



Children Missing from Home or Care

Presentation to the Corporate Parenting Board 3rd April 2025

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What does 'Missing Child' mean?

Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and 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

What factors may lead to a child going Missing?

The Children's Society through its research has identified the following risk factors that can precede a missing incident:

- Arguments and conflicts
- Poor family relationships
- Physical and emotional abuse
- Rules, Boundaries and Consequences
- Peer pressure
- Family contact
- Placed out of area
- Mental Health
- Truancy
- Exploitation

Missing From Home Team

- Team sits within Children's Services, within the Risk and Resilience team in the Education and Partnerships directorate.
- The team consists of 1 Missing from Home Coordinator and 2 Missing from home practitioners.
- The role of the team is to work with children who have had a missing from home or care episode.
- A Return Home Interview (RHI) is offered to all children who go missing from home or care within 72 hours of their return, this is a statutory requirement.
- Children can be signposted to partner agencies as part of engagement work, or partners can form part of a multi-agency plan to support the child.
- Practitioners are cognisant of potential reasons for children going missing and sometimes concerns can result in completion of the Harm Outside the Home (HOTH) screening tool being completed to identify any concerns surrounding exploitation and how to support the child.
- Teeswide changes to HOTH practice - currently in the implementation phase in Middlesbrough.



What is a Home Return Home Interview (RHI) and who conducts it?

A RHI is offered to every child who goes missing from home or care. Practitioners in the 'Missing' team will conduct the interview and place this onto the child's record so that it is easily accessible to Social Workers/anyone working with the child. Issues identified at interview are addressed via the child's safety plan.

The purpose of the interview is:

- To better understand the reasons why the child went missing, capturing the child's views
- To explore the circumstances which led to the missing episode(s)
- To inform future prevention strategies
- To inform any future missing person investigation should the child go missing again
- To learn of the activities, persons of concern and/or locations of concern involved in the missing episode, and where possible to address issues with appropriate and proactive strategies.
- To identify and address any harm the child has suffered, including harm that may not have already been disclosed as part of the police welfare check.

Middlesbrough Missing in numbers

- From August 2024 to February 2025 Middlesbrough had 641 missing episodes for 295 children.
- In February 2025, 45 children went missing from home or care. Of those, 19 were Looked After Children.
- 100% of children were offered a RHI. 73% of children took up the offer and the reasons that 27% did not were due to children or their parents declining, the team being unable to contact the family despite repeated attempts, and 1 child had been placed into custody.
- 73% of interviews were completed within timescales. For those that were not this was due to child/parent availability or arranging to see a child at school (which was the child's preference).
- Of the 45 children who went missing 7 went missing on 3 or more occasions in the month. 6 of these children have been referred or were already known to Harm outside the Home arrangements and had significant professional involvement and robust plans put in place, the other child's missing episodes related to significant mental health issues and had support in place from CAMHS. All children who are repeatedly missing (3 or more occasions in 1 month) are subject to additional scrutiny by the team to ensure robust plans are in place and action taken.

Planned improvement activity

- In February 2025 the way in which missing is recorded has been amended with the aim of improving response.
- Previously data was only broken down by children not open to Social Care, and those who were Looked After Children, Child in Need or Child Protection.
- Recording practice has been amended to separate Looked After Children in the area and those out of the area, and also current open referrals to Social Care. This will enable better analysis in future, enabling the team to draw out themes, trends and issues to better inform safety planning for the child as part of a multi-agency response.
- Heads of Service and Directors are now provided with a daily update of children who have been missing, if they have returned, plans for the child. For those who have not returned the plan for the child is outlined.
- Directors also receive a weekly report of the overview of children who have been missing that week, and the plans for those who have not yet returned.
- There is on-going work taking place to the Case Management System to enable better reporting. This work will enable information to be drawn quickly where required and will also enable a dashboard to be built for monthly reporting of themes and trends relating to missing children.
- The aim of the data/reporting improvements is to enable better reporting and recording, and ultimately a better multi-agency response and safety plan for the child. It will also feed into various Harm outside of the Home meetings where relevant.