Missing Child or Young Person

Policy & Guidelines

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Date:	13/10/2026
Signed:	
Policy review date:	13/10/2027
Version:	1.4

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Policy Statement

Concrete Rose is committed to protecting the children and young people in its care including those housed by hosts in our supported lodgings scheme and those living in our Co-Living homes. This policy sets out the policies and procedures that will be enacted if a child or young person goes missing from a Concrete Rose placement (including supported lodgings) and recognises that many of these children and young people are more likely to suffer significant harm and are vulnerable to exploitation.

This policy reflects the fact that those housed by Concrete Rose, and notably through the supported lodgings and Co-Living schemes, vary in age and status. In particular, there are three distinct groups of young people that access Concrete Rose services:

- Children looked-after aged 16-18
- Children aged 16-18 but not 'looked after'
- Young people 18 and over with additional vulnerabilities (e.g. care leavers, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, young offenders, those with additional needs including mental health difficulties).

With this in mind, this policy outlines procedures for those:

- Missing from care – referring to CLA aged 16-18 who are not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts are not known;
- Missing from home – referring to children 16-18 residing in Concrete Rose placements who are not 'in care' but are not in the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and whose whereabouts is unknown.
- Missing young people – referring to those 18+, vulnerable, and residing in a Concrete Rose placement who are not where they are expected to be or, have not returned at an agreed time, whose whereabouts is not known, and where there is concern for their welfare and/or safety.

This policy is particularly applicable to Cambridgeshire (including Peterborough).

1.2 **Definitions**

Child: Anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Child and 'children' are used throughout this guidance to refer to anyone under the age of 18;

Child Looked After (CLA): A child who is under the parenting responsibility of a local authority for more than 24 hours.

1.3 **A note on Cambridgeshire Police**

Cambridgeshire Police will class any young person under the age of 18 whose whereabouts are not known as 'missing'. They do not operate an 'absent' category as some other forces do. It is important to note that professionals or others reporting a child missing to the Police, should not make the judgement themselves as to whether a child is missing. This decision will be formally made by the police on the basis of the information provided

The Police will prioritise all incidents of missing children as medium or high risk. A missing child incident would be prioritised as 'high risk' where:

- The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child is in serious danger through their own vulnerability; or
- The child 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 is in danger.

A missing child incident would be prioritised as 'medium risk' where the risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others. This category requires an active and measured response by

Police and other agencies in order to trace the missing person and support the person reporting. This will involve a proactive investigation and search in accordance with the circumstances to locate the missing child as soon as possible.

The Police will carry out a 'Safe and Well' check with a 'missing' child following their return. Their purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give the child an opportunity to disclose any offending against them.

2.0 SPECIFIC RISKS

2.1 **Trafficking**

Some of the children who local authorities look after may be unaccompanied asylum-seeking children or other migrant children. Some children in this group may have been trafficked into the UK and may remain under the influence of their traffickers even while they are looked after. Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing, with most going missing within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours. Unaccompanied migrant or asylum-seeking children, who go missing immediately after becoming looked after, should be treated as children who may be victims of trafficking. Children who have been trafficked, may be exploited for sexual purposes and the link to sexual exploitation should be addressed in conjunction with Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Safeguarding Children Board, Children who may have been Trafficked (see also Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Safeguarding Children Board, Child Sexual Exploitation).

National Referral Mechanism: Where a child displays indicators that they may have been trafficked, whether from overseas or within the UK, the social worker, in consultation with their manager, should refer the case to the relevant competent authority by submitting a National Referral Mechanism Referral Form. Decision making following the receipt of such a referral will normally follow discussions with the Police, the person making the referral and may involve other professionals and services.

2.2 **Grooming**

Grooming is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse or exploitation. Children and young people can be groomed online or in the real world, by a stranger or by someone they know – for example a family member, friend or professional. Groomers may be male or female. They could be any age. Many children and young people do not understand that they have been groomed, or that what has happened is abuse.

Children can be groomed for the purpose of sexual abuse as well as other forms of exploitation including involvement in criminal and extremist activity. Children who are missing are more vulnerable to being groomed and may also go missing as a result of being groomed.

2.3 **Radicalisation**

Children and young people can suffer harm when exposed to extremist ideology. This harm can range from a child adopting or complying with extreme views which limit their social interaction and full engagement with their education, to children being groomed for involvement in violent attacks. A child may go missing because they have already been radicalised and/or a child's risk of being radicalised might increase because they are missing and are spending time with people who may seek to involve them in radical/extreme activities.

2.4 **Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)**

The sexual exploitation of children involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where the young person (or third person/s) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common. Involvement in exploitative relationships is characterised by the child's or

young person's limited availability of choice as a result of their social, economic or emotional vulnerability (see Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy). A common feature of CSE is that the child or young person does not recognise the coercive nature of the relationship and does not see themselves as a victim of exploitation.

A child's risk of being sexually exploited might increase because they are missing and are spending time with people who may seek to involve them in sexual exploitation. The risk is heightened whilst they are missing because the protective factors of family or care are not available to them. Because there is such a strong link between children going missing and risk of sexual exploitation, professionals should always assess whether a child who has gone missing is being sexually exploited or at risk of being sexually exploited.

2.5 **Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE – often referred to as 'County Lines')**

The County Lines strategy aims to identify and disrupt drug-related and violent offending which develops and exploits a network of often vulnerable people throughout the country. Concerns that a child or young person is going missing or is being exploited should always consider the possibility that they have become involved in such activity and this should be discussed with the Police (see Child Criminal Exploitation Strategy).

Children and young people who go missing from care, home and education also need safeguarding against the risk of being drawn into offending behaviour by gangs or criminal groups.

3.0 MISSING FROM CARE 16-17

3.1 **Prevention and planning**

3.1.1 *The care plan*

All CLA have in place a care/pathway plan and placement plan with details of the arrangements necessary to keep the child safe and minimise the risk of the child going missing from placement. The placement plan includes strategies to avoid unauthorised absences and/or missing incidents along with strategies to reduce the duration and risks associated if the child does go missing. Concrete Rose management will assess this plan and consider whether the supported lodgings or Co-Living is suitable for the young person in question and can meet the needs and mitigate the risks outlined in the plan. Key factors to consider at this stage are:

- Distance from home,
- Family and friends
- Previous missing episodes
- Potential CSE and gang involvement
- The availability of suitable host(s)

3.1.2 *Risk Assessment*

Should a placement be deemed suitable, and where a risk of running away or absconding is identified (or after the first occasion when a young person has run away) the Concrete Rose core team alongside the relevant social worker and identified host or support staff will complete a 'Missing from Care Risk Assessment and Action Plan' which details action to be taken by carers and prevention strategies. Where possible this process should also include the young person and their parents (unless this is deemed inappropriate or impractical). As part of this assessment, it may be appropriate to consult with the police to share information that may be of relevance. The risk assessment should include:

- What is the risk that the child or young person might go missing?
- What risks might the child or young person or public face if they do go missing?

- With whom is it permissible for them to stay overnight and in what circumstances?

3.1.3 *Passport*

All CLA referred to Concrete Rose must have a 'Child Passport Form' including a photograph and key information about the young person that would then be readily available should they go missing.

3.2 **Procedures**

3.2.1 *Whereabouts unknown*

When a CLA goes missing it is expected that the host(s) or staff will act in the capacity of a 'good parent' and, in particular, undertake two actions:

- Make every reasonable effort to locate the child and, if successful, encourage them to return as quickly and safely as possible.
- Inform the Concrete Rose Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). (If you cannot get in touch with the DSL contact the substitute DSL. If neither are available and you are concerned for the safety of a child contact the social worker or 'out of hours' team and the police using the details at the bottom of this document.)

3.2.1 *Timeframe*

It is clearly important to set a deadline for these initial checks. This may vary depending on the levels of risk associated with each young person (including previous missing instances and levels of cognition etc) and should be outlined in the 'risk assessment' (see above). Nevertheless, in normal circumstances a period of **six hours** should be regarded as the absolute maximum for any child whose whereabouts are not known and who cannot be contacted. (It will not be appropriate for any child whose whereabouts are not known and who cannot be contacted, to remain out overnight, without being formally reported as missing.)

3.2.2 *Next Steps*

If these initial checks do not succeed in locating the child, or there are still concerns that, despite contact being made with the child, they are at risk, then the DSL will inform the individuals and agencies listed below:

- The social worker or the Emergency Duty Team if out of hours
- The local Police using 101: An Incident Number must always be obtained

Host(s) and Concrete Rose representatives will also take all the steps that they can to attempt to locate the missing child including searches of the local area, and where possible, and making enquiries with the family and friends, when appropriate. Any new information will be passed directly to the police.

3.2.3 *Police reporting*

When reporting the child missing to the Police, the following information will be required:

- The child's name(s); date of birth; legal status; responsible authority;
- Where and when they went missing;
- A recent photograph;
- Who, if anyone, they went missing with;
- What was the child wearing plus any belongings such as bags, phone etc.;
- Description and recent photo;

- Medical history; any emotional/mental health issues;
- Time and location last seen;
- Circumstances or events around going missing;
- Details of family, friends and associates;
- Reasons for being looked after;
- If thought to be at risk of CSE, reason(s) for this;
- Who are they know to associate with;
- If missing previously where have they been found;
- Social media information: their addresses, etc.;
- Previous locations / care homes they have lived;
- What action carers and others have taken so far to locate a child.

Within 24 hours, if the child is still missing, the Social Worker will organise a 'Missing from Care Strategy Meeting' to include the Police, social worker and Concrete Rose. The action plan and risk assessment should be reviewed and updated. After five days, the Social Worker will organise a further Missing from Care strategy meeting to update the action plan and share information. This will be reconvened every 5 days until the child has been found. Whilst partners will discuss the merits of publicising that the child is missing, any publicity will be led by the Police.

3.3 **When a child is found by host(s)**

When the child has been located by hosts they should inform the DSL immediately who will, in turn, inform the child's social worker and the police. Arrangements should be promptly made for 'Safe and Well' checks and Independent Return Review interviews:

3.3.1 *Safe and Well Checks*

Safe and well checks are carried out by the Police as soon as possible after the child has returned. Their 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. This should take account of 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.

3.3.2 *Independent Return Review*

The independent return review is an in-depth interview carried out by The Met Hub in Cambridgeshire and by NYAS in Peterborough. The child should be seen on their own unless they specifically request to have someone with them, and they should be offered the option of speaking to an independent representative or advocate.

The independent return interview should be offered and provided within 72 hours of the child being located or returning. It should preferably take place in a neutral place or somewhere the child feels safe. Delays in return interviews may mean a loss of important information or evidence.

3.3.3 *Reviewing the placement*

Following any missing incidents a review of the placement will be carried out with the DSL, the social worker, the host(s) and, where appropriate the child.

3.4 **Repeatedly Missing from Care**

If a child has had three missing episodes within 90 days Concrete Rose will request a strategy meeting to be convened by the social worker to review the placement and arrangements for reducing future episodes and keeping the child safe.

3.5 **Looked after Children who are away from placement but their whereabouts is known**

Sometimes a looked after child may be away from their placement, and whilst not 'missing', they may still be placing themselves at risk (e.g. they may be at the house of friends where there are concerns about risks of sexual exploitation). The hosts should again inform the DSL of the situation and take reasonable steps to ascertain the wellbeing of the child including, when appropriate, visiting the location. If there is a concern the child may be at significant risk of harm to themselves or to others then the DSL will contact the Police in order that appropriate safeguarding measures can be taken. This should not be confused with reporting a child 'missing'.

4.0 MISSING FROM 'HOME'

4.1 **Prevention and planning**

All children and young people accommodated through Concrete Rose must complete a referral process that includes a referral form and face-to-face interview. As part of this process potential risks including the risk of going missing, exploitation or self-injurious behaviour are examined and relevant paperwork requested (e.g. CAF, EHCP, MARAC). Where a young person is identified as a 'high risk' of missing from home a 'placement risk assessment' is developed for each child/young person identifying risks and mitigation measures. This process involves:

- A member of the Concrete Rose Core Team
- The child/young person
- Relevant professionals
- The family of the young person (where appropriate)

Only where it is viewed that the needs and risk of the child/young person can me suitably met by Concrete Rose are placements offered. Once placements are offered risk-assessments are shared with relevant host families and, mitigations measures are discussed with the child/young person as part of the 'pairing' process.

4.2 **Procedures**

4.2.1 *Whereabouts unknown*

When a child (16/17) goes missing it is expected that the host(s) will act in the capacity of a 'good parent' and, in particular, undertake two actions:

- Make every reasonable effort to locate the child and, if successful, encourage them to return as quickly and safely as possible.
- Inform a member of the DSL. (If you cannot get in touch with the DSL contact the substitute DSL. If neither are available contact and you are concerned for the safety of a child contact Children's Services or 'out of hours' team and the police using the details at the bottom of this document.)

4.2.2 *Timeframe*

Again timeframe is dependent on the specific young person in question. Nevertheless, in normal circumstances a period of six hours should be regarded as the maximum for any child whose whereabouts are not known and who cannot be contacted. (It will not be appropriate for any child whose whereabouts are not known and who cannot be contacted, to remain out overnight, without being formally reported as missing.)

4.2.3 *Next Steps*

If these initial checks do not succeed in locating the child, or there are still concerns that, despite contact being made with the child they are at risk, then the representative of the DSL will inform the individuals and agencies listed below:

- Children's Services
- The local Police using 101: An Incident Number must always be obtained

Host(s) and the Concrete Rose representatives will also take all the steps that they can to attempt to locate the missing child including searches of the local area, and where possible, and making enquiries with the family and friends, when appropriate. Any new information will be passed directly to the police.

4.2.4 *Police reporting*

When reporting the child missing to the Police, the following information will be required:

- The child's name/s; date of birth;
- Where and when they went missing;
- A recent photograph
- Who, if anyone, they went missing with;
- What was the child wearing plus any belongings such as bags, phone etc.;
- Description and recent photo;
- Medical history; any emotional/ mental health issues
- Time and location last seen;
- Circumstances or events around going missing;
- Details of family, friends and associates.
- If thought to be at risk of CSE, reason(s) for this;
- Who are they know to associate with;
- If missing previously where have they been found;
- Social media information: their addresses, etc.
- Previous locations they have lived;
- What action carers and others have taken so far to locate a child

4.3 **When a child is found by host(s)**

When the child has been located by hosts they should inform the DSL immediately who will, in turn, inform the Children's Services and the police. Arrangements should be promptly made for Safe and Well checks and an Independent Return Review. When a missing child not open to Social Care has been located, consideration will be given to undertaking an assessment and/or referral to appropriate services.

4.3.1 *Safe and Well Checks*

Safe and well checks are carried out by the Police as soon as possible after the child has returned. Their 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. This should take account of 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.

4.3.2 *Independent Return Review*

The independent return review is an in-depth interview carried out by The Met Hub in Cambridgeshire and by NYAS in Peterborough. The child should be seen on their own unless they specifically request to have someone with them, and they should be offered the option of speaking to an independent representative or advocate.

The independent return interview should be offered and provided within 72 hours of the child being located or returning. It should preferably take place in a neutral place or somewhere the child feels safe. Delays in return interviews may mean a loss of important information or evidence.

4.3.3 *Reviewing the placement*

Following any missing incidents a review of the placement will be carried out with the Concrete Rose core team representative, the host(s) and the child.

4.5 **Child is away from placement but their whereabouts is known**

Sometimes a child may be away from their placement, and whilst not 'missing', they may still be placing themselves at risk (e.g. they may be at the house of friends where there are concerns about risks of sexual exploitation). The hosts should again inform the DSL of the situation and take reasonable steps to ascertain the wellbeing of the child including, when appropriate, visiting the location. If there is a concern the child may be at significant risk of harm to themselves or to others then the DSL will contact the Police in order that appropriate safeguarding measures can be taken. This should not be confused with reporting a child 'missing'.

5.0 MISSING YOUNG PERSON

5.1 **Prevention and planning**

All young people accommodated through Concrete Rose must complete a referral process that includes a referral form and face-to-face interview. As part of this process potential risks including the risk of going missing, exploitation or self-injurious behaviour are examined and relevant paperwork requested (e.g. EHCP, MARAC etc). Where a young person is identified as a 'high risk' of missing from home a 'placement risk assessment' is developed for each child/young person identifying risks and mitigation measures. This process involves:

- A member of the Concrete Rose Core Team
- The young person
- Relevant professionals

Only where it is viewed that the needs and risk of the young person can me suitably met by Concrete Rose are placements offered. Once placements are offered risk-assessments are shared with relevant host families and, mitigations measures are discussed with the young person as part of the 'pairing' process.

5.2 **Procedures**

5.2.1 *Whereabouts unknown and concerns for welfare or safety of a young person*

Although young people are given more freedom to come and go from their placement they are, our of courtesy, expected to let hosts know where they are and when they can be expected to return. With this in mind, there may be circumstances whereby host(s) have concerns for the welfare and/or safety of a young person. Examples include:

- Where the young person is absent for a prolonged period having not informed the hosts (e.g. 5 days or more)
- Where the young person with a history of low mental health and self-injurious behaviour has gone missing or failed to return when they said they would.
- Where the young person is absent for a period of time that is very much out of character

If a situation arises where the hosts become especially concerned for a young person it is expected that the host(s) will undertake two actions:

- Make every reasonable effort to try and contact the young person and, if successful, encourage them to return as quickly and safely as possible.
- Inform a member of the DSL. (If you cannot get in touch with the DSL contact the substitute DSL. If neither are available contact and you are concerned for the safety of the young person contact the police using the details at the bottom of this document.)

5.2.2 *Timeframe*

The timeframe will vary depending on each young person, their history, the risk outlined in the 'placement risk assessment' and events that have taken place in their life. It is recommended that hosts contact the DSL as soon as the host has concerns for the welfare/safety of a young person or if a young person has an unexplained missing episode that has lasted longer than 24 hours.

5.2.3 *Next Steps*

The Concrete Rose representatives along with the hosts will make all reasonable efforts to contact, and if necessary locate, the young person making enquiries with friends, family etc. If between the two parties it is deemed that there is an immediate concern for the welfare of the young person the DSL representative will contact the police immediately (via 101 or for concerns requiring an emergency response using 999). For cases, where a young person is missing without immediate concerns for welfare, the Concrete Rose representative will contact the local police at a judicious time and usually after 24 hours of the young person being deemed 'missing'.

5.2.4 *Police reporting*

When reporting the young person missing to the Police, the following information will be required:

- The young person's name/s; date of birth;
- Where and when they went missing;
- A recent photograph
- Who, if anyone, they went missing with;
- What was they wearing plus any belongings such as bags, phone etc.;
- Medical history; any emotional/ mental health issues
- Time and location last seen;
- Circumstances or events around going missing;
- Details of family, friends and associates.
- If thought to be at risk of CSE, reason(s) for this;
- Who are they know to associate with;
- If missing previously where have they been found;
- Social media information: their addresses, etc.
- Previous locations they have lived;
- What action have been taken so far to locate the young person

5.3 **When a young person is found or returns**

When the young person is found or returns the host(s) they should inform the DSL immediately who will, in turn, inform the police.

5.3.3 *Reviewing the placement*

Following any missing incidents a review of the placement will be carried out with the Concrete Rose core team representative, the host(s) and the child.

5.4 **Young person is away from placement but their whereabouts is known**

If a young person is away from their placement, and whilst not 'missing', they may still be placing themselves at risk (e.g. they may be at the house of friends where there are concerns about risks of sexual exploitation). The hosts should again inform the DSL of the situation and take reasonable steps to ascertain the wellbeing of the young person including, when appropriate, visiting the location. If there is a concern the young person may be at significant risk of harm to themselves or to others then the DSL will contact the Police.

6.0 SUMMARY FLOWCHART – MISSING CHILD/YOUNG PERSON WITH UNKOWN WHEREABOUTS

Missing child or young person with whereabouts unknown

↓

Is the child under 18

Yes ↙ ↘ No

Do you have immediate concerns for their safety or have they been missing for 6 hours or more

Yes ↙ ↘ No

- Call the DSL*
- Try to contact/locate the child

↓

DSL will contact the police & Children's Services

- Try to contact/locate the child

↓

Call the DSL* as soon as you have concerns or 6 hours have passed

Do you have immediate concerns for their safety

Yes ↙ ↘No

- Call the DSL*
- Try to contact/locate the young person

↓

DSL will contact the police

• Try to contact/locate the young person

↓

Call the DSL* as soon as you have concerns or 24 hours have passed

*If the DSL is not available contact the substitute DSL. If neither are available contact the relevant social worker or Children's Services (if necessary using the 'out of hours' number) and the police directly

7.0 CONTACT DETAILS

- Concrete Rose
  - Concrete Rose 24/7 emergency number: 01223 979046
  - Mike Farrington (Designated Safeguarding Lead): 07881926728 // mike@concreterose.co.uk
  - James Bennett (Substitute Designated Safeguarding Lead): 07989352063 // james.bennett@romseymill.org
- Children's services:
  - Cambridgeshire Children: 0345 045 5203

    - Peterborough Children: 01733 864180
    - Out of hours Emergency Duty Team (EDT): 01733 234724
- Police:
    - Non-emergency: 101
    - Emergency: 999

8.0 ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

- The Children Act 1989;
- The Children Act 2004;
- The Children's Homes Regulations 2015;
- Missing Children: Who Cares? The Police response to missing and absent children (HMIC).