Cleveland Police Middlesbrough District Command. Middlesbrough would expect that when a Looked After child has been missing for 24 hours continuously a risk assessment is completed by the Social Worker and caregiver (see Appendix 4). If a child is placed outside of the Cleveland Police Force area the report should be made to the Police Force responsible for policing that area.

## **Absconder**

A child is an absconder when they are absent from their placement without permission whilst the subject of an order via the Youth Justice system. Children subject to the legal statuses of bailed to reside as directed by the Local Authority, and remanded to Local Authority with or without conditions e.g. curfew and a supervision order with a condition of residence are classed as Looked after Children. While these children fall within the Youth Justice System, in terms of a response from the Police, as either a "wanted person" or "unlawfully at large" (NPIA s. 4.72 2010) and subject to arrest for breach of a condition, for purposes of information sharing, data collection and analysis they will be regarded as RMC. If a child placed in secure accommodation on welfare grounds under the Children Act (1989) becomes RMC they are an absconder and when found should be returned to the secure unit by the police and or staff from the local authority.

## **Truancing**

This is not an issue that should be dealt with as RMH or RMC. Unless there are circumstances that determine an investigation as RMH or RMC is warranted (NPIA S.4.8.1. 2010) e.g. a child is believed to have suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm.

## **7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AGENCIES FOR CHILDREN WHO GO MISSING IN THE MIDDLESBROUGH AREA**

7.2 The broad roles and responsibilities of Cleveland Police and Middlesbrough Local Authority are outlined below:

- The lead responsibility for a co-ordinated multi agency response to prevent children becoming RMH and RMC lies with the Local Authority. The accountability for monitoring trends, reporting statistics and co-ordinating a reduction in instances of children becoming RMHC lies with the Local Authority via Middlesbrough Safeguarding Children Board and the Children's Trust from the information collated by Barnardo's as set out in the service specification.
- The lead responsibility for finding and returning children reported as RMH or RMC lies with Cleveland Police. The procedure also recognises that a police station is not a place of safety for a child unable or unwilling to return to their home address. In these circumstances staff from Safeguarding Services and the Emergency Duty Team have a responsibility to actively seek to remove children from police stations as soon as is practicable. Middlesbrough Local Authority agrees to take reasonable steps when Corporate Parenting responsibilities exist for Looked after Children, to enquire, locate and seek to return children whom become RMC to their placements when it is practicable and safe for them to do so.
- The police undertake a 'return home' interview with the child/young person using the areas in Appendix 1.
- The Local Authority have the lead responsibility when children are returned home to ensure that effective support services are provided to reduce the risk of further incidents of RMH or RMC.
- Middlesbrough Local Authority have entered into a commissioned partnership arrangement with Barnardo's Project to conduct the receiving of information from the Police and the follow up interview with young people missing in the Middlesbrough area.

## **8. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AGENCIES WHERE MIDDLESBROUGH CHILDREN AREA PLACED OUT OF AREA**

### **8.1 Middlesbrough Local Authority**

Where Middlesbrough children are placed in another area of the UK the lead responsibility for a co-ordinated multi-agency response to prevent children becoming RMC remains with the home authority (i.e. Middlesbrough) where a child/young people has RMC out of the area, the Social Worker must ensure that a telephone call takes place with the young person as soon as the child/young people is returned and wherever possible a visit is made to the placement within 72 hours where the return interview should be undertaken.

Consideration should be made as to whether the Core Assessment needs updating.

If a child or young person is placed out of area and meets the criteria for the N171 practice group they will be included on the N171 Middlesbrough Practice Group Monthly Meetings and an action plan devised in respect of their RMC if appropriate.

The children/young people will be identified as RMC via the information provided by the Emergency Duty Services during out of hours and Social Workers where the child goes missing during day time hours (8.30 a.m. – 5.00 p.m.).

8.2 Consideration should also be taken as to whether it is necessary to convene a statutory review chaired by the child/young person's Independent Reviewing Officer.

8.3 The Independent Reviewing Officer as part of the statutory review should consider the plan for the welfare of the child, monitor the progress of the plan, and make decisions to amend it as necessary in light of changed knowledge and circumstances.

8.4 Where children / young people have gone missing from their placements, then their statutory review will provide an opportunity to check that their care plan has been appropriately amended to address the reasons why the child was absent and includes a strategy 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 to consider whether the placement is able to put in place a strategy 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.

8.5 **Police responsibility in the area the Middlesbrough child is placed**

Where a Looked After Child is reported missing to the police in the area that the Middlesbrough child is placed the police must follow the missing from care procedure under N171. The police must ensure a return to home interview is completed.

8.6 **Care Providers**

Any provider commissioned to care for a Middlesbrough child / young person is required to notify the Local Authority immediately when a child goes missing from placement.

## **9. SAFEGUARDING**

- 9.1 This procedure does not alter the current arrangements and procedures issued by Middlesbrough Safeguarding Children's Board. If Cleveland Police believe that a child is at risk of or is suffering significant harm, they will contact the Local Authority using the existing procedures and contact points in respect of day time office hours Monday to Friday and the Emergency Duty Team outside of office hours.

## **10. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 10.1 There will be two types of risk assessment undertaken during the process of children becoming RMH or RMC and it has been agreed through the Tees Wide Protocol that the assessments will each have a different focus.
- 10.2 While children are RMH or RMC the focus of risk assessments for Cleveland Police will be on the risks to children when they are RMHC.
- 10.3 When children return or are returned home the focus of risk assessments by the Barnardo's project will be to ensure the child's safety and reduce the likelihood of children becoming RMH or RMC in the future.
- 10.4 Cleveland Police and Barnardo's (on behalf of Middlesbrough Local Authority) agree to, where appropriate, exchange risk assessments to assist with finding, returning and supporting children who become RMH or RMC and their families. It is recognised by all agencies that it is good practice for Police Officers, Social Workers and staff from commissioned services to share risk assessments and agree a risk assessment level for individual children. This exchange of information will take place within the information sharing context outlined in s.9 of the Tees Protocol.
- 10.5 Cleveland Police and Middlesbrough Local Authority have agreed that work associated with children and their parents who become RMHC should be open to constructive professional challenge. It is acknowledged that there may be occasions when agencies do not agree e.g. on a risk assessment. If a dispute does arise the resolution of the issue should be via the pathway agreed in the local procedure in s.16 of the Tees Protocol.
- 10.6 Where the Risk Assessment of the child/young person is deemed as high risk this may lead to a multi-agency formal planning meeting to agree a formal action plan to reduce the risk of the child/young person.

The decision to elevate the planning process may be as a result of the practice group or any professional working with the young person may request a more formal meeting having received additional information that places the young person at risk.



## **CATEGORIES OF RISK**

### **High Risk**

The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child/young person is in danger through their own vulnerability or may have been the victim of a serious crime,

or

The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public are in danger.

### **Medium Risk**

The risk posed is likely to place the child or young person in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.

### **Low Risk**

There is no apparent threat of danger to either the child or young person or the public.

### **Important**

The assessment of risk is a dynamic process and should be reconsidered and challenged at every point during a child or young person's absence.

## **11. PROCESS FOR RMH WORK FOR CHILDREN RESIDING IN MIDDLESBROUGH**

- 11.1 The responsibility for reporting a child who becomes RMH lies with their parent(s) or carer(s). However, if a child is receiving services from a practitioner and the practitioner becomes aware that the child is becoming RMH and is not being reported to the police, the practitioner should support and encourage the parent(s) or carer(s) to do so. The purpose of this advice is to help safeguard the welfare of the child. The pathways by which workers must proceed are outlined in Appendix 4 and 5 of this procedure. If a child who is reported as RMH is an open child in need case the relevant Social Worker and their Line Manager must record reasons for decisions being made in respect of the young person.
- 11.2 The data exchange template will be sent by Cleveland Police Middlesbrough District Command to Barnardo's (on behalf of Middlesbrough Local Authority) twice per week as described in Section 8 of the Tees Protocol. This is also sent to Middlesbrough Local Authority.
- 11.3 Barnardo's will then check the names on the template that meet the criteria for a "Return Interview" under the NI71 statutory guidance as outlined in Appendix 1.

If the child has a Safeguarding Services Social Worker working with them Barnardo's will contact the worker to notify them that a child has been reported RMH or RMC and discuss a strategy for preventing future RMH or RMC.

- 11.4. Should the family consent the return interview must be started within **(72)** Hours of a child returning home or to a care placement from an episode of RMH or RMC. However it is recognised that it may take up to **(5)** working days to undertake the interview with the degree of sensitivity that may be required in some cases.
- 11.5. Should a return interview take place the pre-CAF assessment is used as the template to establish the 'push factors' those which drove a child to runaway or go missing e.g. disputes with parent(s) or carer(s) and/or 'pull factors' those factors outside the home or care setting that drew a child to become RMH or RMC e.g. the influences of a negative peer group. The interview should assess the risk of harm and the likelihood of any future episodes of RMH or RMC.
- 11.6 If the case is not open to a Social worker from Safeguarding Services as a child in need or a looked after child and the interview with the child or parent(s)/carer(s) indicates that further intervention or support is required then practitioner's from Universal or Targeted Service should undertake a Common Assessment Framework (CAF). This should be followed where appropriate by referral to the Middlesbrough Children and Young Person Panel. The purpose of which is to develop and implement a plan to support the child and parent(s) or carer(s) to resolve the push and or pull factors that have been identified in order to reduce the risk of the child becoming RMH in the future.

## **12. PROCESS FOR RMC WORK IN MIDDLESBROUGH**

- 12.1 The process is followed for Section 11.2 to 11.3. The process and pathways that must be used when a looked after child has become RMC are outlined in Appendix 4. When a child is looked after by Middlesbrough Local Authority and becomes RMC the responsibility for deciding if an episode is an unauthorised absence or is to be reported as an episode or RMC lies with the child's Social Worker from Safeguarding Services and foster carers or residential staff as described in Appendix 4. When looked after children as defined in section six become RMC, the Social Worker responsible for the case must start the missing from care process.
- 12.2 When looked after children from other Local Authorities are placed in foster care or residential care in the Middlesbrough Local Authority area and repeat patterns of RMC occur, Barnardo's (on behalf of Middlesbrough Local Authority) will contact the Local Authority that placed the child. This will be in order to seek reassurance from the Local Authority that they are working to safeguard the child from any future incidents of RMC.

Should the pattern of RMC continue or escalate Barnardo's will notify the Assistant Director, Safeguarding Services who will contact the relevant Assistant Director in the placing Authority to discuss the concerns Middlesbrough Local Authority may have about the child's pattern of RMC.

**13. PROCESS FOR RMC WORK FOR A CHILD/YOUNG PERSON PLACED (LOOKED AFTER) OUT OF THE MIDDLESBROUGH AREA**

- 13.1 Should the Risk Assessment regarding the children missing from home or care episode or episodes determine that further discussion is needed, these children will be considered at the monthly N171 practice group.

**14. DIVERSITY, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION**

- 14.1 This procedure values diversity and access in the provision of services for children and adults based on equality of opportunity regardless of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, faith or disability.

**15. CROSS REFERENCING WITH OTHER PROTOCOLS AND STRATEGIES**

- 15.1 Appendix 2 in this document outlines the cross referencing of this protocol that must take place with other related protocols and strategies in respect of children who become RMH and RMHC and are effected by the issues identified in these documents e.g. The Harboring of Children/The Trafficking of Children.

**16. FLOW CHART**

- 16.1 A flow chart that shows how the procedure will work in practice is contained in Appendices 3 and 4.

**17. CONTACT LIST**

Middlesbrough Safeguarding Samantha Addison, Service Manager,  
Intervention Services

Jane Wilson, Service Manager,  
Specialist Services

Sue Smethurst, Team Manager  
Safeguarding Services

Barnardo's

Mary Robinson  
Clare Dyer

Cleveland Police

Ian Sharp  
Dave Grieves

**18. DOCUMENT REVIEW**

18.1 The N171 Steering Group will review the N171 procedure document annually.

## **APPENDIX 1 – CLEVELAND POLICE RETURN INTERVIEW GUIDANCE**

**This appendix is the criterion from National Indicator 71 for children who become RMHC to have a return interview conducted by Cleveland Police.**

- First instance of RMHC.
- RMHC on two or more occasions
- RMHC for more than 24 Hours
- Believed to have been a victim or perpetrator of crime whilst RMHC.
- Been involved as a victim or perpetrator of criminal behaviour whilst RMHC
- Known mental health issues
- Known risk of sexual exploitation
- Known risk of contact with persons posing risk to children
- Incidents that have generated assessment of needs via Common Assessment Framework (CAF), s.17 or s.47 of the Children Act (1989)
- Police information is supplemented by information from other statutory agencies and where it is appropriate the voluntary sector. This will include whether support was offered to children and parent(s) or carer(s) and whether it was accepted or not accepted and by whom.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Middlesbrough Safeguarding Board Procedures**

**The procedures listed below are examples of documents that should be cross referenced with the RMHC procedure. This is in respect of children who become RMH or RMC and who can also be affected by the issues addressed by these documents**

- Harboursing
- Trafficking
- Honour Based Violence
- Sexual Exploitation of Children
- Missing from Education

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **Young people missing from home process flowchart**

#### **Identify child/young person is missing**

Parents/carer/responsible adult identify time by which the child should be at the address.  
Parents/carer/responsible adult should make enquiries to locate the missing young person with relatives/friends.  
This should include searches of the residence and local area of the child or young person is not included.



#### **Report to the police**

Parents/carer/responsible adult should telephone police with details of the missing person.  
**Details required:** child's name/DOB/ where, when and who if any one they went missing with, what child was last wearing, description of young person, recent photo, medical history, time and location last seen, circumstances of going missing/details of friends and associates.



#### **Officers can conduct a risk-assessment forming the basis for resulting proportionate actions**

Enquiries are then ongoing.  
Sharing of information between the police, parents and other agencies as appropriate.



#### **Young person is located or returns to home address**

When missing a child is located by family or friends etc, it is their responsibility to return the child to the home address.  
Where a risk is present, a police officer may accompany the family or the police may be requested to collect and return the child/young person to the place of residence only if it is safe to do so. Parents must inform the police when a child returns of their own accord.



**The police should conduct an interview known as a Safe and Well Check to establish the young person's well-being and safety, and to establish whether they were the victim of crime or abuse whilst missing.**

**If the child is considered to have suffered or is at risk of suffering serious harm, police should refer child or young person to Children's Services via normal safeguarding channels.**



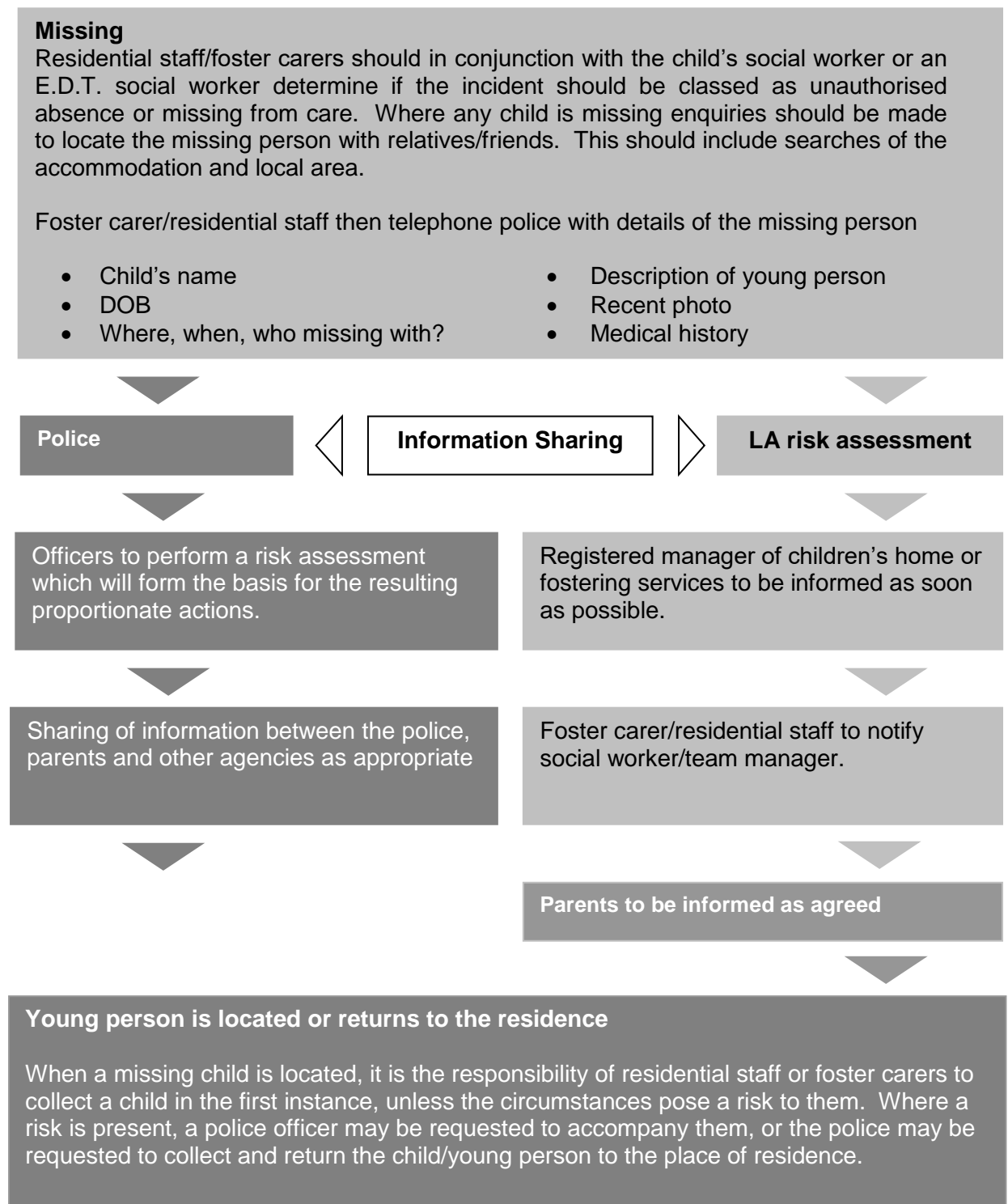
**Barnardo's on behalf of Children's Services (Universal, Targeted or Safeguarding services) carry out a Return Interview and Assessment of Need. Information established from interview to support assessment of need, to be carried out using a Pre CAF or CAF by Universal or Targeted services as appropriate (check whether CAF already exists.) Lead Professional to be appointed if assessed to be needed.**




**In some cases, specialist assessment may be required should it appear that the child or young person has complex needs e.g. initial or core assessment if a new case to Safeguarding Services Young person/Parents & Carers offered relevant support by either Universal, Targeted or Safeguarding Services.**

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **Young People missing from care process flow chart**








The police will conduct a Safe and Well Check to establish the missing person's well-being and to establish whether they were the victim of crime or whilst missing.




Foster carer/residential staff to:

- Provide positive non-judgemental return;
- Check young person's health & well being (medical condition) and make necessary arrangements.



Placement staff will inform the social worker and team manager of the young person's return. Social worker to inform parents



Arrangements for return interview to be agreed in consultation with the child.



Consider whether to:

- Convene a multi-agency risk assessment planning meeting;
- Review any prevention/support work currently being undertaken with the child.
- Arrange an early looked after review.