

# Oaklands School



## Return Home Interviews and Missing Episode Policy

<b>Approved by:</b>	Julie Smith	<b>Date:</b> November 2023
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<b>Last reviewed on:</b>	November 2023
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<b>Next review due by:</b>	November 2024
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**Guidance:**

Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (January 2014) [s](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care>

Reference: DFE-00009-2014

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2)

**Advice:**

Missing people and return home interviews : <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk>

Helpline for people who are thinking of running away, or have runaway or if you are concerned that someone is planning to runaway: <https://www.runawayhelpline.org.uk>

**1.0 Introduction****1.1 What is an Independent Return Home Interview?**

Statutory guidance for local authorities in England states that on every occasion a child goes missing, on their return they should be offered an independent Return Home Interview (IRHI), by someone who is not involved in caring for the child or young person. This is different from the police prevention interview (formerly known as a safe and well check) and provides the child an opportunity to engage in a more in-depth interview.

The purpose of the interview is to gather information about the child's life with a holistic perspective to identify reasons for running or going missing.

The interview is an opportunity for children to speak to an independent professional who can provide appropriate follow up with referrals or signposting. A good Return Home Interview can:

- help understand and address the reasons why a child has run away
- identify if the child is currently at risk
- identify any harm
- help the child feel safe
- understand the issues and reasons why the child went missing
- understand the risks and issues the child faced whilst missing
- try to prevent or reduce the risks of future episodes of missing or running away
- supply them with information and resources on how to stay safe if they do choose to run away again
- allow professionals to identify actions to help them

## **2. Who should undertake the interview?**

The statutory guidance requires that the person carrying out the interview is an independent person, that is, someone who is not involved in caring for the child.

Ultimately the main priority should be that children have a choice in who they engage with upon their return from being missing. It is important that an independent option is always available as the child may not feel comfortable or willing to talk to someone who is responsible for their care placement or with whom they have had a negative relationship in the past. However, if a child is more likely to engage with a trusted professional with whom they already have a relationship, their choice should be respected.

## **3. When should the interview take place?**

The DfE guidance states that IRHs should take place within 72 hours of a child or young person being found or returning from the missing episode.

## **4. Before the interview takes place**

Confidentiality should be discussed with the child to make sure they understand what information will need to be shared with other services and what information will always be kept confidential.

Considerations to discuss with the child prior to the interview:

- How will the information be used?
- Will this information be shared directly with professionals already involved with the child?
- Does the child understand and consent with full knowledge of the limitations of confidentiality?

The child must feel safe and comfortable with the interviewer to be able to share difficult information with them. Arrange to hold the interview in a neutral place where the child feels safe. If the interview takes place at the child's home it is important that the young person is interviewed alone. Parents or carers should have a separate time and space to talk about their concerns.

The conversation needs to be caring, creative, and courageous. It is important to ensure that they feel they can talk to the independent interviewer in the future; some young people run away frequently and may need to have further interviews.

Although all missing young people must be offered a return home interview, they can choose not to accept this and the reasons for this decision should be documented.

Parental consent is not required because return home interviews are a statutory safeguarding function. However, a discussion with parents will take place for primary school age children or where it is felt that a young person is unable to provide their own consent.

## **5. What should be covered in a return home interview?**

Try to identify:

- The reasons the child gives for going missing or running away
- Was this the first time the child went missing or has it happened before?
- Did the child go alone or with others?
- Were they persuaded to go by someone else?
- Did they try to resolve the problem before it caused them to run away and if so, why didn't this work?
- Does the problem/trigger still exist?
- Where did the child go or stay?
- How did they get access to food, money, transport, clothing, etc?
- Did they get involved in criminal activity?
- Did they seek or need medical help?
- Did they get help from anyone while they were missing?
- Did they enter into any relationship, particularly if it made them feel uncomfortable?
- Were they harmed or at risk of harm from other people?
- How did they feel – did they feel physically and mentally healthy?
- Did they feel bullied or pressured?
- Were there signs of stress, depression or self-harm?
- Were they involved in substance misuse?
- What led them to return or be found?
- How did they feel about returning?
- What Next?

## **6. What Happens After a Return Home Interview?**

A return interview is only effective if appropriate follow up support is offered to the young person to help them deal with the issues that caused them to run away and/or the issues they experienced while they ran away.

The child should always be told what the plan is for the information that they have given such as feedback to professionals, parents/carers.

Consideration should be given to any immediate or long-term follow-up support such as health-care, counselling or a police referral.

Confidentiality - If a young person has disclosed something, they need to be reminded that it will be passed on if it is a concern.

The young person should be told the limitations of support available from the Independent Interviewer from this point on and be given information on how they can reach them.

Following a return home interview, it is best practice to give feedback at the earliest opportunity to other relevant practitioners (school safeguarding staff, social worker etc.) or a parents/carers, depending on what has been discussed, along with any plan made with the child for follow on support or referrals to other agencies.

For a child already in care, the information obtained in an Independent Return Home Interview should contribute to their care and placement plans.

Where the child is relatively unknown to social care, then this may be the opportunity for early intervention support for the child or their family.

For a child at Oaklands School who is not in care, the information obtained may contribute to their individualised care and education plans.