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## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES AUTHORITIES IN THAMES VALLEY AND THAMES VALLEY POLICE**

### **Joint Protocol concerning children and young people who run away or go missing from home or care**

1. The Police Enquiry Centre (PEC) receives a report that a child is missing.
2. In cases where the report initially goes to Children's Social Care (CSC) in the relevant Council, the case should still be referred to the Police Enquiry Centre (PEC) on 08458 505505. There may be occasions when a child in care goes missing and police and CSC do not feel it is appropriate to report it immediately, in these circumstances the case should be reviewed hourly by CSC and risk assessed until such time as CSC consider a missing person report should be made.
3. The police do an initial risk assessment to establish potential risk to the child and how to respond.
4. The police duty supervisor is informed. He/she will manage the police response. All high risk cases will be led by a senior officer.
5. Police officers should:
  - Search the premises and surrounding grounds
  - Obtain details concerning the circumstances of the child's disappearance
  - Complete a full risk assessment
  - Obtain a detailed description of the child's clothing, together with a photograph
  - Obtain consent to release the photograph to the press (if required)
  - Add the child's details to the Missing Person Database
  - Add the child's details to the Police National Computer (PNC) if they have been missing for more than 2 hours
6. Police should undertake a secondary investigation to identify any incidents or issues which may inform the risk assessment or help locate the child more quickly e.g. domestic violence, child protection reports, the child is in care or particularly vulnerable etc
  - Police should consider contacting CSC in the relevant Local Authority
  - The risk assessment must be continually reviewed

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7. Police are responsible for liaising with the family as well as with other agencies and force areas. If the child is in care, it may be more appropriate for CSC to undertake enquiries with the family and other agencies and report their findings back to the police. This approach should be decided on a case by case basis.
  8. The local Police Missing Person (Misper) Co-ordinator is the single point of contact for all agencies.
  9. Any child who is in care or who is particularly vulnerable will be reviewed within 24 hours by the Misper Co-ordinator and CSC. Children missing over 24 hours will be notified to social care by way of referral to the relevant CSC assessment team.
  10. Where there are concerns about a child's vulnerability or that the child may be at risk of significant harm a referral should be made to CSC as soon as this becomes evident.
  11. If the child has been missing for more than 24 hours, the case will be reviewed at the police daily management meeting.
  12. Once a child has been missing over 24 hours, the police, in consultation with partner agencies, must consider a media strategy.
  13. When a child has been missing more than 48 hours, the case will be reviewed by a Detective Inspector.
  14. When a child has been missing over 5 days CSC will convene a strategy meeting. CSC will call a strategy meeting sooner if they consider the child is likely to suffer significant harm.
  15. The Misper Co-ordinator will inform the Police National Missing Persons Bureau when the child has been missing over 14 days – this may be earlier if the child is at high risk of harm.
  16. If the child has been missing for more than 10 weeks, the Misper Co-ordinator will ask for the PNC record to remain in place for up to a year.
  17. Within 24 hours of the child's return, the police undertake a "safe and well" check and inform all relevant agencies of the child's return.
  18. In cases when a child goes missing repeatedly, or if there are other concerns about the child, the police will make a referral to CSC irrespective of the duration of time the child has been missing.
  19. In cases where a child discloses a child protection issue, an officer from the Child Abuse Investigation Unit (CAIU) will liaise with CSC in order to determine if there is need for joint agency investigation – if so, a strategy meeting will be convened.

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20. Panel meetings should take place regularly (according to local need) in each area called by the Police to review cases. CSC and any other relevant agencies will be invited to attend as judged necessary.

21. Data on missing children will be sent by the police quarterly to the Performance data section in each Local Authority's Children's Services.

22. Out of hours arrangements

If a child goes missing out of office hours, the police should consider informing the emergency duty/social work team, which covers that area.

23. Out of area arrangements

There may be occasions when a child goes missing and they are placed in care in a different Local Authority area or Police area. In these circumstances, CSC should report the child missing to TV Police (as well as to the Police in the area the child has gone missing) by phoning the Duty Inspector on 08458 505505 as the child may have returned to his/her home area.

24. For further information refer to the Thames Valley Missing Children Guidance on your local safeguarding children board website/ procedures.

*This Protocol was agreed in September 2010 between Thames Valley Police and Children's Social Care representatives from Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire West Berkshire, Reading, Wokingham, Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead, and Bracknell Forest Councils.*