



Lakeside @ Our Place

**Missing Young Person and
Unauthorised Absence Policy**

Missing Young Person and Unauthorised Absence Policy

1. Policy Statement

The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015

'The protection of Children standard 12.—(1) The protection of Children standard is that Children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe.'

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- The Safeguarding Policy
- West Mercia Police Runaway and Missing from Home Procedures

Lakeside @ Our Place has written this policy in conjunction with advice taken from the West Mercia Police and the Joint Protocol for reporting Missing Young People.

The missing person's procedure identifies the action to be taken when Young People are missing from the home without authority.

It is the duty of Lakeside @ Our Place to protect all Young People and recognize that Young People who abscond are very vulnerable and that the level of risk increases for them during each occasion that they run away.

2. Legal Framework

Lakeside @ Our Place has a duty to safeguard vulnerable Young People and the Registered Person is required to prepare and implement 'the missing Young Person' policy under The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015- Regulation 34 (4) and (5)

Legal parameters for Missing Person's Enquiries are found in both common law and in International Law. Most specifically through the European Convention of Human Rights interpreted through the Human Rights Act, 1998.

It is important to note that the Data Protection Act, 1998, does not prevent partnership working and sharing of information to ensure the safe return of a Young Person.

3. Scope of the Policy

A Young Person is identified as anyone ages 14 and over having been diagnosed with a disability. The policy itself covers all Young People including those Young People who are in the Looked After Child System and those placed in the West Mercia Police Authority Boundaries by any Local Authority, including those placed in private establishments.

In agreeing the contract to place a Young Person at Lakeside @ Our Place the placing authorities agree to adopt safeguarding policies and procedures in place within the school for the Young Person they are placing. This includes the unauthorised absence procedure which adopts advice from West Mercia Police for Young Person missing in the West Mercia Police Area.

Within the context of this Policy, "Looked after Children" refers to Young People accommodated under Section 20 of the Children's Act 1989, Young Person subject to Care Orders including Interim Care Orders, Sect 31 and 38 Children's Act 1989, and Young People who are otherwise provided with accommodation by Section 21 Children's Act 1989.

In addition the protocol will apply to all Young People within the West Mercia Police Authority area boundaries (including those aged over 18) for whom the placing Local Authorities have continuing responsibilities under The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

4. Principles of the Policy

- Lakeside @ Our Place recognizes that it is not able to anticipate every situation but that staff employed to care for Young People accommodated within Lakeside @ Our Place should use their professional judgement to take any action necessary to protect the safety of the Young Person based on a robust, detailed and current risk assessment being in place for each Young Person.
- Lakeside @ Our Place identifies that each time a Young Person absconds from the home, they are missing and, as such, place themselves, and others, at risk and that every missing episode is potentially very serious.
- Lakeside @ Our Place identifies that any “missing” episode should be identified as such by the professionals involved and that all professionals and carers must effectively collaborate to ensure that a consistent and coherent response is given to the Young Person on their return.

5. Protocol

- In line with the guidance from West Mercia Police, any Young Person who are at risk of going missing and each Young Person who is known to abscond is identified and this area is included in their risk assessment. Each Young Person who is at risk of going missing has a specific management programme designed to minimize the risk of them being absent without authority. The procedures detailed in these management plans are approved by the Registered Manager and may include “physical restrictions on normal movement within or from the home are not used unless this is necessary to safeguard Young People and protect their welfare and development. Such measures are only used where agreed with the responsible authority and the parents. Such restrictions for one Young Person do not impose similar restrictions on other Young Person. For Young People homes that are not secure where specific measures including electronic devices are used to monitor Young Person there is a written policy that sets out how they should be used, how they promote the welfare of Young Person, how Young People will be informed of their use, how legitimate privacy of Young Person will be protected and how Young Person will be protected from potential abuse of such measures. Standards Act, National Minimum Standards, Children Homes, 2011, Standards 10.4 & 10.5). This risk assessment and specific management programme forms part of the Young Person’s placement plan and will identify factors which may increase the risk of a Young Person going missing and risk factors when a Young Person is missing from site.
- Lakeside @ Our Place maintains current information regarding each Young Person accommodated within the home, including a recent photograph of the Young Person. This is updated and changed, if necessary, at least every 6 months and the photograph is suitable for circulation or press release if necessary. Photographs of this type are, usually, just used by the Police, however, the consent of the person holding parental responsibility for the Young Person will be sought if a photograph needs to be used in the course of a missing person’s investigation. If possible, we will gain the young person’s permission to use the photo for a missing person’s investigation.
- In discussion and agreement with other professionals caring for the Young Person including the multi-disciplinary team, Registered Person, Heads of Care And Education and relevant team members a decision will be made as appropriate in discussing with the Young Person matters of going missing. If necessary, extra support or resources will be identified to assist in this process for example, the use of social stories.
- This policy identifies two categories of missing persons:
 1. Unauthorised Absence
 2. Missing Person

Staff caring for the Young Person need to decide which of the two categories the Young Person falls into when missing based on consideration of:

1. Circumstances of the absence
2. The Placement Plan
3. Age and maturity
4. Disability
5. Medication needed
6. Legal Status
7. Behaviour / History
8. Danger to themselves or others
9. Vulnerability
10. Disposition towards drug/ substance abuse
11. The Young Person running to/from someone/something
12. Immediate circumstances
13. Risk of offending
14. Influence of peer groups/families/friends
15. Predatory influences on the Young People eg: crime/sex/drugs
16. Risk of abduction
17. The environment including weather and time of year
18. Community events

However, through this consideration it is essential that staff keep in mind the need to locate the Young Adult and ensure that they are safe.

- Depending on the above considerations there will come a point at which absence will give rise to justifiable concern and will require a formal missing person's report to the Police. This point is defined in terms of time by Lakeside @ Our Place in its unauthorised absence protocol. At this point residential staff should consult with senior staff on duty making this decision based on the best available information.
- Although Lakeside @ Our Place recognizes that the need to make a missing person's report should be decided on individual merit, formal missing person's reports need to be made to the Police after the timescale identified in the unauthorised procedure given the vulnerability of the Young Person accommodated within the home as short absences for these Young People are as risky as lengthy ones.
- While a Young Person is missing, they continue to remain the responsibility of Lakeside @ Our Place and therefore staff and the social worker are responsible for liaising with the Police while continuing to make enquiries and search for a Young Person.
- In some cases if a Young Person is very vulnerable or has been missing for a long time it may be necessary to publicise the case via the media. This is not a routine approach and usually a response to serious concerns for a Young Person's safety. Primacy over such decisions lie with the Police however a member of the Lakeside @ Our Place Senior Management Team would be involved in the decision making process and in subsequent managing of media interest.
- The Young Person's return must also be notified to any person who has been previously notified of their missing status under the "notification of significant events" policy and procedures.

- On return to Lakeside @ Our Place, the Young Person should be de-briefed, where appropriate to consider the reasons for them being missing. It may be necessary to conduct this de-brief with someone independent of the home or the Young Person's social worker. Any reasons for the absence given by the Young Person should be recorded in their schedule three file. This should be completed within 24 hours of their return.
- The purpose of the debrief is to:
 1. Discover factors leading to the missing episode
 2. Inform efforts to prevent further episodes
 3. Inform future Missing Persons Investigations
 4. Learn of activities, risk, associate and victimization involved in the episode and address those risks.

If it is not appropriate or possible to interview in detail the Young Person as often is the case of Young Person accommodated within Lakeside @ Our Place then staff caring for the Young Person at the time will be interviewed and debriefed to illicit a clear picture of activities prior to the missing incident. Care reports will, also, be analysed to check for any circumstances or reasons which may have had an effect on the Young Person causing them to go missing.

- On return the Young Person will be seen by their social worker or the Independent Care and Complaints Advisor to consider why the Young Person absented themselves.
- If a Young Person state that they went missing because of abuse at the home, it is, immediately, considered to be a safeguarding issue and must be reported to a Designated Safeguarding Lead for the home: Emily Clews – Registered Manager, who will notify the Young Person's Duty Social Work team, the Young Person's placing authority and Ofsted.

This policy identifies two categories of missing persons:

1. Unauthorised Absence
2. Missing Person

CATEGORIES	Unauthorised Absence	Missing Person
Identification	Accidentally or deliberately late home. Where the Young Person's whereabouts are known and does not jeopardise the safety of the Young Person.	Location or reason for absence is unknown due to these circumstances there is a cause for concern for the Young Person or a potential danger to the public.
Action	<p>Staff decide whether to allow the Young Person to remain temporarily in the location or arrange for their return. If they wish to arrange a return but feel that there will be public order difficulties the Police will assist. The Young Person will not be categorised as missing. Before reporting this to the Police staff should try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to locate the Young Person. - consider the circumstances and causation factors - consider the potential risks - contact parents/friends & other service providers <p>Staff report unauthorised absence to the Police for information only. Police will not proactively search for a Young Person in this category and a missing person's report will not be filed. A clear judgement must be made in each case as to the length of time that elapses before a Young Person becomes categorised as missing. Any Young Person whose whereabouts are not known and who cannot be contacted must not remain out overnight without formally being reported as missing .</p>	<p>Staff to report the Young Person as missing providing detailed information to the Police by telephone. Staff to make clear that the Young Person is missing. Staff will be given a Police OIS log reference number which must be recorded.</p> <p>The report will lead to the Police making a pro- active investigation locally and their response will be tailored to the circumstances. Decision about risk level in this case lies with the Police who will have essential dialogue with staff at this stage. Police will inform the National Missing Person's Helpline after:</p> <p>3 hrs - High risk 72 hrs - Medium risk 14 days - Low risk</p> <p>Staff must inform without delay: Parents/people with Parental Responsibility Social Worker Emergency Duty Team for safeguarding if out of hours</p>
Follow Up	All action to be recorded and timed. All actions to be shared with the police in the event of the missing episode not being resolved at the early stage. 6 hours is regarded the absolute maximum for any Young Person whose whereabouts is not known and who cannot be contacted to be classed as absent without being formally reported as missing. In many cases a shorter period is appropriate.	All actions and times to be recorded. All actions to be shared with the police. On return the Young Person should be de-briefed, to consider the reasons for going missing. It may be necessary to conduct this de-brief with someone independent of the home or the Young Adult or Young Person's social worker. Any reasons for the absence given by the Young Person should be recorded in their Schedule three File.

6. Missing Person Procedure

1. The member of staff working with the Young Person will inform the senior on site of the Young Person's name, what they are wearing, their current mood and where they were last seen and their current medication status i.e. what time are they next due to take any medication, emergency medication. They should also provide information about the activity the person was engaging in prior to them going missing.
2. The senior staff on site will co-ordinate a search of the home and the grounds. They will inform the site that a Young Person is missing and call on all available staff to assist in the search. They will also contact the police to inform them that we are currently looking for a Young Person, not for the police to come out but just so that they are aware we may need assistance. Police call centre 0300 333 3000. If it is out of office hours or a weekend, the senior on site will contact the on call manager to inform them of the situation and that the protocol has been followed at this stage they will make the decision as to the status of the Young Person (e.g. unauthorised absence or missing person) as per the Unauthorised Absence Policy for Young Person missing from care in the West Mercia Police Area.
3. The senior on site will, at this point, get the missing person's information sheet from the Missing Person file in the Team Office, off- site the 'missing Young Person's' documents are stored in the glove compartment of each car; which will include any information regarding health diagnosis and safety awareness/risk management.
4. Whilst staff are searching the site, the senior staff on duty will telephone Lakeside @ Our Place immediate neighbours to inform them that there is a Young Person missing and will give a brief description of the Young Person to those people contacted and ask them to contact the school if they may see the Young Person. Provide the home's contact telephone number.
5. The senior on site will then instruct the staff involved in the search to extend the search to the immediate area off site should the Young Person not be found on site, which will involve the use of some vehicles. The senior will give staff members specified areas to search based on the maps also stored in the missing person's file in the Team Office. Staff involved in the search should keep the senior on site informed using the mobile radios of where they have searched and the results. It is essential that while a search of the site and immediate area is carried out that all other radio traffic ceases except for emergency / assistance calls to ensure that information is relayed clearly. Staff searching off site must take a Lakeside mobile phone with them to ensure that information can be relayed effectively back to the site.
6. If, after a maximum of 15 minutes a Young Person has not been found, the senior on site will contact the Police on 0300 333 3000 (Police Call Management Centre) reporting the incident, giving information about the Young Person as detailed on the missing persons information sheet and giving the status of the Young Person.
7. The manager on- call or on duty will make the telephone calls necessary to parents/carers and Placing Authority social worker for the Young Person.
8. Staff searching for the Young Person need to continue the search until advised by the senior on duty or the Police to scale down the search or until the Young Person is found.
9. Once a Young Person is returned to the site and is checked to ensure that they are medically fit the senior on site will inform anyone notified of the missing status that the Young Person has returned and the outcome of the incident.
10. The senior on site will arrange for the Young Person to be debriefed (if appropriate) and the staff member responsible for the Young Person prior to them being missing regarding the incident within 24 hours of the incident happening regardless of the length of time a Young Person has been missing. The senior will write a report on the incident or appoint another member of staff to do this and will include information from the debrief session in this.
11. At this point further action will be decided and the risk assessment for the Young Person updated. A copy of the debrief information and incident report should be forwarded to the Police when they have been involved in an incident.

7. Monitoring

The Registered Person monitors absences from the home and the Police monitor reported absences from each establishment. The Police will instigate formal reviews if Young Person show continual missing episodes including a full organisational review if one individual has three missing episodes in a 90 day period or the establishment is shown to have in excess of 12 missing episodes in one year.

For all missing person's reports the Police contact number is:

Police Call Management Centre

Contact - 0300 333 3000