



Owlswick School and Home

Missing Person and Absence Policy

Approved by:	Sarah Hawke/Leon Creenan	Date: 10/4/18
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Owlswick School and Home Missing Person's/Absence Policy

Policy Statement

Owlswick consider young people going missing to be a safeguarding and child protection issue. Young people going missing or being classed as an unauthorised absence can be linked to a range of safeguarding concerns including the following (this is not an exhaustive list) :

- Child sexual exploitation
- Radicalisation
- Gang culture and/or being a victim of crime
- Anti-social behaviour
- Being bullied – in person or via social media for example
- Being influenced by peers or persons known/unknown
- Wanting to see family members

Each young person has a behaviour management plan and associated risk assessments. These plans will (where relevant) include the risks of a young person going missing and the mitigating actions that need to be taken in order to reduce them. These plans will include a thorough assessment of the safety of each young person which will regularly review and consider the placement and the appropriateness of this.

Although this policy will seek to give guidance in all these circumstances, obviously the reasons underlying why young people go missing are very different for each group and so responses need to be tailored to fit the specific situation.

Young people who are missing invariably place themselves at risk. The reasons for their absence are varied and complex and cannot be viewed in isolation from their home or school circumstances.

The responsibility for responding to reports of young people who go missing and undertaking enquires to locate them and ensure their return to a safe caring environment lies with the Police and Owlswick staff.

Anyone may report a young person as missing to the Police; they do not have to be a parent, carer, or other relative. Any report of a missing young person must be recorded by the police receiving the report.

The detailed Police response to children who go missing is contained in the relevant Force policy and national guidance, and will not be repeated in this policy.

Staff will be expected to help the Police in finding the young people and to work cooperatively with Police during any enquiry. Therefore, prior to contacting the Police, a thorough search of both the house and grounds will take place and a log created to record actions taken including date and time and information about staff and the young person themselves. Staff ratios permitting a search of the area around Owlswick will also

take place which will include the lake areas, Wyevale Garden Centre and Rugby Club as well as other known areas of Lewes such as Lamport.

Even after reporting a young person missing or as an unauthorised absence, staff should recognise that staff are responsible for the young people in their care at all times, and this responsibility remains after they have reported a young person missing to the Police.

When a young person is missing from Owlswick, the priority must be ensuring immediate safety of the individual by finding them and returning them to the home.

Other young people will be reassured as needed.

The following information is required by the police and staff will need to ensure it is available.

- A physical description of the young person and their clothing;
- Details of when the young person was last seen and with whom;
- A recent photograph (if available);
- Family addresses;
- Known associates and addresses frequented;
- Personal details of the young person;
- Any previous history of absconding / absenteeism and circumstances of where found;
- Mobile phone number;
- The names and addresses of the young person's GP and dentist;
- The circumstances under which the young person is absent;
- Any factors which increase the risk to the young person
- Placement address
- Contact details of carer, social worker, placing authority
- Where a Looked After Child is involved, the name of the staff member who has completed a search of their home for the young person (NB Police reserve the right to conduct further searches).

Communication/Record keeping

All stages of the process of a young person going missing needs to be documented meaning a clear time line can be established from the moment a person is missing or an unauthorised absence. This is in accordance with the Children's Home national minimum standards.

All phone calls and actions taken are to be documented as part of record of events related to the absence and reported to the senior manager.

All staff will keep in touch with one another whilst a search is taken place.

Who needs to be contacted when a young person has gone missing after following the first and stages of action as set out in the policy below:

Owlswick staff must without delay inform:

- The Police
- The parents and those who have parental responsibility (the decision of when to inform parents/those with parental responsibility must be made in consultation with a senior manager)
- The relevant social worker
- The local authority emergency duty service if out of hours and the social worker and accountable team manager the next working day
- The placing authority

Actions to be undertaken when a young person has returned

- The young person is given food, drink and if necessary first aid or medication
- The young person is given the opportunity to talk about why they absconded and this needs to be documented. If there are any child protection concerns then these should be reported immediately following the Owlswick Child Protection policy.
- The relevant authorities and police need to be informed.
- A return home interview will be conducted with the young person within 48 hours of their return.
- The young person should be provided with the opportunity to meet with their social worker, parent or carer to discuss why they went missing.
- If appropriate a consequence for actions can be given in accordance with the young person's behaviour management plan.

Longer Absences

In accordance with Owlswick policy a meeting will be called within a maximum of 7 working days and in most instances within two days. This meeting will review the actions taken up to this point to ensure that everything has been done to locate the missing person. This meeting will involve:

- The accountable manager /social worker from the authority responsible for the child's care;
- The local Police Inspector (or their nominee);
- Other relevant staff representatives from the authority where the child is living;
- The registered manager of Owlswick.

This meeting will review the action taken up to this point, and satisfy themselves that all possible steps are being taken to locate and return the young person

Young people who go missing during an external activity

If a young person becomes absent whilst taking part in an external activity/holiday, the member of staff in charge will undertake the following actions:

- Notify the centre/holiday camp/external activity staff members to report the young person is missing and to arrange a search in the area where the young person became absent.
- If in a park or beach area, arrange for a staff member to undertake a search of the area and contact Owlswick for other staff to assist in a search or collecting other young people as required.
- Notify the local Police for that area.
- Notify the young person's parents or carers.
- Notify the young person's social worker.
- Notify a senior manager at the home if relevant.
- Notify the emergency duty team if out of hours.

Owlswick Protocol for reporting a missing person or absence to the Police as reviewed and agreed with East Sussex Police – April 2018

Action for members of staff:

1. A young person is reported to the manager on shift as being absent. A risk assessment will be immediately made about the absence. It will be important to ascertain if the young person is assessed as being absent or is assessed as being a missing person. Staff should also refer to stages one and two as set out in the Owlswick missing person's policy below.
2. If the assessment is made that the young person is a missing person and/or has been abducted or is extremely vulnerable for example then staff will immediately call 999 and make a report to the police. The Police will make a risk assessment about the nature of the case and then direct the staff about the action they will be taking. They will send a response unit to the property for further information and authorise an immediate search if required.
3. If the assessment is made that the missing young person is absent and it is likely that their whereabouts may be known then staff should refer to stage one and two of the policy.
4. If the decision is made that the Police need to be called as the absence has been assessed as being one that has not been authorised or that the young person is refusing to come back to Owlswick for example then staff should contact the police by calling the 101 number. The Police will risk assess the situation dependent on the age and vulnerability of the young person. They will then either:
 - a. pass the information onto local response officers who will then circulate the description amongst themselves and look out for the young person as part of their patrols. They will keep staff informed of any sightings of the young person.
 - b. attend the address of where the young person is known to be
 - c. send a response unit to Owlswick to interview staff and gather information about the young person in order for an authorised search to begin.

N.B The police protocol is that Owlswick staff will be expected to assist in any search for the young person and search areas in Lewes for example where the young person is known to visit or stay. Staff will only be able to participate in any search at the manager's discretion and if there are sufficient numbers on shift to enable them to do so.

5. This protocol will be reviewed with East Sussex Police on a regular basis and protocols agreed

Policy First Stage: Immediate action to be taken when a young person has gone missing or is assessed as being absent.

If the period of absence continues for two hours or more, consideration should start to be given as to whether the young person would be regarded as an absence, or whether they should now be considered as a missing person. Four hours should be regarded as the maximum period before reconsideration, and in many cases a much shorter period would be more appropriate depending on age and status of the young person.

All staff to note: In some circumstances it will be necessary for immediate action to be taken if it has been assessed that a young person has gone missing depending on the risk assessment made at the time of the absence being notified.

Staff on duty will report the absence to a senior manager and decisions made about how to treat the absence and action to be taken dependent on the young person, their levels of vulnerability and individual circumstances. This assessment will inform the actions to be taken by staff.

When a young person has gone missing the following action will be taken:

- The team leader will delegate a member of staff(s) to search the house and school buildings.
- Staff will search the grounds of Owlswick including all sheds and outbuildings.
- If the young person has a mobile phone then they will be contacted on this.
- Staff will stay in touch with one another by mobile phones
- A log will be started to document that the young person is absent and all actions taken by staff
- A staff member will check the local area and known venues, by vehicle if possible.
- If there is no sign of the young person then the staff will move onto the Stage 2 depending on the status and age of the young person who is missing

Policy Second Stage: Next actions to be taken when a young person goes missing

- The team leader will make a decision (following consultation with another senior manager) for staff to stop searching the premises and hand the issue over to the police. The team leader will take the lead in terms of managing the situation and staff involved.
- A member of staff will contact the police by calling 999/101 and report the young person missing or absent.
- Staff will question the other young people to gather any relevant information about places that young people go to or other young people that they be associating with.
- Staff will inform and report to the relevant individuals such as the duty social work team, parents/carers and/friends (dependent on who is involved in the young person's life). All calls will be documented and all parties will continue to be kept updated.
- It is important for staff to keep an open channel of communication with the young person if it is possible to do so. Staff will continue to contact the young person by their mobile phone and encourage them to come to a meeting place where they can be picked up.

- When a young person has returned, staff must inform all of the relevant parties connected to the young person and inform them of their safe return and action taken by Owlswick.
- The young person must be checked to ensure that they do not require medical attention and be offered food and drinks. A return interview will be conducted within 48 hours. Good practice would be for the young person's social worker or other appropriate adult to be involved in the return conversation.

Owlswick School and Home Prevention Strategy for young people going missing/being absent

What measures do staff take to prevent a young person from going missing?

Staff develop good relationships with young people and understand individuals and their personal issues extremely well. This is paramount in the prevention of young people going missing as individuals know they can talk to a staff member if they are concerned or anxious about a person or situation. Staff also are alert to any changes in a young person's behaviour or emotional state and will monitor this if there is thought to be a concern about the young person and a heightened risk about their personal safety. Young people going missing is a safeguarding issue and is to be assessed as such when supporting each individual. The usual safeguarding policies apply in relation to this policy.

Each young person has a Risk Assessment, Behaviours, Boundaries and Consequences Plan which details any concerns and risk about a young person and the likelihood of them taking part in a risk activity or where there are concerns about their personal safety. Individual risk assessments are carried out as and when required. These assessments and plans are regularly reviewed and discussed with the young person and staff team to ensure they are relevant and cover the areas of concern. This means that all staff are alert to any potential issues that could result in a young person going missing. Each young person has a key worker who is expected to create a positive relationship and act as a role model to the young person. The key-worker will also bring to the attention of the staff team any issues of concern about a young person's safety that need to be monitored and where needed reported onto external agencies.

Owlswick is aware that there are many external influences on a young person and they can become involved in situations which could mean that they choose and/or are influenced to go missing. Examples of these influences or situations that could cause a young person to go missing are as follows but this is not an exhaustive list:

- A young person becoming involved in gang culture or criminal activity
- A young person becoming involved in activities that cause them to take on a set of beliefs or ways of thinking that can then translate to them becoming radicalised by an external group or individual
- A young person being sexually exploited by an individual or group
- A young person creating a relationship with an individual or group through using social media

- A young person being involved in substance misuse that causes them to become involved in criminal activity
- A young person being easily influenced by a group of peers who encourage them to leave the premises

Owlswick has robust safe working practice in place to prevent young people from going missing for all of the above reasons. The Local Area Assessment also sets out the assessment from local external agencies (including the Police and East Sussex Local Safeguarding Board) of the area that the home is situated in.

In all areas of the assessment external agencies have assessed that young people are at low risk from the identified reasons that could cause them to go missing.

There are well researched and considered internet safety and social media management policies in place to monitor the use of social media. Young people receive regular education sessions on the risks of putting personal information online or meeting up with someone who they have been chatting to on line for example.

Young people are also monitored about where they are going and who they are meeting. Staff will visit friend's houses and other venues (such as a youth club) in order to assess that addresses and meeting places are safe for the young person to go to.

Owlswick also has a good relationship with the local Police and Police schools liaison officer. Any concerns about a young person are reported and discussed so the Police can advise and talk to an individual if needed. Owlswick also has contact with the local project to prevent and support sexual exploitation and PREVENT officer.