



Procedure and Practice Guidance for Children and Young People Who Go Missing from Family Home, their Place of Care or Educational Establishment

December 2025

Version Control

Title	Procedure and Practice Guidance for Children and Families who go Missing from Home, Care and Education
Version	DSP1 (former DSCB V3 may 2019)
Date	December 2025
Author	Safeguarding Partnership Business Unit

Update and Approval Process			
Version	Group/Person	Date	Comments
DSP1	Business Unit	May 2019	Rebranded under new Safeguarding arrangements and to reflect Statutory Guidance.
DSP1.1	Business Unit	August 2020	Minor amendment. Revised to reflect changes to Front Door Service
DSP 2	Nicola Brownhill Service Manager - CIAT	December 2025	Revised to reflect changes within the missing and exploitation service.

Issue Date	December 2025
Review Date	December 2026

Contents

Section Number	Section Title	Page Number
1	Introduction and Purpose	4
2	Definitions	5
3	Reasons why children and families go missing	5-7
4	What to do when a child goes missing?	7-8
5	Children who go missing who are cared for by the Local Authority	8-9
6	Children who go missing from their family home	9
7	Missing children in the care of Darlington Local Authority that live in other Local Authority areas	9-10
8	Missing children in Darlington cared for by other Local Authority areas	10
9	During an active missing episode	10
10	Actions to be taken when a child is found	12-15
11	Abduction, Slavery, Exploitation or Trafficking	15-16
	Legal Framework, Roles & Responsibilities	17
	Appendix A – Missing Flow Chart	18

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

1.1 A child or young person going missing from home, their place of care or education establishment can be an indicator for a range of harm. Children who go missing are at an increased risk of being abused and/or exploited with the reasons for the children going missing often being complex. This means that those involved with children who go missing, need to ensure that missing episodes are not viewed in isolation to the child's situation and considered alongside all aspects of their life.

1.2 The safety and welfare of the child or young person is paramount, and it is important that professionals and carers responsible for a child's care know how and when to report a child missing. The Police are partners of Children's Social Care in managing "missing" episodes and it is important those involved with the child work together.

1.3 The purpose of the procedure and practice guidance is to support practitioners to ensure that effective responses are in place when a child goes missing. It also assists in their understanding of the Return Home Interview (RHI) process and where a referral into the Missing and Exploited Group (MEG) is required.

1.4 This procedure and practice guidance relates to:

- All children and young people living with their families within the boundaries of Darlington.
- Children who are cared for by Darlington Borough Council and placed in Darlington Borough Council Children's homes, independent homes or foster homes, within the Darlington Borough Council area.
- Children who are cared for by other Local Authorities but placed in the Darlington area in independent children's home or with agency foster carers, where compliance with the protocol is specified in the contract or placement agreement.
- Children who are cared for by Darlington Borough Council who remain in the parental home, but who are currently subject to a Care Order and are subject to Placement with Parents Regulations.
- Children missing from education for more than five days (this does not include non-attendance)
- Children/unborn subject to a child protection plan residing within and outside of Darlington Borough Council area.
- Any Darlington Child who has been cared for by the Local Authority and is entitled to leaving care services residing within and outside Darlington Borough Council area, under The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 (including those aged over 18).
- An adult whose whereabouts are unknown in the following circumstances:
 - a pregnant woman when there are concerns about the welfare of a child following birth.
 - a family where there are concerns about the welfare of the child because of the presence of an individual who poses a risk to children or other person suspected of previously harming a child.

2. DEFINITIONS

2.1 'Missing': Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until they are located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.

2.2 'Child': anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore refers to 'children and young people' throughout this protocol with the exception of a former relevant child within the meaning of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. These young people continue to be the responsibility of the Local Authority up to the age of 21 (24 years if in receipt of full time education).

2.3 'Child who is cared for': a child who is cared for by the Local Authority by reason of a Care Order or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

2.4 'Missing from placement': a child who is cared for by the Local Authority whose whereabouts are not known.

2.5 'Unauthorised absence from school': a child who is not present at school as required or who is absent without explanation from school. Unless there is a belief that an absent child is at risk of significant harm, these matters should be referred to the Local Authority by schools after they have followed their own school level actions. Where there is a pattern or frequency of absence episodes that cause concern, this may require an investigation to determine if the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm.

2.6 'Children Missing Education': a child believed, after reasonable investigation from the school, to have moved out of the area and whose whereabouts are unknown. The response to this falls within the Children Missing Education (CME) procedure.

2.7 'Absconded': When a missing child is subject to a court order, such as curfew or bail conditions, police must be made aware of the order and the expiry date in order for the child to be classified as an absconder. If the expiry date of the order is not known, the child will be classified as a "missing."

3. REASONS WHY CHILDREN AND FAMILIES GO MISSING

3.1 The Children's Society through its research, has identified the following risk factors that can precede a missing incident in a young person, otherwise known as '**push' factors**:

- arguments and conflicts at home including being told/forced to leave
- poor family relationships including specific step-parent issues
- physical and emotional abuse including Domestic Abuse
- personal wellbeing – feeling depressed, needing someone to talk to
- problems with alcohol and/or drugs
- problems at school
- placement instability for looked after children, and children who are placed some distance from their family and friends
- avoidance of services or intervention associated with child protection procedures

Significant '**Pull**' factors are:

- children running to be with family, particularly if contact arrangements are problematic
- grooming for potential sexual exploitation – children will run away or go missing following grooming by adults or other children wishing to exploit them
- pressure from their peer group, a gang or radicalisation group

3.2 The following are examples of **immediate risks** associated with going missing:

- suspicion of Murder
- suspicion of abduction
- suspected suicide or self-harm
- severe weather conditions
- ongoing victim of bullying or harassment, e.g. facial, sexual, homophobic etc. or local community concerns
- previously disappeared and suffered or was exposed to harm whilst missing
- the person is normally resident in the UK and is believed to have travelled abroad
- the person is normally resident abroad and is believed to have gone missing whilst in the UK
- risk of sexual exploitation
- risk of criminal exploitation/County Lines/Modern Slavery

3.3 Children who go missing in **specific circumstances**:

- Children who are abducted - 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 and Honour Based Violence - Some children run away because they are at risk of abuse and some children are physically removed from the country for the purpose of entering a forced marriage. The prospect of a forced marriage in particular, can lead to young women running away from home though young men can also be at risk.
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) - Girls may be removed from the country (or elsewhere in the UK) for the purposes of FGM. This may particularly be an issue during school holidays.
- Trafficked Children - Department for Education (DfE) guidance: 'contains practical guidance for agencies.'
- Grooming for Potential Sexual Exploitation - In some cases children may run away or go missing following grooming by adults, (including online grooming), who will seek to exploit them sexually. Evidence suggests that 90 per cent of children subjected to sexual grooming go missing at some point.
- Criminal Exploitation and County Lines - In some cases children and young people go missing or become involved in gangs because they are at risk of exploitation by Organised Crime Groups (OCGs).

- Impact of Technology - The role of fixed and mobile technologies (including the internet, mobile / smartphones and games consoles) in facilitating the grooming process is well documented. Some adults who seek to abuse children, exploit these technologies by using text messages, e-mail, chat rooms, Instant Messenger and social networking sites (e.g. Facebook) to set up actual 'off line' abusive situations. These situations often involve children going missing. In addition, online bullying is often experienced very differently from traditional forms of bullying, as the opportunity to target individuals wherever they are and at any time has greatly increased due to developments in online technologies.

4 WHAT TO DO WHEN A CHILD GOES MISSING

4.1 We all have a responsibility to safeguard and protect the young and vulnerable and children who go missing are at an increased risk. When a child goes missing from their family home, their place of care, their educational setting or does not return as expected, it is a distressing and worrying time for parents and carers. Parents and carers, when made aware of this, should make reasonable efforts to locate the child which should include:

- Search bedroom / accommodation / outbuildings / vehicle
- Contact known friends and relatives where the child may be
- If it is possible, visit locations that the child is known to frequent
- Visit the address where the child is supposed or thought to be
- The carer should also consider checking with the local Accident & Emergency Department and the police, as in some circumstances the child may have been arrested and refused to give their name or address to the police.

4.2 Where basic checks have been completed and the child has not been located the child should be reported as missing to Police via telephone 101 or 999. The responsibility for making a missing person report to the police rests with:

- The parent or primary carer of the child when there is no social care involvement.
- The foster carer
- The residential carer.
- The supported lodgings provider.
- If a child goes missing from school or hospital, staff must inform the parent or person with Parental Responsibility.

4.3 It is important when reporting a child missing, that all relevant information is passed on to the Police. Information to consider should include;

- Details of the child / young person, name, date of birth, legal status, mobile telephone number etc;
- A physical description including clothing worn when the child or young person left the place.
- Names, addresses and contact numbers of family members, significant others and friends;
- Details of where, when and with whom the child or young person went missing;
- Legal status of the child or young person, who has parental responsibility, or Local Authority care section 20 or 31

- Relevant medical history;
- A recent photograph cropped as necessary to show only the missing person;
- Any other relevant information e.g. addresses / locations frequented;
- Previous history of missing and circumstances of where found;
- Actions already taken to try and locate the child or young person along with the results of this action;
- Any factors, which may increase the risks to the child or young.
- Where the child was last seen or spoken to, their presentation, what they were wearing etc.
- The nature and reason why the child may be missing, any triggers which may have resulted in the missing episode.
- Any worries or concerns the child/parents/carers may have which may increase the risk.

4.4 Once a child has been reported to Police, from the information provided to them, they will determine the level of risk involved. If a child is not where they are supposed to be but their location is known the police may consider them to be 'away' rather than missing and will determine the level of risk.

4.5 A photograph of the child should be obtained and shared with the police for the purpose of identifying and locating them.

5 MISSING CHILDREN WHO ARE CARED FOR BY THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

5.1 When the whereabouts of a child in care is not known the carers are responsible for carrying out preliminary checks to see if the child can be located as outlined above. If the initial checks do not succeed in locating the child or there remain concerns that despite contact being made with the child, that they are at risk, the Police, the placing Local Authority, parents/carers with Parental Responsibility and the Independent Reviewing Officer need to be informed.

5.2 The Philomena Protocol is a Durham Constabulary Safeguarding initiative aimed at preventing and responding to young people going missing. The protocol is to help ensure that those responsible for caring for children and young people in care, carefully and sensitively gather relevant information which is used to locate them and return a child safely and as quickly as possible. The basis of the scheme is to ensure vital information about the child is recorded on to a form, information such as where the child was last seen, any triggers which may have resulted in the missing episode, out of character behaviour, details of relatives, friends, associates and modes of transport normally used by the child and any financial details. It will also include details of mobile phones and social media that may be used to facilitate contact with the child during a missing episode. Link to [Philomena Protocol](#).

5.3 Addresses the child may be going to as well as contact details should be provided by the carer. This information is kept securely both by the carer and the Police. Following this information being shared, discussions between the carer and Police will take place regarding what measures are to be taken to locate the child which will include what additional enquiries the carer will be making and also how those involved will be updated.

5.4 The carer/s should take all reasonable steps to secure the safe return of the child based on their knowledge of the child and the information within the child's care plan.

5.5 Where any allegation of physical or sexual abuse is made or becomes evident child protection procedures must be implemented.

5.6 The Social Worker and Team Manager should decide in consultation with the carer and the child, whether they should convene a statutory review of the child or young person's care plan.

5.7 If a missing episode lasts longer than 24 hours where a child is placed within a residential provision, care workers within the children's home must inform their Registered Manager or Deputy Manager if the Registered Manager is not available. The Registered Manager/deputy must inform the Service Manager.

5.8 An up to date photograph of the child should be kept on the child's social care file so that in the event they go missing the photograph can be shared with the police for the purpose of identifying and locating them before they come to harm.

6 MISSING CHILDREN FROM THEIR FAMILY HOME

6.1 Children missing from home are vulnerable to the same risks as those children who are cared for by the Local Authority therefore the response to missing episodes are as outlined within this procedure.

6.2 When a child is reported missing to Police, a Vulnerable Child (VC) form is submitted to the Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) and a decision will be made as to whether a response from Children's Social Care is required for those children who do not have an allocated Social Worker. This decision is made by the Team Manager within CIAT Team. All children in such instances will be offered a Return Home Interview (RHI) by the Barnardo's Missing From Home Worker (MFHW).

6.3 If at any point during this process, there are concerns that the child may be at risk of significant harm, child protection procedures may be implemented.

7 CHILDREN CARED FOR OUT OF OUR LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA

7.1 When a child is placed out of the Local Authority area, the responsible authority must ensure that the child has access to relevant support services in advance of the placement being made, wherever possible. A notification must be made to the host authority to ensure they are aware of the child placed for care in their area.

7.2 If the child placed out of the local authority area goes missing, this procedure must be followed in addition to other processes which may be set out within the policy of the host authority. It is possible that the child may return to the responsible authority's area therefore it is imperative that there is close liaison between the Police and professionals across both areas. We need to ensure that the response to the missing episode is co-ordinated and managed well. Where going missing has been a concern previously for a child, how this will be managed and responded to, should be detailed within the care plan.

7.3 If the child is at also at risk of or being exploited they may be heard at the host Local Authority MEG/VEMPT and the responsible Local Authority allocated worker should attend.

This will ensure that any information regarding places, peers and associates is gathered and used within a matrix or risk assessment.

8 CHILDREN CARED FOR IN DARLINGTON THAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ANOTHER LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA

8.1 If a child is cared for in the Darlington area but is the responsibility of another Local Authority the designated placement or carer is responsible to contact Durham Constabulary, the placing Local Authority and parents/carers with Parental Responsibility.

8.2 As the host authority a Vulnerable Child form will be submitted by the Police to the Children's initial Advice Team where this will be forwarded to the responsible Local Authority.

8.3 It is possible that the child may return to their responsible Local Authority area therefore it is imperative that there is close liaison between the Police and professionals across both areas. We need to ensure that the response to the missing episode is co-ordinated and managed well. Where going missing has been a concern previously for a child, how this will be managed and responded to, should be detailed within the care plan.

8.4 Children residing in Darlington but cared for by another Local Authority will be heard at the daily missing meeting. If appropriate these children will also be referred to Darlington's MEG and the responsible Local Authority will be invited to attend. This will ensure that the relevant information regarding the risk, peers and places in Darlington will be shared with the responsible Local Authority.

9 DURING AN ACTIVE MISSING EPISODE

9.1 When a child has been reported missing details are shared within the daily missing meeting scheduled by the Children's Initial Advice Team. Attendees include Durham Constabulary, Barnardo's Missing from Home Worker, a duty Manager from CIAT and the Team Manager from the exploitation team.

9.2 For any child that is actively missing a discussion will take place within the daily missing meeting until the child is found. When updates occur, all parties need to share current information with each other. Following the missing child report, the carer must update the police with the status of the child's absence including details of any action that has taken place to locate them such as attempts to contact via mobile telephone.

9.3 All updates or information provided should be recorded accurately and in a timely manner and shared with any person deemed involved in locating the missing child.

9.4 The allocated social worker must send relevant updates on the missing incident to EDT until the child has returned to placement or been located.

9.5 When a child has been missing for 24 hours, the appropriate Children's Social Care Service Manager must be informed. If the child is cared for by the Local Authority, the Independent Reviewing Officer should also be informed.

9.6 The Police or the Local Authority may call a multi-agency meeting at any point to develop a plan to manage and reduce any risks posed to or by the child while they are missing and to review and plan actions to locate them. This may be in addition to any updates shared at the daily missing meeting within CIAT.

9.7 When a child cared for by the Local Authority has been missing from their place of care with no contact or sightings for 48 hours, the Service Manager must advise the Head of Service and Assistant Director. If it is out of hours this must be done via the EDT on call Senior Manager.

9.8 Within 3 days of a child going missing and not returning or no knowledge of their whereabouts a multi-agency strategy meeting must be held. The following professionals should be invited to attend the strategy meeting and any absences must be recorded:

- The most appropriate Durham Police Representative.
- Police Officer from the Child Exploitation Team.
- The Barnardo's Missing from Home Worker.
- Team Manager from CIAT.
- Team Manager from the exploitation team.
- Team Manager from the allocated team.
- The allocated Social Worker.
- The Foster Carer or Residential Carer.
- The Foster Carer's Supervising Social Worker (if applicable)
- The Team Manager of Fostering (if applicable)
- Fostering Agency Manager (if the placement is with an Independent Fostering Agency)
- The Residential Childrens Home Manager.
- An Education Representative / School Nurse.
- Any other relevant agency representative.
- Parents / Carers (if appropriate)

9.9 Further such reviews will take place at least every five days thereafter or earlier, if deemed appropriate.

9.10 Durham Constabulary have responsibility for advising the media regarding any child who is missing in order to assist in locating that child or warning the public if the child poses any sort of threat. This must be done with approval from the parents or those with Parental Responsibility. For children who are cared for by the Local Authority, any decision to publicise will always be made in consultation with the Local Authority.

9.11 The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care is the delegated decision maker regarding any decision to release publicity regarding a child that has gone missing that is cared for by the Local Authority.

9.12 If the child has been missing for 28 days, a senior Police Officer and a senior Children's Social Care Service representative should jointly review the case and take any actions they consider necessary to locate and return the child.

9.13 During a missing episode, there must be regular liaison and exchange of information between the police and professionals. This exchange of information must be well managed and co-ordinated. If the child is hosted in another Local Authority area Durham Constabulary must also be informed of the missing incident by the police force in the host authority.

9.14 If a parent or carer knows or suspects the location of the child it is their responsibility to arrange the return the child to their place of care if this is safe and practicable.

10 ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN WHEN A CHILD IS FOUND OR RETURNS

10.1 If the child returns on their own accord the parent or carer must inform the police and any other professionals that were involved in looking for the child.

10.2 Repeated episodes of going missing or running away should be viewed with as much concern as the first incident.

10.3 If a child or young person has 3 missing episodes in a period of 90 days a referral is made to the Missing and Exploited Group (MEG)

10.4 If the child has been found in a different Local Authority area and is not likely to return, representatives of the 'receiving' Local Authority must be involved in the Strategy Discussion and the transfer of responsibility for and/or services to the child and family must be discussed.

10.5 If the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, consideration must be given by the social worker and Manager in consultation with the Conference Chair, as to the need to bring forward the next Child Protection Review Conference. Children's Social Care team must give explicit consideration on the need for legal action and record the reasons for their decision.

10.6 Where the circumstances of the missing person episode indicate that the child may have been subject to, or at risk of significant harm, the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Child Protection Procedures should be implemented.

10.7 When a child returns to their home or place of care following a missing episode, a number of actions need to be undertaken. **Safe and well checks:**

- Safe and well checks are carried out by the police as soon as possible after a child or young person reported as missing has been found. Their purpose is to check for any indications that the child or young person has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give the child an opportunity to disclose anything. If the police discover that the child is running away from any form of abuse at home joint safeguarding measures will be implemented and the child will not be returned to their home.
- Where a child or young person goes missing frequently, it may not be practicable for the police to see them every time they return. In these cases a reasonable decision should be taken in agreement between the police and the child's parent, carer or

social worker, with regard to the frequency of such checks bearing in mind the established link between frequent missing episodes and serious harm, which could include gang involvement, forced marriage, maltreatment or abuse at home, bullying or sexual exploitation.

- An assessment of whether the child might go missing again should be based on information about their individual circumstances, family circumstances and background history as well as push and pull factors such as exploring the motivation for going missing, potential associates and places they may go to. The circumstances in which the child was found or returned and any individual risk factors, i.e. age, vulnerability, emotional/mental health issues, learning disability should also be considered.

10.8 Return Home Interviews (RHI):

- The Department for Children, Schools and Families (2014) 'Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home and care' states that when a child or young person is missing from home or care, in addition to a Police 'Safe and Well Check', arrangements should be made by Children's Social Care for a 'Return Home Interview' to be conducted. This includes children and young people known to Children's Social Care on a child in need plan, a child or young person subject to child protection procedures and children cared for by the Local Authority.
- The Return Home Interview is to be offered and completed by the Barnardo's Independent Missing from Home Worker within 72 hours of the child returning to their place of care. If the RHI is not completed within 72 hours this must be referred to the Service Manager within CIAT.
- The MFHW should talk with the child or young person on their return from a missing episode to ensure an initial or updated safety, needs and risk assessment is carried out. The Return Home Interview is important in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child, or young person at risk of going missing in the future and should not be considered a routine or administrative task.

10.9 The purpose of the Return Home Interview is:

- To ensure the child or young person is safe in his or her home or care placement, and to identify any harm they may have suffered prior to, or whilst missing.
- To discuss any medical condition the child or young person may have, and assess any need for immediate medical attention.
- To assist the child or young person to identify issues leading to them going missing to reduce/avoid the likelihood of them going missing in future.
- To explore strategies for improving personal safety and promote safe behaviour if a child or young person remains at risk of going missing in future.
- To undertake and update a need and/or risk assessment, and agree and identify actions to address need and avoid/reduce further missing episodes.
- To gather information to facilitate finding a child or young person if they go missing in future.

- To gather intelligence to share with Children's Social Care and Police regarding children and young people missing from home and care.

10.10 The interview and actions that follow from it should:

- Identify and deal with any harm the child or young person has suffered – including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the 'safe and well check' – either before they ran away or whilst missing.
- Understand and try to address the reasons why the child or young person was reported as missing.
- Help the child or young person feel safe and understand that they have options to prevent repeat instances of them running away.
- Provide them with information on how to stay safe if they choose to go missing again, including helpline numbers.
- Independent return interviews provide an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again and from risks they may have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their home.
- Where a child does not wish to engage with the interview, parents and/or carers should be provided with the opportunity to provide any relevant information and intelligence they may be aware of. This should support in the prevention of further missing episodes and identify where additional support may be required.
- Return Home Interviews, when completed, are assigned to the allocated Social Worker to complete the social work plan. It is expected that any issues or support needs identified within the Return Home Interview are acted upon and progressed by the social care Team.
- The social worker then assigns the RHI to the Team Manager/CIAT Manager for final sign off and authorisation within 10 days.
- The CIAT Service Manager will monitor the completion of RHI and social work plans to ensure that these are completed in timescale.
- Where a child does not have an allocated Social Worker, the Children's Initial Advice Team Manager/Advanced Practitioner will consider the information within the Return Home Interview and determine whether further support or intervention is required from Children's Social Care.
- If a child is believed to have suffered significant harm while they have been missing or if the missing incident leads professionals to believe that the child may be at risk of significant harm, Darlington Safeguarding Procedures must be followed and if appropriate, this will include an enquiry and assessment under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

10.11 In **exceptional** circumstances, a Local Authority Officer not below the level of Service Manager may determine that a return home interview is not required i.e. where the missing child was very young and was missing for a very short period of time or the missing child was located in hospital following an accident.

10.12 If it is apparent upon the return of a child or young person, that they have been the victim of a crime whilst absent, or that they may be in danger or at risk from any person

arising out of circumstances that have occurred whilst they were absent, then the Police must be called and asked to attend without delay. This is vital for the protection of the child and for the speedy recovery of evidence.

10.13 In such circumstances, the missing persons clothing, mobile phone and trace evidence from their body, fingernails or hair may be crucial. In cases of sexual abuse, the child should be discouraged from washing and immediate advices sought from the Police. If carers become aware of the location of the scene of any crime committed against the young person, or of the location of any crucial evidence (e.g. a used condom), they must notify the Police without delay. This will enable the Police to take steps to secure and preserve evidence.

10.14 In cases where there are concerns regarding sexual assault, the Police have access to specially trained officers, doctors and facilities designed to care for the victim and obtain evidence.

11 ABDUCTION, EXPLOITATION, SLAVERY OR TRAFFICKING

11.1 As part of the management of children and young people who may have been found at a location or with a person in circumstances that may have encouraged directly or indirectly a young person to stay away from carers, professional may wish to utilise a Child Abduction Warning Notice. The procedure aims to identify, warn and where necessary prosecute these individuals for harbouring or abduction in order to disrupt this activity under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 or section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984.

11.2 Warnings can be given in relation to children under the age of 16 years if they live at home and under 18 years of age if they are a child cared for by the Local Authority. The notice can only remain in place until the young person reaches that age. Durham Police will give the warning, where appropriate, and record them on the police system. In the case of a child cared for by the Local Authority, this will be done in conjunction with the relevant Local Authority.

11.3 If during the course of a missing episode and the completion of a Return Home Interview there are concerns that a child may be at risk of suffering from exploitation a child exploitation matrix should be completed and sent to the Police Erase Team. A referral may also be made to the Local Authority Missing and Exploited Group (MEG) which is held monthly. MEG is a multi-agency meeting chaired by the Service Manager of the Exploitation Team and explores risks, places, peers, associates and perpetrators in order to disrupt and minimise risks to children that may be being exploited.

11.4 If it is established that a child has been moved from A to B for the purposes of exploitation the child should be referred to the UK Human Trafficking Centre using the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) available on the National Crime Agency website. This will ensure the child is assessed as being a trafficking victim, given support and will establish patterns.

Legal Framework Summary

- Children Act 1989 & 2004
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)
- Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (DfE, 2014)

Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Social Workers	Coordinate care plans, attend strategy meetings, complete RHIs
Police	Risk assessment, locate missing children, share intelligence
Carers	Initial search, report missing, provide child information
Education Staff	Monitor attendance, report concerns
CIAT Team	Receive VC forms, manage daily missing meetings
MEG Team	Review exploitation risks, coordinate multi-agency response

Appendix A: Missing Episode Flowchart



