



Surrey County Council Missing Protocol: Children and Young People

December 2024

Contents

Introduction	4
Missing Children and Young People in Surrey	4
Missing and Harm	4
Background	5
Protocol Purpose and Aims	5
Relevant Policy and Legislation	6
Definition of Missing	6
Reporting a Child or Young Person Missing in Surrey	6
The Balance of Reporting.....	7
Concern for Welfare.....	8
Children and Young People Who Go Missing from an Education Setting	8
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC).....	8
Children and Young People Missing from Healthcare Settings	9
Practice Flowchart: Reporting	10
During a Missing Episode	10
Risk Grading	10
Push/Pull Factors and Risk of Harms Associated with Missing.....	11
High-Risk Abducted or Trafficked Children and Young People: Child Rescue Alert	11
Repeat Missing and Long-term Missing Episodes: Strategic Meetings and Safer Meetings	12
Children and Young People in Care Missing for Over 24 Hours.....	13
Publicity Appeals.....	13
Support Services	14
Practice Flowchart: During a Missing Episode	15
After a Missing Episode	15
Transport.....	15
Surrey Police Prevention Interview (Safe and Well Check)	15
How Children’s Services Are Notified of a Child or Young Person’s Return: The Central Hub Missing Team & C-SPA	16
Things to Consider when a Child or Young Person Returns.....	17
Return Home Interviews	17
Children and Young People living in Surrey	18
Where to Complete an RHI	18
If an RHI is Declined	18
Children and Young People Placed in Surrey from Another Area	19

Surrey Children and Young People Placed Outside of Area.....	19
Confidentiality.....	19
Multiple missing episodes and RHIs	19
Recording	20
Information Sharing and Action.....	20
Management Oversight of RHIs.....	20
Practice Flowchart: When a Child or Young Person Returns.....	21
Safeguarding.....	21
Forensic Considerations.....	21
Intelligence.....	22
Extra-Familial Harm	22
Child Sexual Exploitation.....	22
Child Criminal Exploitation and County Lines	23
If a Surrey Child or Young Person is at Risk of or Experiencing Extra-Familial Harm.....	24
SafeCall.....	25
Risk Vulnerability Meetings (RVMs).....	25
Safer Plans.....	26
If a Child or Young Person is Arrested.....	26
The National Referral Mechanism (NRM).....	26
Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTGs).....	27
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC).....	27
Mental Health Pathways.....	28
Prevent and Radicalisation	28
Practice Flowchart: Safeguarding After a Missing Episode	29
Care-experienced Children and Young People	30
Surrey Police Memorandum of Understanding.....	30
The Philomena Protocol.....	30
Transitional Safeguarding: Care Leavers and Young People.....	31
Diversity and Missing	32
National Support Services.....	33
Surrey Local Support Services	35
Useful Links.....	35

Introduction

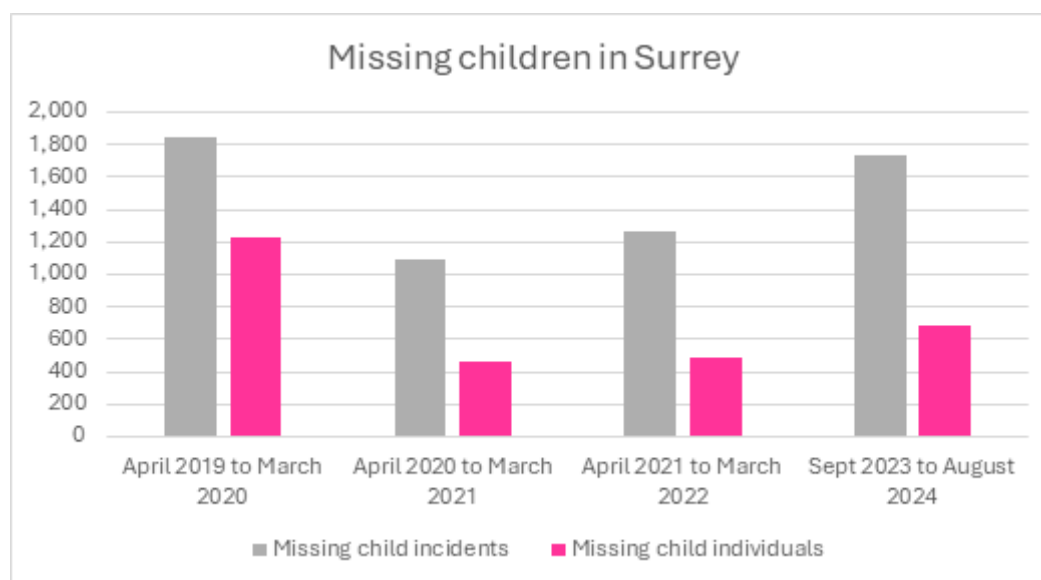
Missing Children and Young People in Surrey

The number of individual missing children and young people, and the number of missing child incidents recorded by Surrey Police have both increased in recent years, as shown in the table and chart below. Surrey Police, like many forces, recorded lower numbers of missing incidents and individuals in 2020 and 2021 as COVID restrictions led to fewer people being reported missing. In Surrey, as in most other forces, numbers have steadily increased since COVID restrictions ended, and the number of incidents is now at similar levels as they were pre-pandemic. However, the ratio of incidents to individuals is now 2.5:1 in Surrey compared to 2019/20 when it was 1.5:1, which means the number of repeat incidents for missing children is now higher than it was four years ago.

Surrey missing children (data from NCA statistics, 2023-24 data from Surrey Police)

Year	Missing child incidents	Missing individuals (children)
April 2019 to March 2020	1,848	1,230
April 2020 to March 2021	1,096	465
April 2021 to March 2022	1,265	488
Sept 2023 to August 2024	1,735	681

Please note, we are missing data for 2022-23.



Missing and Harm

Most children and young people who are reported missing are already at risk of harm due to exploitation, mental health issues, abuse or conflict at home.

- 70% of sexually exploited children have also gone missing
- 48% of criminally exploited children have gone missing from care settings

- 31% of trafficked children go missing from local authority care, with many going on to be exploited
- 23% of young people who described their home lives as lacking in positive relationships and high conflict went missing in one year, compared to 2% who described home life as being based on positive relationships and low conflict
- 21% of young people graded as medium or low risk when missing shared information that they had mental health issues including risk of self-harm and suicide.

Furthermore, our research into Black missing children's experiences shows that Black children are particularly likely to be adultified by professionals – seen as more adult than their peers of other ethnicities, and less likely to be seen as vulnerable, at risk of harm or in need of safeguarding as a result.

When missing, children are at even higher risk as they are hidden from help and away from their support networks.

- 1 in 6 young people who go missing end up sleeping rough or staying with someone they have just met
- 1 in 9 children reported being hurt or harmed while missing, rising to 1 in 3 for children who have been missing more than once.

If a child or young person is repeatedly missing, this is a red flag that they are being criminally or sexually exploited – or both. In a local Missing People service, over 90% of the children supported who have been repeatedly missing are victims of exploitation or known to be at risk of it. Importantly, the Missing People's research shows that many of the risks facing young people when they are reported missing are not known by the reporting person or shared with the police. Therefore, the risks faced by missing children are likely to be under-estimated.

Background

Over the last 12 months Surrey's Children Service has undergone a review of its support for young people who are at risk of or are experiencing extra familial harm. As a result of this review, we have created a new Adolescent Service and within that a specific Missing Team to support young people that go missing. We have also aligned ourselves with the police divisions across Surrey to improve the partnership working across both services.

Protocol Purpose and Aims

This protocol is for any local authority professionals in Surrey working with missing and/or exploited children and young people. It aims to ensure that Surrey provides better outcomes for children and young people by:

- Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of professionals responding to, preventing, and safeguarding missing and exploited children and young people
- Facilitating greater local awareness of multi-agency working and processes
- Providing a consistent response and support to missing and exploited children and young people, and their families
- Limiting the harm around children and young people who go missing and are affected by exploitation

- Facilitating the coordination and quality control of Return Home Interviews
- Facilitating efficient, relevant and proportionate information sharing
- Promoting available national and local support for missing children, young people and their families, and any associated issues.

In facilitating greater local awareness of multi-agency process and procedure around missing and exploited children and young people, this protocol contains useful information for agencies around prevention and respective actions required at each stage of a person's missing journey. Clarity around the roles and responsibilities of Surrey Police and Surrey County Council will help to ensure that each agency is consistently responding and supporting local missing children, young people and their families.

Relevant Policy and Legislation

- [Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- [Children Missing from Care Framework \(npcc.police.uk\)](https://npcc.police.uk)
- [Missing persons | College of Policing \(Authorised Professional Practice\)](#)
- [Children Missing Education - Guidance for Local authorities \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- [Children Act 1989 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)
- [Children Act 2004 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)
- [Child sexual exploitation Definition and a guide for practitioners – Department for Education \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- [Children and Social Work Act 2017 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)
- [Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery: Statutory guidance for local authorities \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- [Keeping children safe in education 2024](#)

Definition of Missing

Surrey County Council work with the same definition of missing as Surrey Police, according to Authorised Professional Practice (APP) from The College of Policing. This definition is:

'Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed' (APP 2024).

You can find more information about this definition and more information from The College of Policing, [here](#).

Reporting a Child or Young Person Missing in Surrey

A child or young person should be reported missing immediately to Surrey Police via 999 if they are thought to be at imminent risk of harm. If a child or young person is thought to be missing and is not thought to be, or is not at risk of imminent harm, the following immediate steps should be taken by parents, carers, or staff to locate them before reporting them missing to police, if appropriate and safe to do so:

- Search their bedroom, house, outbuildings or vehicles

- Attempt to contact them via mobile phone
- Contact any known friends, relatives or associates who may know their whereabouts
- Check their mobile phone email and social media sites
- Visit locations that they are known to frequent.

Children and young people should then be reported missing via 999 or 101.

If the child is in a care setting and has not been found after the above steps have been taken, residential staff or foster carers must immediately notify:

- Surrey police via 999 or 101 and provide information from The Philomena Protocol (discussed in the below section on *Care-experienced Children and Young People*)
- Those who have parental responsibility where appropriate
- Social worker/supervising social worker and the accountable team manager
- Emergency Duty Team (if out of hours)
- The Placements Team
- Independent reviewing Officer, Safeguarding Children Unit
- The responsible authority if a child is placed in Surrey by another local authority
- Surrey's virtual head teacher for looked after children.

The Balance of Reporting

It is important to note that some groups of children and young people, including those in the care system, are disproportionately likely to be reported missing. Children in care are twenty times more likely to be reported missing than the national average. In some scenarios, this is because looked after children may be at increased risk of harm. However, there are also concerns that sometimes they are being reported as missing inappropriately.

Reporting people missing when there are no genuine concerns about their safety can have a negative impact on their wellbeing and relationships. [The Howard League](#) found that over-reporting children as missing can lead to criminalisation, can damage children's perceptions of the police, and can harm children's relationships with their carers. These findings were supported by [Missing People's consultation with looked after children and young people](#) in which children spoke about their frustration with being reported missing in circumstances where peers outside of the care system would not have been. For more information about proportionate reporting, see [Responding to Missing Occurrences in the Children Missing from Care Framework](#).

In circumstances where the immediate safety of a child or young person is at risk or where there is a perceived risk of harm to them, a child or young person should be reported missing to police immediately.

- To mitigate the risks around over-reporting and the risk of a child or young person falling through the safety net when they may be at risk of harm from missing, it is vital that a balance is found within Surrey, to ensure the right approach to reporting, and responding to, missing person reports is put in place. Locally, Surrey Police have written a [Missing Persons and Child Exploitation Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) with Surrey care providers, to facilitate working together.

Importantly, in line with APP guidance, not every report of a missing person to police will be considered for a policing response. Whether an investigation is opened, and resource allocation will be considered

by Surrey Police on a case-by-case basis by operational decision makers. In line with national good practice, the following should be considered:

- When taking a missing report, the police should listen to the concerns of the reporting person. They should acknowledge that the reporting person knows the child. If they are worried, there is probably good reason to be.
- Surrey local partnership should work together to address any issues of inappropriate reporting or refusals of reports. Conversations about what is and is not appropriate reporting should happen in multi-agency meetings, **not** at the point of reporting when a child's safety could be at risk.
- Surrey local partnerships should monitor any perceived inappropriate reporting and refusals of reports, to help both the police and the people making the reports to address the issue constructively.
- Care home staff and foster carers should receive regular training on missing and parents and carers should take reasonable steps to locate the child or young person as discussed above, before reporting to the police, unless there is an immediate risk to the child or young person's safety.

Concern for Welfare

If a child or young person is not where they should be or where parents/carers or professionals want them to be, but it is known where they are, they should not be considered as missing. However, if there is a belief that they are at risk, a concern for welfare report should be made to the police via 101.

Children and Young People Who Go Missing from an Education Setting

Local schools should follow individual safeguarding procedures when reporting a child or young person missing from school or an education setting. The UK government's publication [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024: Statutory Guidance for Schools and Colleges](#) may be a useful document.

As with a child missing from home, reasonable steps should be taken to locate the child or young person before reporting them missing to police. School staff should report a child or young person missing themselves if that person has gone missing from their education setting.

For children and young people who are absent from education long term, see [Children missing education: Statutory guidance for local authorities \(2024\)](#).

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

Thousands of children arrive in the UK each year who are seeking asylum or have been trafficked into the UK. Many are forced into exploitation. Once missing, many of these young people remain missing after months or even years. Missing People and ECPAT UK have undertaken research studies into the issue. Their most recent report, [When Harm Remains](#) (2022) found that:

- The number of identified or suspected trafficked children, who have gone missing from local authority care, increased 25% from 284 in 2018 to 378 in 2020
- That means almost 1 in 3 (31%) of those children went missing in 2020.

This makes trafficked children the most at-risk group of going missing in the UK. These children and young people are particularly vulnerable and should be reported missing as any other child or young person would be. Surrey procedures for supporting unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of trafficking and modern slavery are available [here](#). There is also more information about UASC in the *Safeguarding* section of this protocol, below.

Children and Young People Missing from Healthcare Settings

Sussex and Surrey Healthcare Trust have a standalone Missing Persons Policy and a Baby/Child Abduction Policy. In circumstances where a child or young person is missing from a healthcare setting in Surrey, the relevant policy will be followed by healthcare staff. You can find more information, [here](#).

Surrey Emergency Duty Team (EDT)

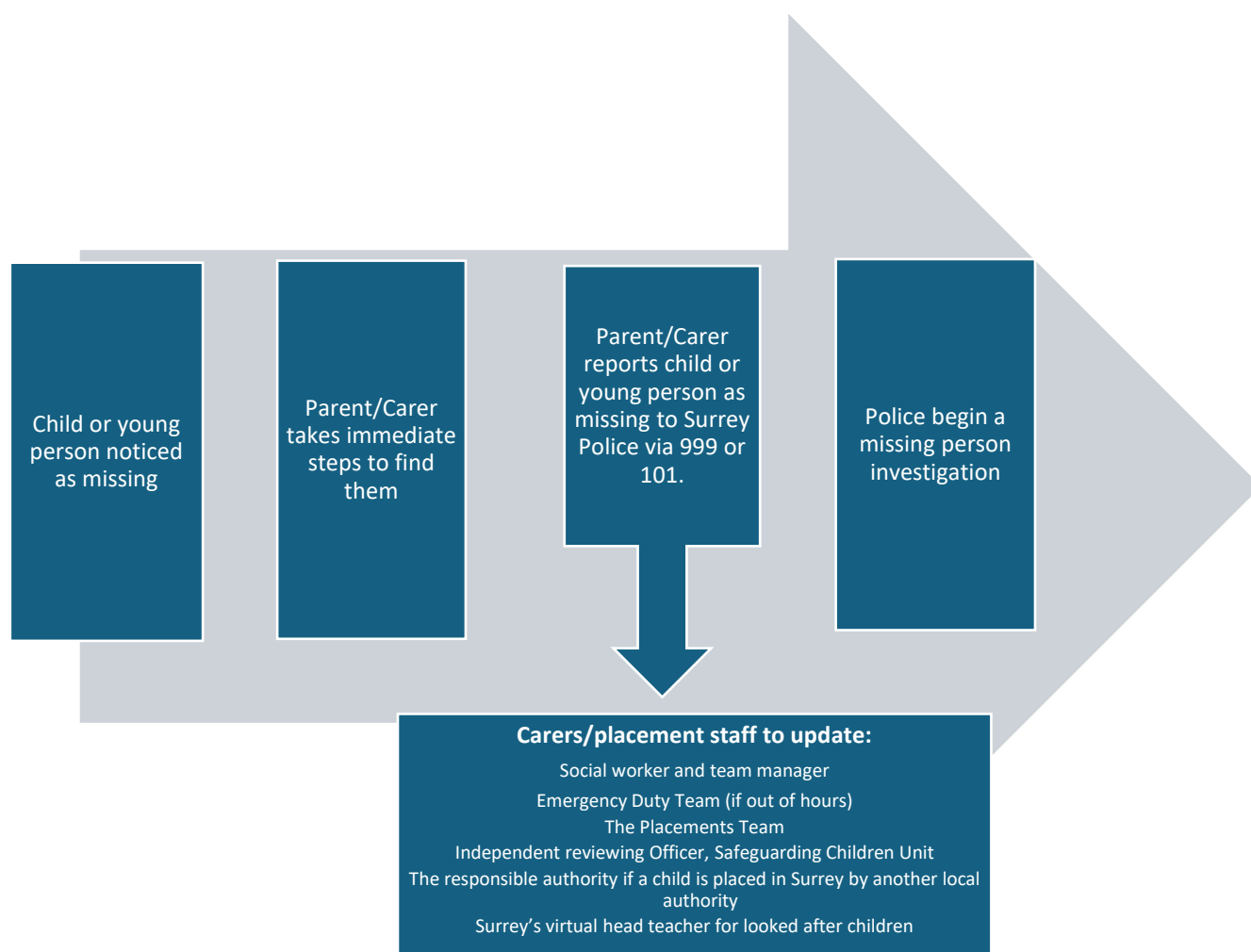
During evenings, weekends and Bank Holidays, the EDT should be contacted by care placements if a care experienced child or young person goes missing. They may also be contacted by A&E and other healthcare settings, and Education.

EDT will have access to any key concerns around a child or young person, case summaries, and information recorded in that person's Safer Plan and should be consulted for any information that may help locate or safeguard a missing child or young person who is known to Children's Services.

When EDT is notified of a missing child or young person, they will update the day service via a daily handover who will then pass any missing notification over to the C-SPA the next business day.

Contact details for the Surrey EDT are available [here](#).

Practice Flowchart: Reporting



During a Missing Episode

When a missing report is accepted, Surrey Police will open a missing investigation to locate the child or young person and contact the Missing Central Hub. When a child living outside of Surrey goes missing, The Missing Central Hub should be advised by those local police or the child's placement or home. Police resource will be allocated based on the level of risk to the child or young person.

Risk Grading

Surrey County Council work with the same risk grading as Surrey Police, who grade a missing episode as low, medium, and high risk based on the initial information that is received during a missing episode. This risk grading is continuously reviewed and can change based on any additional information received.

If the child or young person is care-experienced, Philomena Protocol form shared with police

Risk Grading	Risk of Harm
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Low	The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but not minimal.
Medium	The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.
High	The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.

The risk of **serious harm is defined as:**

‘A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible’ (Home Office 2002 and OASys 2006)

Parents, carers, and staff are expected to **update police with any additional information** they receive whilst a missing investigation is ongoing that may affect the level of risk. They are also expected to **notify the police and any relevant allocated workers as soon as possible if a child or young person returns** of their own accord.

Push/Pull Factors and Risk of Harms Associated with Missing

Children and young people go missing for a range of reasons, and there is often more than one cause. Going missing is a communication that someone is struggling. There will often be both push (things that cause someone to leave) and pull (things drawing someone away) factors involved. For children and young people, some of the most common reasons for going missing are:

- Mental health concerns
- Being unhappy at home or in care, including conflict, abuse and neglect
- Exploitation, including criminal and sexual exploitation, and grooming.

Exploitation is both a common cause and a consequence of going missing. Additional harms that children and young people could be at risk of include, but are not limited to:

- Self-harm and suicide
- Gang involvement
- Substance misuse
- Trafficking
- Death
- Accidental injury
- Forced marriage
- Sexual and physical abuse
- Emotional and psychological abuse.

High-Risk Abducted or Trafficked Children and Young People: Child Rescue Alert

A Strategy Meeting will consider whether a [Child Rescue Alert](#) is required for any high-risk children and young people who may have been abducted or trafficked. A missing episode must meet the following criteria:

- The child is apparently under 18 years old
- There is a real and immediate risk to life
- There is sufficient information available to enable the public to assist police in locating the child or young person.

The above strict criteria also ensures that professionals, the public, and the media do not become desensitised to Child Rescue Alerts. The decision to issue a Child Rescue Alert will be made by the appropriate Assistant Director in Children's Services, in discussion with police.

Repeat Missing and Long-term Missing Episodes: Strategic Meetings and Safer Meetings

Please note that Surrey is no longer holding 'Intervention Meetings,' these are to be replaced with 'Safer Meetings,' explained below.

As detailed above, if a child or young person is not where they should be or where parents/carers or professionals want them to be, but it is known where they are, they should not be considered as missing. However, if there is a belief that they are at risk, a concern for welfare report should be made to the police via 101. However, a multi-agency Strategy Meeting should be arranged in the following circumstances:

- If the child is missing, and you suspect that they are at risk of, or suffering significant harm
- If the child has been missing, no one has seen or heard from them, and there is no evidence to establish their whereabouts for a period of 24 hours or more, and this missing episode is out of character.
- If the child has frequent concerning missing episodes, either by nature of where they are going and/or who they are going missing with.

Where there are multiple missing episodes that do not meet threshold for a strategy discussion, then professionals should consider completing an extra familial harm risk assessment and safer plan.

The Strategy Meeting should take place within a maximum of 5 working days of the missing episode starting and be **convened by the child or young person's social worker, lead professional. Where the young person does not have an allocated social worker then the Assessment Team will undertake the strategy discussion where the concerns are intra familial or by the Adolescent Service where the concerns are extra familial.**

For these meetings to achieve positive outcomes the appropriate attendance and clarity of purpose are essential. **The meetings should be chaired and recorded, and the increased levels of concern reflected in the seniority of those attending.** The meeting should include:

- The accountable service manager (Chair) from the team responsible for the child's care
- Police representative for the missing investigation
- The registered manager of the children's home or fostering service (in the case of a care experienced child)
- The professional who conducted the most recent RHI (where appropriate)
- Representatives from CAMHS/Health/GP/Education/CAMHS/TYS/SAT (as appropriate)
- Any other voluntary or statutory agency that has an interest, or may take an interest, in the safeguarding of the child or young person's welfare and circumstances.

The purpose of the Strategy Meeting is to:

- Review actions taken so far and be satisfied that all possible steps are being taken to locate and return the child or young person
- Consider what actions are required to reduce the risk of significant harm
- Identify any 'push' or 'pull' factors for the missing episode, and in the case of 'pull' factors, it may be necessary to target those in the community who harbour or exploit the missing child or young person.

The Strategy Meeting **must** determine:

1. The multi-agency plan to locate the child
2. The multi-agency plan to safeguard them upon return.

If the child or young person is looked after by another local authority and placed in Surrey, the Surrey C-SPA will notify the other local authority who will be responsible for the RHI and Strategy Meeting.

If the child or young person returns in advance of a meeting, and there is no evidence that they have suffered significant harm, a Strategy Meeting is no longer required.

In all circumstances, a Safer Meeting should be convened to create, or review the effectiveness, of a child's Safer Plan. The Safer Meeting is the universal meeting framework to support the assessment and planning around missing and children who suffer extra familial harm. Every child should have an up-to-date Extra-Familial Harm Screening Assessment and Safer Plan that identifies and responds to the dynamic factors contributing to that person's missing episode(s) and any extra familial harm.

Children and Young People in Care Missing for Over 24 Hours

If a child or young person has been missing for over 24 hours, in-house residential workers should inform their service manager for in house provision.

The child or young person's allocated worker, should:

- Inform their service manager
- Complete a [Cause for Concern](#) when the child or young person is:
 - Looked after
 - an Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child (UASC) subject to a Child Protection Plan, or otherwise, vulnerable.

This should be sent this to their service manager who will consider if more senior management need to be informed.

If the child or young person has been missing for over 24 hours and is subject to a Child Protection Plan or S47 enquiry, the allocated worker should take the above steps, **and** inform:

- The allocated social worker
- Team Manager
- Duty admin
- Child Protection Chair.

If a child or young person has been missing for over 24 hours and is subject to court proceedings, the allocated social worker should take the above steps **and** inform Legal Services.

Publicity Appeals

During a missing investigation, police may request publicity to find a missing child or young person through the charity Missing People or their own distribution channels. Publicity will include the use of a child or young person's photograph. Any publicity appeals by Surrey Police will be with consent from a child or young person's next of kin, or the person holding parental responsibility. If a child is in the care of the local authority then best practice is to discuss consent with the person holding PR unless to do so

would be considered to place a child at further risk of harm irrespective of whether they are S20 or S31. The local authority is not able to give consent for publicity for a child who is S20.

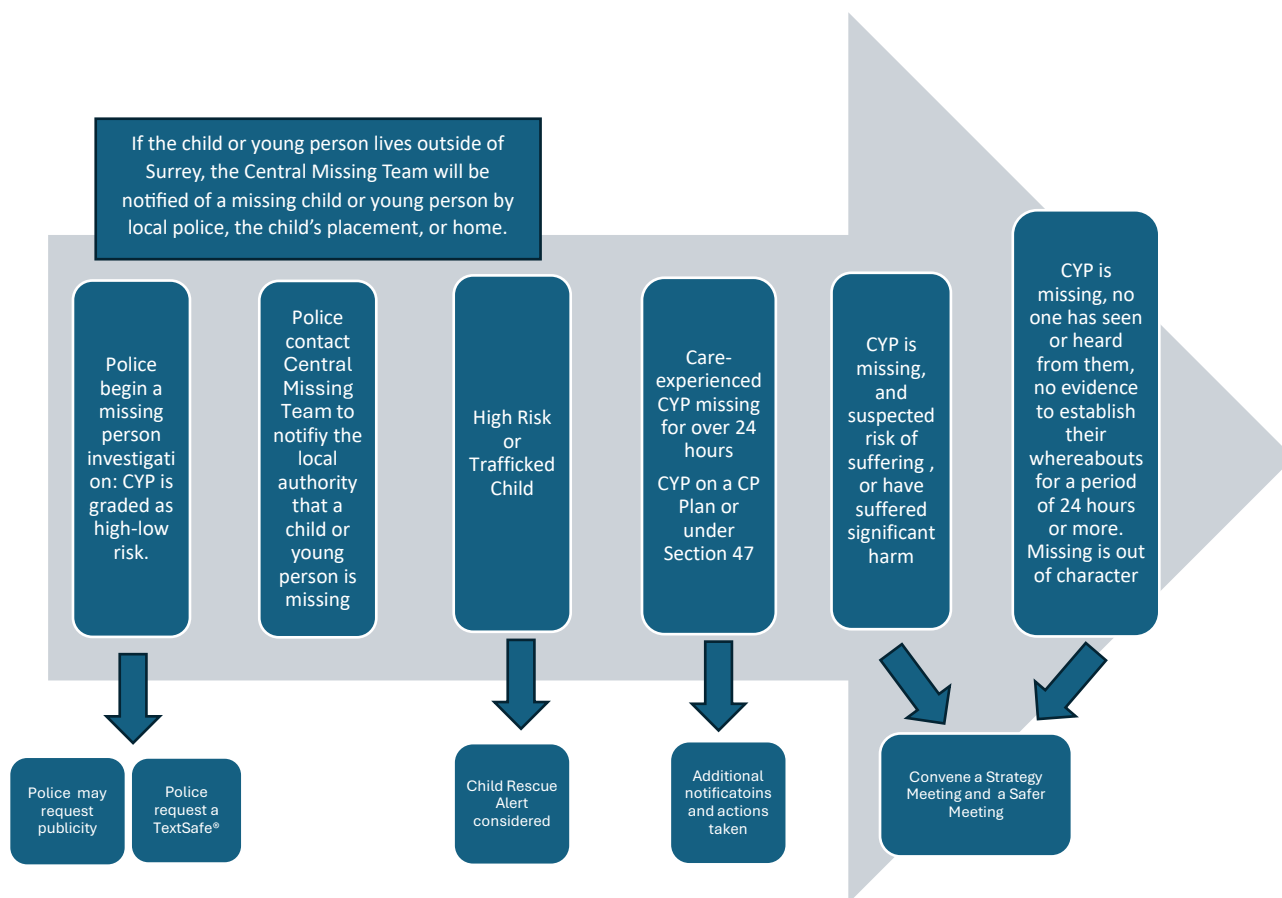
In extreme scenarios, if consent is not given, this can be overridden but will be done so according to strict criteria. Police will only use first names when issuing a missing person appeal to minimise the legacy of a digital footprint. Missing People can only receive a publicity request from police.

Surrey Children's Services will support the police using Missing People's [Safeguarding Briefing Network \(SBN\)](#) if a child or young person has been missing for more than 48 hours. The SBN is a network of organisations across the UK that Missing People send missing person briefings to when there is reason to believe that staff there may encounter the person. The SBN aims to only share information with professionals privately so that they can keep an eye out for the missing person and either report a sighting to the charity or speak to the missing person directly if they are providing support to them. The SBN aims to only share information with professionals privately so that they can keep an eye out for the missing person and either report a sighting to the charity or speak to the missing person directly if they are providing support to them.

Support Services

[Missing People's Helpline](#) offers free, confidential, emotional and practical support to friends, families, parents, carers and loved ones of missing children and young people. Consider signposting a child or young person, or their parents, carers or families to Missing People during a missing episode for safeguarding information and emotional support. More information is available [here](#), and in the *National Support* section, below.

Practice Flowchart: During a Missing Episode



After a Missing Episode

Transport

When a child or young person is located, or returns of their own accord, police should be notified immediately. If police find the child or young person, their parent, carer or professional with parental responsibility will be expected to collect them, and/or arrange and pay for transport. However, police will assist with transportation if there is evidence of risk, violence, or to the child or young person's safety.

Surrey Police Prevention Interview (Safe and Well Check)

Surrey Police will conduct a [Prevention Interview](#) with a child or young person for each missing episode, as soon as is practicable, and within 24 hours to ensure that they are safe and well. This usually takes place immediately if they are found by police, and police will attend the home or placement as soon as is practicable for children and young people who return of their own accord. There can be negotiation around when a Prevention Interview can take place where the child is placed in a regulated Surrey Children's Home and accepted as immediately 'safe/' by police where staff are present.

Where a child or young person goes missing frequently, it may not be practical for police to see them each time, in which case a reasonable decision should be taken by the police, parents and carers or social worker regarding the frequency of such checks, considering the level of risk and potential harm to the child or young person. **The reason to not conduct a Prevention Interview should be recorded on the child or young person's case file.**

A Prevention Interview is an opportunity for police to ensure that a child or young person is safe, that they have not been a victim of crime or harm, and that they will not come to further harm. In most scenarios, this means that the child or young person must be seen face-to-face to establish that they are safe and well.¹ Police will ensure as far as possible that it is safe for a child or young person to return home or to a care placement that they have been missing from. They will ask questions to try to understand what led the person to go missing, what happened while they were away, and find out any other relevant information.

Any concerns about a child when they return must be shared with police by parents, carers or professionals. Information gathered will be used to close the missing incident on police systems. When completing a Prevention Interview, officers will consider safeguarding measures that might need to be put in place immediately, or considered by other agencies e.g. health, education, or social care. Officers should also notify the child or young person and their parent/carer that they will be receiving contact from Surrey County Council for further help and support within the next 72 hours, in reference to the Return Home Interview (RHI) process.

How Children's Services Are Notified of a Child or Young Person's Return: The Central Hub Missing Team & C-SPA

The Central Hub Missing Team has oversight for all children and young people missing in Surrey. As part of the local response to missing and completing RHIs, the Missing Team will review missing children daily with Surrey Police. They will identify patterns and trends at critical points and task practitioners to respond accordingly, for example, collating information from RHIs for the disruption of extra-familial harm and exploitation.

The **Central Hub Missing Team hours and contact details** are:

Monday-Friday 9am-5pm

Email: surreymissingcentralhub@surreycc.gov.uk.

The [Surrey Children's Single Point of Access \(C-SPA\)](#) is responsible for local children and young people's safety and well-being. If there are safeguarding concerns raised during the police Prevention Interview, police will submit a Single Combined Assessment of Risk Form (SCARF) to the C-SPA who will then know that a child or young person has been missing.

The **C-SPA hours and contact details** are:

Monday-Friday 9am – 5pm

Phone: 0300 470 9100

Email: cspa@surreycc.gov.uk

¹ In some scenarios, when the risk to the missing person has been assessed as low or medium the police might feel it is acceptable to do all of this by phone with the missing person or by speaking to whoever reported them missing in the first instance. This is not always considered good practice as we think it's important that the police check on people when they return. However, in some scenarios it might be more appropriate.

A Closed Missing Incident Notification will also be sent to the C-SPA by police, containing the relevant information related to the missing episode. This notification and the SCARF will then be screened and triaged by C-SPA for any additional safeguarding or support that the child or young person may need. This screening includes checks with multiple agencies for any information about a child or young person, particularly those who are not open to services. The notification will then be sent to the child or young person's allocated worker if they are open to Children's Services, for them to contact the child or young person, complete the RHI, and update their Safer Plan.

If a SCARF is not submitted, the Central Hub Missing Team will receive notification of missing children and young people through the Closed Missing Incidents List, which is sent to them by police each day, which is also open to Senior Management to review.

If a child does not have an allocated worker and is not open to Children's Services, the Missing Incident Notification will remain with both the C-SPA for screening, agency checks, and contact with the family to assess any immediate safeguarding concerns, and the Central Hub Missing Team to complete the RHI.

Things to Consider when a Child or Young Person Returns

Professionals should carefully consider the circumstances of a child or young person's return to ensure that they are not being placed in a position of any further or potential risk of harm. If a child is 'found' rather than returning of their own accord, any signs of reluctance to return to their home or placement should be explored with them and inform a risk assessment before a child is 'returned' or accommodated elsewhere.

Return Home Interviews

Statutory guidance published by the Department for Education states that upon their return, **all** missing children should be offered an independent return interview – a Return Home Interview (RHI) following a missing episode. Going missing may be the first indication that there are problems or vulnerabilities for a person. An RHI is an opportunity to support the individual who has gone missing and identify any underlying causes, including any ongoing risk of harm, and is an opportunity to refer the individual to appropriate support services. For more information about the value of RHIs, please see Missing People's report, [A Safer Return](#), or The Children's Society and The National Police Chief's Council (NPCC)'s report, [The First Step: How Return Home Interviews can improve support and safeguarding for missing young people](#).

The benefits of RHIs include the opportunity to:

- Identify harm and safeguard a child or young person
- Gather information for Children's Social Care
- Capture the child or young person's voice
- Provide emotional and practical support to a child or young person
- Identify risks early on and reduce these risks
- Detect crime
- Gather police intelligence
- Signpost and refer a child or young person to other agencies
- Safety Plan
- Provide support to a child or young person's family
- Prevent further missing episodes

- Be compliant for OFSTED inspections and in line with DfE compliance

It is Surrey's statutory responsibility to ensure that every child receives a Return Home Interview following a missing episode within 72 hours of their return.

Children and Young People living in Surrey

An RHI should take place with a **trained professional** who the child or young person is most likely to talk to. This can be their allocated worker or other professional as identified by the team around the child. **Where possible, the child or young person should be given a choice as to who completes their RHI.** Every attempt should be made to complete the RHI within **72 hours** of a child's return.

Children and young people allocated to a social worker or practitioner will be contacted by the Missing Team to agree who is best placed to offer the RHI dependant on capacity within the Missing Team. Children and young people who are not open to Children's Services and/or do not have an allocated worker will have their RHIs completed by a member of the Central Hub Missing Team. Care leavers up to the age of 25 will have their RHI completed by their Personal Advisor (PA).

How to offer an RHI

An RHI is a debrief conversation for a child or young person following their missing episode – there is no threshold to receive an RHI other than a missing episode taking place, so it is a crucial opportunity to identify any risk or harm. An RHI can be explained in terms of its benefits as:

- A debrief conversation
- An opportunity for support
- An opportunity to identify any risks or harm that a child or young person may be facing
- A space in which the child or young person can explore ways to keep themselves safe
- A space in which the child or young person can be signposted to additional support
- A way to help prevent the child or young person from going missing in future.

Surrey will engage with the child or young person's parents or guardians to discuss potential support measures. This process typically involves direct communication with the child or young person to ascertain the circumstances surrounding their absence. For children under the age of 14, an RHI will only occur with prior consent from their parents or guardians. In scenarios where the child is 14 years of age or older, or if they are assessed as capable of making informed decisions (referred to as 'Frazer competent'), every effort will be made to conduct a private conversation with the child, either at their home or at school. All decisions made during this process, along with the rationale behind them, will be documented to ensure clarity and accountability in our approach to supporting the child.

Where to Complete an RHI

When an RHI is to be completed face-to-face, ask the child or young person if they're happy holding the RHI where you have suggested. Where else would they feel comfortable? Is the place a safe, calm and quiet environment? Can the person talk freely without being overheard by others? Consider how much time you may also need to complete an in-depth discussion. In some scenarios, it may be appropriate to complete an RHI over the phone or via videocall.

If an RHI is Declined

In circumstances where a child is prevented from receiving an RHI at home, their school should be contacted to arrange the RHI. The circumstances and reasons why a parent, carer or child declines an

RHI, should be recorded. When an RHI is declined and the child cannot be seen or spoken to, an RHI form should still be completed. Any information that is shared or discussed about the missing episode should be recorded on the form, making sure that it is clear who the information has been shared by.

Children and Young People Placed in Surrey from Another Area

For children and young people who are placed in Surrey from out of area, **the other local authority is responsible for completing an RHI for them after a missing episode.** The Central Hub Missing Team Coordinator is to send a covering letter, the Closed Missing Incident Notification, and request a completed copy of the RHI or similar summary from the other local authority. Copies of this are to be uploaded to LCS.

Once the RHI form has been received, it should be **reviewed** by the Central Hub Missing Team to gather any information or intelligence relating to safeguarding Surrey children and young people and **uploaded to LCS. Any relevant safeguarding information should be shared with Surrey police and actioned by the other local authority.**

If no RHI information is received from the other local authority. A reminder request for the completed RHI form of other relevant summary is to be sent to the local authority 2 weeks after the due date for the RHI (72 hours following the child or young person's return). If nothing is received, this is repeated 2 weeks later. Requests for RHIs are followed up 3 times, and after 2 months, the missing episode will be finalised and closed on Surrey systems. Surrey's Adolescent Safeguarding Board will follow up with any local authorities where RHIs are not received.

Surrey Children and Young People Placed Outside of Area

For Surrey children and young people placed outside of Surrey, their **allocated worker will be responsible for completing their RHI.** Surrey will be notified by the other local authority that a missing incident has taken place, and Surrey professionals should work closely with that local authority's requirements for information sharing following RHI completion. Any RHI completed for a child or young person should be **uploaded to LCS. Any safeguarding information should be shared with police from the other local authority and any relevant allocated workers by Surrey professionals.**

Confidentiality

From the start of an RHI, ensure the child or young person understands your role, and an awareness that what they share with you may be shared with other professionals if there is a safeguarding concern. Do not promise confidentiality unless you are able to uphold this.

A good RHI is only effective if **relevant, proportionate** information is shared with other local professionals and agencies, and actions are taken based on this information to safeguard, support, and prevent the person from going missing again. Consider information that the child or young person might not want to be shared to protect their privacy where it is safe to do so, e.g. information relating to their sexuality.

Make sure that you manage the person's expectations around what information you will be sharing with other professionals after the RHI, and what might happen next if you need to report any incidents of crime or harm to the police.

Multiple missing episodes and RHIs

In circumstances where a child or young person has had multiple missing episodes before an RHI has been able to be completed for each episode, an RHI can be used to discuss multiple missing episodes, and the dates of the information relating to each episode made clear on the RHI form.

Recording

All RHIs should be recorded using Surrey's RHI Form on LCS.

Any record of the RHI should contain an account of what happened before, during and after the missing episode, a consideration of any risk or harm experienced by the child or young person, as well as any safeguarding concerns and further support offered. This information should be recorded in a way that **most accurately reflects the experience of the missing person**, using quotations where possible to annotate their voice. It is also useful to think about and record how likely you feel that they are to go missing again.

Information Sharing and Action

Any relevant and proportionate information from an RHI should be shared with other local partner agencies, where appropriate by the person completing the RHI. **There is no need to share the completed RHI in its entirety** to protect the privacy of the child or young person when it is safe to do so. For example, information relating to a child or young person's sexuality does not need to be shared with police. However, any information relating to the child or young person's associates and who may be a risk to them, should be shared.

Some information such as **the disclosure of crime and any immediate safeguarding information will need to be shared and actioned straight away** (see the section on *Safeguarding* below). There will be opportunities to share relevant information from the RHI with/through:

- The missing episode investigating officer/police missing teams by email
- The child or young person's allocated social worker
- The C-SPA for immediate response and further assessment
- Multi-agency STRAT meetings
- Risk Vulnerability Meetings (RVMs)
- Intelligence forms
- Safety Plans and Care plans.

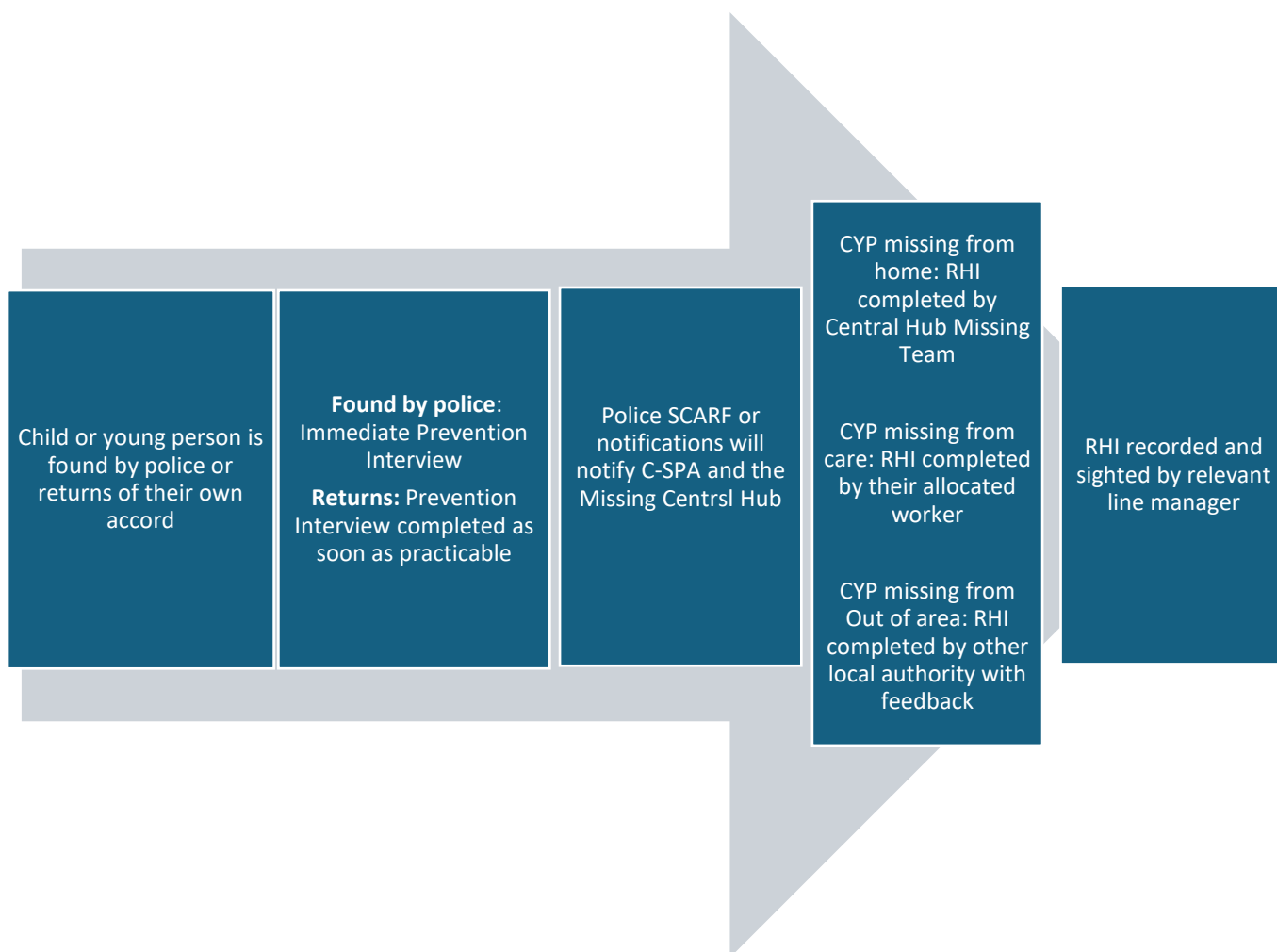
Actions taken based on RHI information to safeguard, support, and prevent the child or young person from going missing again, are crucial. Consider any additional risk assessments that may need to be completed, and signposting to additional local and national support services based on the information that is shared from an RHI. This is discussed in more detail in the next section.

Most importantly, make sure that the child or young person's expectations around what information you will be sharing with other professionals after the RHI are managed, and be clear about what might happen next if you need to report any incidents of crime or harm to the police.

Management Oversight of RHIs

To ensure that RHIs are being completed and recorded to a good standard, each completed RHI form should be authorised by the relevant line manager prior to being finalised and any information being shared.

Practice Flowchart: When a Child or Young Person Returns



Safeguarding

Any information that a child or young person shares that makes you concerned for their safety, or the safety of others **must** be shared with the relevant agencies and/or professionals, and any disclosures of crime, harm or intelligence shared with police.

Forensic Considerations

Where an allegation of physical, sexual, psychological and/or emotional abuse is made or becomes evident, safeguarding procedures must be implemented and a referral to the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) should be considered. If there is any suggestion that the child or young person has been a victim or perpetrator of crime, consideration must be given to referring them to the SARC to support the securing of evidence by police. This could include forensic examination, securing clothing and delaying washing/bathing in relevant scenarios. However, the welfare of the child is paramount and careful consideration must be given to the potential effects on a child or young person from securing evidence. Permission must be obtained from the child's parents and/or those with parental responsibility. The child cannot consent to these procedures taking place, and an appropriate adult must be present.

Intelligence

Intelligence can be shared with Surrey Police by submitting an Intelligence Form <https://www.surrey.police.uk/partners/partner-services/>

Any new intelligence should also be shared with the child or young person's allocated worker and/or the MASH.

Relevant intelligence likely to be shared during an RHI could be:

- Any new associates, particularly if they are suspected to be perpetrators
- Other vulnerable children or young people
- New locations children or young people are frequenting
- Registrations and descriptions of cars collecting or hanging around children and young people
- New phone numbers
- Unexplained wealth
- A person with several phones
- Knowledge of weapons
- Knowledge about the possession and/or movement of drugs.

Intelligence can also come from third parties or anonymous sources.

'Intelligence can include low level, soft whisperings and gut feelings; something that does not sit well with you or your co-workers but has no-where else to go. It can include information from third parties or anonymous sources.

Ask yourself, will the information I have help the police or other professionals safeguard the child?' – Surrey Police

Extra-Familial Harm

The term extra-familial harm is used to capture any risks to children and young people outside of their home, such as exploitation, bullying, peer on peer harm, online harm, radicalisation, trafficking, and serious violence.

Child Sexual Exploitation

Missing episodes are a strong risk indicator of child sexual exploitation (CSE). **7 in 10 young people** who have been sexually exploited have also been reported missing (Missing People 2019). It is therefore important to look out for any indicators of sexual exploitation during an RHI. For example, the [NSPCC suggests that in addition to missing episodes, behavioural indicators](#) may be, but are not limited to:

- Displaying [inappropriate sexualised behaviour](#) for their age
- Being fearful of certain people and/or situations
- Displaying significant changes in emotional wellbeing
- Being isolated from peers/usual social networks
- Being increasingly secretive
- Having money or new things (such as clothes or a mobile phone) that they can't explain
- Spending time with older individuals or groups
- Being involved with gangs and/or gang fights
- Calling an older person their 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend'
- Missing school and/or falling behind with schoolwork

- Persistently returning home late
- Returning home under the influence of drugs/alcohol
- Being involved in petty crime such as shoplifting
- Spending a lot of time at hotels or places of concern, such as known brothels
- Not knowing where they are, because they have been [trafficked](#) around the country (Department for Education, 2017).

NSPCC (2024).

‘Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.’ – Department for Education

For more information on sexual exploitation, see [Child sexual exploitation Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation](#), by the Department of Education.

Child Criminal Exploitation and County Lines

Missing episodes are also a strong indicator of child criminal exploitation (CCE), and involvement with County Lines. Nearly **1 in 10** children who completed RHIs with Missing People had been a victim of criminal exploitation (Missing People 2019). Similarly to CSE, CCE involves an individual or group taking advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 19 to carry out or be involved in criminal activity.

In addition, across the UK, children and young people are targeted by gangs and organised crime groups and forced to move and sell drugs, known as County Lines. The children and young people targeted are led to believe that these people are their friends despite there often being a strong power imbalance in this friendship. This could be age, physical strength, or status. Gangs will use several tactics to build trust with their victims so that they feel comfortable and will often groom children and young people – using threats, violence and force to control them. Young people may also be forced to travel hundreds of miles and be away from home or care for long periods of time.

‘County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line.” They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.’ – UK Government

Although CCE may involve County Lines activity, this is **not** the only form of criminal exploitation. Involvement with any form of harm or criminal activity where a child is being taken advantage of through an imbalance of power constitutes criminal exploitation.

Indicators of criminal exploitation or County Lines activity may be present from an RHI. For example, Missing People suggest that indicators may be, but are not limited to:

- A noticeable and often sudden change in personality, behaviour and moods such as becoming hostile, aggressive, secretive, unsettled, anxious, scared, depressed or controlling
- Disengaging from education, family and/ or their normal social life
- Periods of going missing for short periods or for days, weeks or months at a time
- Unexplained new items, sometimes called 'gifts.' This could include new expensive trainers, mobile phones, jewellery or clothes
- An increase in using their mobile phone with lots of messages and calls and multiple phones
- Their attendance, behaviour or performance at school declining
- Spending time with a new group of older friends, or people parents/carers are not allowed to meet
- Returning home with rucksacks, boxes or packages that are unfamiliar
- Unexplained injuries including bruises, burns or cuts
- Unexplained sums of money
- Coming to the attention of the police.

Missing People (2024).

'Child criminal exploitation is common in county lines and occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.' – UK Government

There can also be a **cross-over between CCE and CSE**, for example, children may be forced to hide drugs internally or be coerced into carrying out sexual activities and offences that are filmed as part of a control process. **All genders** can be victims of both CCE and CSE. For more information, see the Home Office document, [Criminal Exploitation of Children, Young People and Adults, County Lines](#).

If a Surrey Child or Young Person is at Risk of or Experiencing Extra-Familial Harm

If you suspect that a child or young person who you are working with is at risk of or is experiencing extra-familial harm such as exploitation, take the following steps:

- Share any safeguarding information and information about criminal activity and/or intelligence, as above
- If you are a partner agency please complete [Extra Familial Harm Screen Tool for partners](#)
- If you are a social worker or practitioner please Complete Surrey's Extra Familial Harm Assessment and Safer Planning Tool [here](#)
- Refer the child or young person to be discussed at the next Risk Vulnerability Meeting (RVM)
- Update any relevant care plans
- Complete a National Referral Mechanism Referral (NRM) if appropriate (see below)
- Consider a referral to Missing People's SafeCall service.

SafeCall

Missing People offers free, confidential support for missing children and young people and their families affected by exploitation and County Lines through its [SafeCall](#) service across England and Wales, 7 days a week from 9am-11pm.

SafeCall offers 1-2-1 telephone based and online peer support to young people and families, as well as professionals in related to their work with an exploited young person or family. Professionals can refer young people and families to the service with their consent, [here](#).

Risk Vulnerability Meetings (RVMs)

When an RHI raises concerns about the risk of a child or young person experiencing or being at risk of extra familial harm, including exploitation, professionals should refer them for discussion at a Risk Vulnerability Meeting (RVM). Police, Surrey professionals and other agencies can refer a person to the RVM.

Risk Vulnerability Meetings are a multi-agency meeting that take place weekly in each area and are co-chaired by the police and Children's Services. RVMs are an opportunity to share information between agencies for all children and young people who are repeat missing, currently experiencing or at risk of exploitation, or where the child or young person has been identified to have high risk and vulnerability. This includes information from Prevention Interviews and RHIs.

The RVM is an opportunity for missing children and young people to be every agency's responsibility. The issues and circumstances that may lead to and then impact on someone going missing can be complex and require a strong multi agency approach in understanding these issues and delivering positive outcomes. Robust multi agency working plays an important role in ensuring that people who go missing do not experience harm and receive the support they require upon their return, and prevention. The meeting will identify the specific risk(s) for each child, ensuring that multi-agency safety and disruption plans are appropriate, and all available resource options have been explored.

Children and young people discussed at the RVM are those who are:

- High-risk missing scenarios and repeat missing
- Identified as posing a high/very high risk of serious harm to others (including MAPPA Level 1) and/or where concerns for safety and wellbeing are high/very high in the AssetPlus assessment.
- At risk through extra familial risk including those who may be experiencing and/or are at risk of CSE, CCE, County Lines, gang involvement, modern day slavery and NRM referrals.
- Identified through the High Harm Unit scenarios
- Resettlement scenarios
- Scenarios where significant concerns regarding Need have been raised by multi-agency professionals.

Although they are a forum for multi-agency information sharing and discussion, RVMs do not replace the need for wider information sharing that should take place between agencies and professionals outside the meeting. For example, information relating to crime or harm that should be shared immediately following an RHI. RVMs are also not a replacement for good case management with assessment, planning, intervention, and professional supervision. The RVM is a decision-making forum with regards to the overall risk for a child or young person. This decision-making will be based on information provided in advance, and information sharing and discussion during the meeting.

To refer a child or young person for discussion at the RVM, partners can complete the Initial Screening Tool Appendix [Extra Familial Harm Screen Tool for partners](#) or practitioners can complete the EFH Risk Assessment

For more information on the RVM, please see RVM Guidance. [RVM Guidance](#)

Safer Plans

- For repeat missing children or young people who are experiencing or thought to be at risk of extra-familial harm, the lead professional should complete the [EFH Assessment and Safer Plan](#)

A child or young person's Safer Plan should be completed with them and their network of support, and travel as a 'live' document with the child or young person and be shared between key agencies. This could include a physical copy the child has and/or be shared with relevant partners to ensure the measures in place provide support where risk and safety are located. The child and network should agree how the plan can be updated and when (significant events can demand an urgent update and resharing).

For it to be effective, it must be adopted as the 'safety plan' across networks and focus on increasing safety over eliminating risk. It should help achieve the anticipated outcomes of the child's overall plan. The aim is to agree a shared language and understanding with the child, their family and network, and detail how all can (and will) respond to missing episodes, extra-familial risk, harm and abuse.

For the plan to be completed, a Safer Meeting can be convened, attended by key professionals in the child or young person's network. However, when a child is missing **and** suffering significant harm, a strategy meeting is required. [Safer Meeting Guide and Agenda](#)

If a Child or Young Person is Arrested

If a child or young person you are working with is arrested and you have concerns about CCE or CSE; know that there are possible defences for criminal activities committed through exploitation under the [Modern Slavery Act 2015](#). A youth justice lawyer, specialist lawyer or someone with expertise in modern slavery should be consulted. Consider use of [The Independent Child Trafficking Guardian Service](#), ensure safeguarding support put in place, and trauma-informed practices are encouraged. **Ensure potential victims of exploitation are treated as victims not criminals.**

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM)

The NRM is a government framework for identifying potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring that they receive appropriate support. If there are concerns that a child or young person is being criminally exploited, or is the victim of other forms of exploitation, including human trafficking, slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour, **a referral must be made**. This includes children and young people who have been victims of modern slavery abroad, such as Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC).

Where there are concerns that a child or young person has been trafficked, an Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG) referral must also be made (see below).

The new online process allows first responders to submit an NRM referral through a single online form regardless of their location in the UK, or whether the victim is an adult or child. You can access the referral form [here](#).

A referral can only be made by first responder organisations, such as police and local authority workers. The online form will identify whether someone is a first responder by verifying their work email

‘Victims may not be aware that they are being trafficked or exploited, and may have consented to elements of their exploitation, or accepted their situation. If you think that modern slavery has taken place, the case should be referred to the NRM so that the relevant competent authority can fully consider the case. You do not need to be certain that someone is a victim.’ – UK Government

address. First responders will need to complete this verification to progress with the form. After submitting the form, the first responder will be sent a link to download a copy and be emailed a reference number. A child or young person under 18 does not need to consent to an NRM referral, however a young person over 18 does need to consent to a referral. Where a young adult over the age of 18 does not consent to a referral, a Duty to Notify (DtN) may be completed. For more information, see Home Office guidance, [here](#).

Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTGs)

As part of the NRM Transformation Programme, Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTGs) are being rolled out as an independent source of advice for trafficked children. **In Surrey, an ICTG referral should be made in addition to the NRM referral.** A First Responder can make a referral by completing an ICTG service online referral form available [here](#).

For advice on referring a child or young person into the service, a 24/7 assessment line is available - 0800 043 4303. Please go to [ICTG Referral form](#) for details on ICTGs. [ICTG Guide](#)

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

Missing People and [ECPAT UK](#) (Every Child Protected Against Trafficking) have completed research on asylum experienced going missing from care in the UK. [When Harm Remains](#) (2022) highlights that UASC are at very high risk of going missing. In scenarios where they do, the report recommends that:

- Children’s Services must improve data recording systems, collecting and holding data on each child’s history and risk of trafficking in addition to recording it on a child’s individual care plan and in any assessments. This trafficking flag should be in a reportable format, allowing for easy analysis, monitoring and to facilitate multi-agency safeguarding action.
- Safeguarding partners must develop a culture of trust that should be built with trafficked and unaccompanied children to prevent them from going missing. They should ensure that a child’s first and subsequent encounters with agencies and services are protective and supportive, that children feel safe and listened to, and that all steps taken during their care are clearly explained.
- Law enforcement authorities should consider that due to their circumstances, trafficked or unaccompanied children face increased risks when they are reported missing, and that additional resource should be provided to support these investigations (which risk children missing in the long-term).
- The Home Office and local authorities must give trafficked and unaccompanied children the benefit of the doubt regarding their age. Age assessments must not be routine and should only be carried out when there are significant reasons to do so.

- Local authorities must provide safe and appropriate accommodation for all trafficked and unaccompanied children. Safety planning must include young people from the beginning.

(Missing People and ECPAT UK 2022).

Mental Health Pathways

For children and young people requiring mental health support, [Mindworks Surrey](#) is a resource for children and young people themselves. For professionals, Mindworks is a directory for advice, signposting, online resources and referrals to specialist or clinical support, via their professional's area, available [here](#).

[Healthy Surrey](#) is also a helpful resource for children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health and includes information on crisis support and advice for parents and carers.

Surrey's self-harm protocol for professionals supporting children and young people can also be found [here](#).

Prevent and Radicalisation

Children and young people who go missing from home or care may face an increased risk of radicalisation if they are exposed to people who hold extreme views that support terrorism or are in opposition of fundamental values such as democracy and individual liberty.

Some signs of radicalisation in a child or young person may include:

- Sudden withdrawal from family or friends
- Unexplained travel or secretive behaviour
- Expression of extreme or hateful views
- Engagement with online platforms or in person events involving individuals promoting extremist ideologies
- Changes in behaviour, appearance, and language.

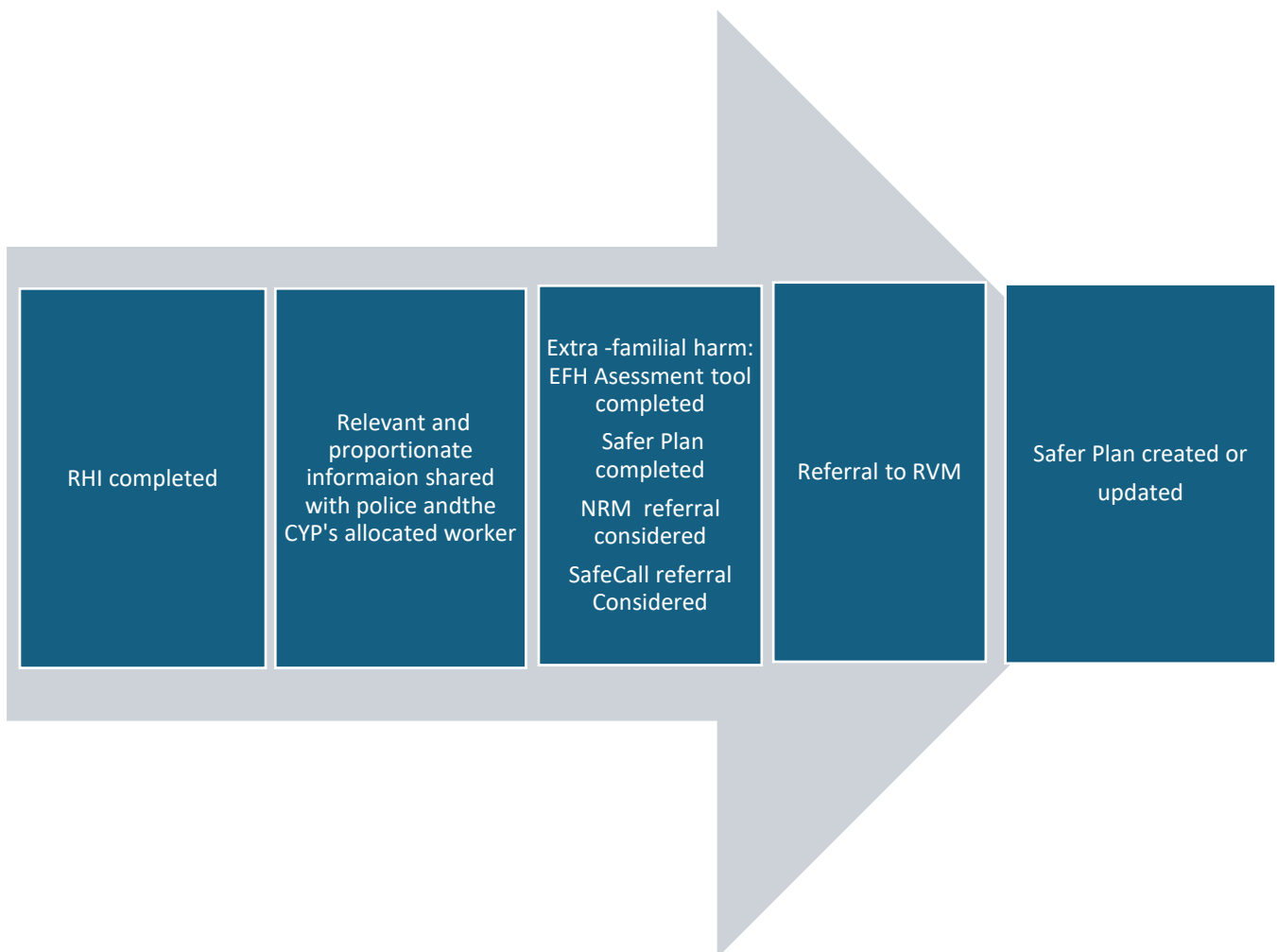
[Prevent](#) is a core aspect of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy, aimed to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. As a local authority, Surrey is subject to the Prevent Duty and must have, '*due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into extremism and terrorism.*' Prevent provides multi agency early-intervention to support and divert vulnerable people away from the radicalisation process, and focused on all kinds of violent extremism, including:

- Extreme right-wing ideology
- Islamist ideology
- Mixed/unclear/unstable ideologies including violent misogyny/incel, anti-government and democracy, and violent conspiracy theories that could lead to criminality.

Children and young people who may be susceptible to radicalisation or being drawn into extremism should be referred into Prevent. **You can refer a child or young person into Prevent, [here](#).** Consent is **not** required to make a referral, and intervention is most effective when it is done at the **earliest opportunity**.

More information on acting early can be found [here](#), and Prevent duty guidance for local authorities in England can be found [here](#). For more information or advice about Prevent processes in Surrey please contact Prevent Lead Lara Boden at lara.bowden@surreycc.gov.uk.

Practice Flowchart: Safeguarding After a Missing Episode



Care-experienced Children and Young People

Children or young people who are care experienced are more likely to be reported missing to police and are particularly vulnerable to harm. They may have additional push/pull factors for going missing, including unhappiness in their placement, wanting to see friends and family who still live where they are originally from. Care experienced children and young people are more likely to be vulnerable to concerns around their mental health, and exploitation. To hear from children and young people who have been missing from care, see Missing People's report, [Children's Views on Being Reported Missing from Care \(2021\)](#).

'To help reduce a child's likelihood of going missing and help create placement stability, carers, the local authority, and partner agencies should adopt a coordinated, consistent, child centred and restorative approach to working with children, to reduce the likelihood of going missing for individual children, and all children in the local area.' – Children Missing from Care Framework (2022)

Moving placements can contribute to an increased risk of going missing and increased vulnerability when missing. For example, care experienced children and young people are more likely to be a target for criminals who wish to criminally and/or sexually exploit them. For guidance on working with children and young people who are care experienced, see the [Children Missing from Care Framework \(2022\)](#).

Surrey Police Memorandum of Understanding

Surrey Police have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with local authority care placements, that outlines partnership expectations and ways of working with missing and exploited children and can be accessed [here](#).

The Philomena Protocol

The Philomena Protocol is a national initiative to identify children and young people who are care experienced and at risk of going missing, and to record vital information about them that can be used to help find them quickly and safely during a missing investigation. The Protocol has been successfully implemented in several police forces across the UK.

'Care-experienced children and young people have told us how important it is for professionals and their carers to really understand them, their behaviours, and their unique circumstances. The Philomena Protocol cannot replace a trusted relationship, but it can be useful in ensuring an individualised approach to each child. This is especially important when a child has very newly arrived in a placement, or if agency or new staff are going to be reporting them missing.' – Missing People (2021)

A Philomena Protocol form should be completed for each child or young person in a care home or supported accommodation who are at risk of going missing in Surrey and is available [here](#).

The form can be used as a helpful tool for understanding the context around a child or young person and should:

- Be completed **with** the child or young person, where possible

- Be used to facilitate conversations about why they might go missing, in what circumstances the police would be contacted
- Be used to genuinely explore what can be done to prevent them from going missing, and what carers/professionals can do to try and mitigate or address any reasons or push/pull factors
- Set out who will do what if they are not where they are expected to be. The police should always be called immediately if there are serious concerns about a child's safety, but the Philomena Protocol should consider who is best placed to contact the child and how inappropriate reporting and unnecessary contact with police can be avoided by taking appropriate steps to stay in contact with them or encourage them to return, prior to police being called.

When a Philomena Protocol form is completed, it should be stored in line with GDPR requirements by the child or young person's carer or placement staff. The form should be shared with police when the child or young person is reported missing and updated with any additional information following a missing episode.

More information on the Philomena Protocol can be found in the [Children Missing from Care Framework \(2022\)](#).

Transitional Safeguarding: Care Leavers and Young People

Transitional safeguarding is an approach to safeguarding young people across developmental stages, particularly into young adulthood. These young people may have unique safeguarding needs, harms and extra-familial risks. Just because a young person legally becomes an adult and turns 18 years old, does not mean that any risk of harm disappears, and they may still have care and support needs, which Surrey can provide up to the age of 25.

'[Transitional safeguarding is] an approach to safeguarding adolescents and young adults fluidly across developmental stages which builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children's and adult safeguarding practice and which prepares young people for their adult lives.'
 - Missing People, NWG Network, NPCC (2022).

Care leavers and those living in supported accommodation may still need to be reported missing by their accommodation providers or professionals who they are in contact with. Reporting should be considered on a case-by-case basis and based on the risk of harm, and that the missing person is a care leaver should be shared with police at the time of reporting so that this can be considered during the police's vulnerability assessment.

In Surrey, care leavers up to the age of 25 will be offered an RHI on their return from missing. This will likely be completed by their Personal Advisor (PA). Care leavers should also be considered for discussion at RVMs, as they may also still be at risk of or continue to experience extra-familial harm, such as exploitation. If a young adult is at risk of extra-familial harm, the role of the RVM will be as a consultation body to assist the team around the young person – supporting practitioners to strengthen planning and safeguarding that already exists. This will include the Safer Plan and contacting appropriate services.

Safeguarding information relating to adults at risk of harm can be shared between agencies in line with the common law duty of confidentiality, the Data Protection Act 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Human Rights Act and the Crime and Disorder Act to:

- Prevent death or serious harm
- Coordinate effective and efficient responses
- Enable early interventions to prevent the escalation of risk
- Prevent abuse and harm that may increase the need for care and support
- Maintain and improve good practice in safeguarding adults
- Reveal patterns of abuse that were previously undetected and that could identify others at risk of abuse
- Identify low-level concerns that may reveal people at risk of abuse
- Help people to access the right kind of support to reduce risk and promote wellbeing
- Help identify people who may pose a risk to others and, where possible, work to reduce offending behaviour.

[Social Care Institute for Excellence \(2024\).](#)

There are some helpful practice principles recommended in [Bridging the Gap: Transitional Safeguarding and the Role of Social Work with Adults](#) that may be useful for working with this age group. Further information can be found in a report from 2022 by Missing People, the NWG Network and the NPCC: [‘The response to missing young people during the transition from childhood to adulthood A survey exploring challenges and good practice in supporting this group.’](#) and on Missing People’s website, [here](#).

‘Ensure a participative, user-led approach. This means adopting a strengths-based approach, respecting young people’s expertise and enabling them to coproduce solutions and support rather than being treated as a passive recipient. This is as important at a strategic level as it is in practice and is a key means of promoting a person’s sense of self-efficacy, by affording them autonomy and agency.’ – Bridging the Gap (2021)

Diversity and Missing

Young people experiencing adversity such as abuse, neglect, or poverty are at heightened risk of extra-familial risks, including exploitation and poor mental health. These challenges are multifaceted and intersect with various factors, such as race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status, which shape their experiences and vulnerabilities. Additionally, influences from their environments, peer interactions, and online spaces further complicate these dynamics, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of how different identities can amplify or mitigate risks. Practitioners should also be aware of the role of unconscious bias when considering the following communities when responding to missing, and the relevant local and national support services to refer people into on their return.

Ethnicity

In 2023, based on data from police forces and local authorities, [research](#) by Missing People in has found that people from minority ethnic groups were missing for longer, less likely to be found by the police, and less likely to be recorded as being at risk, than white people. This is the first time that data of this nature has been collected and published. Key information and findings include:

- Black children are more likely to be missing for over 48 hours and for over a week than White children. Asian children are more likely to be missing for over a week than white children.
- 20% of all missing incidents, where Black children are reported missing, are for 48 hours compared to only 13% of episodes where a white child goes missing.

- While only 1% of missing incidents where a white child goes missing last for longer than a week, 4% of incidents where a Black child goes missing are for longer than a week
- 3% of all missing incidents where Asian children are reported missing are for over 7 days, compared to just 1% of episodes where a white child goes missing.

The statistics are particularly stark for Black children. Key findings include:

- Missing children from Black or Asian communities are less likely to be recorded as being at risk due to their mental health or being at risk of exploitation than white missing children. This suggests that risks may be being under-identified for children from Black and Asian communities due to adultification.
- Black children were the most likely to be missing for over 48 hours and over 7 days.
- Black looked after children are over-represented in missing reports: While 7% of looked after children are Black, 10% of all children who are looked after and go missing are Black.

Missing people from Black or Asian communities are less likely to be recorded as being at risk by police due to their mental health or being at risk of exploitation (children) than other people.

The charity's research suggests there is a disparity of response and bias by the institutions with responsibility for vulnerable missing people. The charity hopes the research will help police and local authorities to identify and prioritise where change is needed in their area, to ensure equitable responses to all missing people. This is a multi-agency issue, and the findings relate to a range of agencies including the police, children's services, education and health. Work is ongoing to understand more about the lived experience behind the new figures.

You can read Surrey's commitment to quality, diversity and inclusion [here](#), and Surrey's current equality objectives, [here](#).

LGBTQ+

Many LGBTQ+ people have contacted Missing People's Helpline to share that specific issues related to their sexuality and/or gender identity can be a factor in going missing the first place. For example, being kicked out of home or not being welcomed at home, school or in other places. Those in the LGBTQ+ community are more likely to experience poor mental health, including risks around self-harm and suicide, particularly those in the trans community. Given the very strong links between mental health and missing, we can assume that this has an impact on the likelihood of going missing.

Neurodiversity

There is little research about the relationship between those who are neurodiverse and go missing. Missing People are currently conducting research on the relationship between autism and missing. Those we have interviewed as part of this research have so far shared that autism can be an influence in going missing, and that people living with autism can be at higher risk while missing. Police Scotland have demonstrated good practice through their [Autistic Missing Person Protocol](#), which works similarly to the Philomena Protocol.

National Support Services

Missing People Charity

Missing People provides free national specialist support to people who are missing, at risk of missing, and their families and friends left behind. Missing People also support professionals working with missing children, young people and their families. Posters, Helpline cards and resources can be ordered [here](#).

Runaway Helpline

Missing People's Runaway Helpline is available for children and young people who are missing or thinking of going missing. It offers free, confidential support for those already missing, or thinking about going missing. Children and young people can contact Missing People for a 1-2-1 chat, everyday between 2.30pm and 9pm. They can call our free helpline without phone credit, 7 days a week between 9am and 11pm on 116 000, send us a free text for confidential support, or email 116000@runawayhelpline.org.uk.

www.runawayhelpline.org.uk contains useful information about what happens when children and young people contact the charity, what to do if they are thinking of going missing, and what to expect on their return.

Helpline

Our free, confidential and anonymous helpline is also available by phone, text and email 7 days a week, from 9am-11pm to support adults, parents, carers, families, and loved ones affected by missing. For more information, visit Missing People's website, [here](#).

TextSafe®

At the request of police, Missing People can send a TextSafe®, which is a text message sent to a missing child or young person's mobile phone explaining how they can get in touch with the charity for free and in confidence. For more information, visit Missing People's website, [here](#).

SafeCall

Missing People offers free, confidential support for missing children and young people and their families affected by exploitation and County Lines through its [SafeCall](#) service across England and Wales, 7 days a week from 9am-11pm. SafeCall offers 1-2-1 telephone based and online peer support to young people and families, as well as professionals in related to their work with an exploited young person or family. Professionals can refer young people and families to the service with their consent, [here](#).

Safeguarding Briefing Network

Missing People's Safeguarding Briefing Network (SBN) can be used 48 hours after someone's disappearance and where a public appeal may not be in their best interests. Missing People can notify their Safeguarding Briefing Partners that someone is missing in their local area. For more information, or to recommend a Safeguarding Briefing Partner, please visit Missing People's website, [here](#).

Family Support

Missing People's [Family Support](#) Team can provide people with a Family Support Worker for longer 1-2-1 support. Their dedicated team of specialists are experts in supporting those who are affected by going missing and can be contacted at family.support@missingpeople.org.uk.

Counselling

Missing People are the only charity offering specialist counselling for those who have been affected by missing. Counselling is suitable for children aged 12 years and older, and adults, and is free and confidential. For more information, visit Missing People's website, [here](#).

Childline

For support around bullying, problems at home and other issues, Childline can provide online and telephone based support, [here](#).

NSPCC

The NSPCC provides UK wide support for children, parents, carers and professionals on multiple issues affecting children. Their website is available [here](#).

Papyrus HOPELINK

A helpline for people under 35 who are experiencing thoughts of suicide, or worried about someone else who is. More information is available on the Papyrus website, [here](#).

SHOUT

A free, confidential, 24/7 text support service for mental health support. You can access their website, [here](#).

Surrey Local Support Services

For details of local support service please visit Surrey's [Family Information Service](#).

For information and details of support services for children and young people with additional needs, their families, and practitioners, please visit the [Surrey's Local Offer website](#).

Useful Links

- [EFH Assessment and Safer Plan](#)
- [EFH Example](#)
- [Police Intelligence Form](#)
- [RVM Guidance and Protocol](#)
- [Definition of Extra Familial Harm](#)
- [Philomena Protocol | Surrey Police](#)
- [Extra Familial Harm Screen Tool for partners](#)
- [Continuum of Support](#)
- [Cause for Concern advice/Serious incidents \(SCC only\)](#)
- [Barnardo's ICTG Service Referral Form](#)
- [Extra Familial Harm RAG rating](#)
- [Safer Meeting Guide and Agenda](#)

- [Surrey Missing Persons and Child Exploitation Memorandum of Understanding](#)