Advice for foster carers: Missing from care

Where the child’s location or reason for absence is unknown and/or there is concern for the child because of their vulnerability or there is a potential danger to the public. A child in this category must be reported to the police.

Absence from care

Some children absent themselves for a short period of time and then return and their whereabouts are known. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed, either on purpose or accidentally, and may be testing boundaries. This kind of boundary testing is within the range of normal teenage behaviour and not necessarily considered a risk.

When a foster carer realises that a child is missing from their care they should consider which definition applies. If the carer is unsure then they can phone the child’s social worker for advice during working hours or the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) out of hours.

If the absence is considered to fall within the definition of missing, the foster carer must, without delay, inform:

1. Police – provide as much detail about the child as possible
2. Child’s social worker or team manager (if out of hours, the Emergency Duty Team)
3. The parents and those with parental responsibility (the decision of when to inform parents/those with parental responsibility must be made in consultation with the social worker or team manager/Emergency Duty Team)

If the child falls in the definition of absent, the foster carer must:

1. Speak to the child’s social worker or team manager to discuss whether they should be reported to the police straight away or if the decision to report to the police should be delayed for a period of time.

Any decision to delay reporting to the police must be made by the social worker, team manager or out of hours the Emergency Duty Team.

Details of any child, either missing or absent, should always be recorded by the foster carer and they must inform the fostering duty team the following day with details of the young person, length of absence and when returned.

Contact numbers

Police: 101  Police emergency: 999
Fostering duty team: 01603 306338
Emergency Duty Team (EDT): 0344 800 8014