

## Why is it important?

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people is a key duty on local authorities and requires effective joint working between agencies and professionals. Every year, lots of young people run away from home for various reasons. It is important to remember that a child running away and choosing to be homeless may not have planned to do so. Many children and young people are forced out of their homes due to spiraling problems.

Whether they run away once or on multiple occasions, the same duty of care, advice and reconciliation is offered, no matter what their reason is. Local authorities are responsible for protecting children whether they go missing from their family home or from local authority care.

The motivation for young people to go missing includes family conflict, relationship issues, neglect, child abuse or domestic abuse at home.

Young people may also want to run away, or be persuaded to run away by someone else, to experience risk-taking behaviour such as house parties, alcohol and adult nightlife.

Analysis highlights a range of risks associated with missing children including sexual exploitation, alcohol or drugs misuse, self-harm and mental health issues. Missing children may also be vulnerable to other forms of exploitation, such as violent or organised crime and gang exploitation.

The Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care 2014 sets out the steps local authorities and their partners should take to prevent children from going missing and to protect them when they do go missing.

## Durham data – the local picture and how we compare

In 2016/17, County Durham had 42 children go missing from care for a period of 24 hours or more; for 114 separate episodes in total.

However, the majority of young people who go missing are not Looked After Children but children missing from their own home.

During the period 2015 to 2017, there were 1,176 missing children episode reports from home and care in County Durham, received from the Police, involving 526 young people.

Of the 1,176 missing episodes, 858 were young people missing from County Durham and the remaining 318 were episodes from young people placed in care in the county by another Local Authority.

Of the 858 episodes of missing County Durham children, 463 were missing from home involving 321 young people, and 395 were missing from care involving 100 young people.

During the period 2015 to 2017, the missing episodes from home and care involved 58% males and 42% females.

The age range of these young people who were missing was 11 to 18 years old, with the most common ages being 16 to 17 years old.

A dedicated multi-agency team known as the ERASE team scrutinises every absent and missing case to ensure that a proportionate response is considered and intelligence is gathered to intervene early and prevent further missing / absent episodes. This has led to improved communication and coordination of intervention and intelligence.

The ERASE team works closely with the Operational Missing and Exploited Group and both the actions of the ERASE Team and the strategic steering group are monitored by the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

## Groups most at risk

National and local research has identified the following risk factors which can precede a missing incident:

- Arguments and conflicts
- Poor family relationships
- Physical and emotional abuse
- Boundaries and control
- Step-parent issues
- Conflict within a placement (Looked After Child)

The immediate risks associated with going missing include:

- No means of support or legitimate income – potentially placing young people in a vulnerable position
- Involvement in criminal activities
- Victim of abuse
- Grooming for sexual exploitation
- Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault
- Alcohol / substance misuse
- Deterioration of physical and mental health
- Missing out on schooling and education
- Increased vulnerability

Longer term risks include:

- Long term drug dependency / alcohol dependency
- Crime
- Homelessness
- Disengagement from education
- Sexual exploitation
- Poor physical and / or mental health

Children in residential care are at particular risk of going missing and are vulnerable to sexual and other exploitation. Care leavers, particularly 16 and 17 year olds, may go missing from their home or accommodation and face the same risks as other missing children.

Some looked after children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children or other migrant children. Some of this group may have been trafficked into the UK and may remain under the influence of their traffickers even while they are looked after. Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing, with most of them going missing within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours.

## How does this topic link to our strategies and plans?

Further information can be found in the following strategies and plans:

- [County Durham Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2019](#)
- [Children, Young People and Families Plan 2016-19](#)
- [Durham County Council CAS Service Plan 2016-19](#)
- [Durham Local Safeguarding Children Board Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy 2016-19](#)

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**Data sources:**

Durham County Council data