

22.5.20

Police Scotland, Social Work Scotland and Scottish Government

**Working together to protect children and young people who go missing from care during the Covid-19 pandemic:
a joint statement from Police Scotland, Social Work Scotland and the Scottish Government**

Introduction

The restrictions put in place to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic are particularly challenging for children and young people. We know that it is even harder for looked-after children and young people in the care system, due to being separated from their families and the close attention that's paid to their behaviour.

This statement sets out how local authorities, care providers and Police Scotland as 'corporate parents' are working together to keep care experienced children and young people safe and protected during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Safety and protection continues to be central to all the decisions we make.

Protecting children and young people who go missing from care

Children or young people living in a residential or alternative family setting may find the pandemic restrictions particularly hard because of the difficult and often emotionally fraught, circumstances which led them to be in care, and may be at increased risk of harm if they go missing.

If you are providing care to a child or young person, you should follow the local protocols and procedures which were in place prior to CoVID-19. This means that care providers should continue to report concerns about children or young people in their care who go missing to the police, as usual.

All reasonable efforts should be made to locate the child or young person before calling Police Scotland, unless there is evidence that the child or young person is at risk of harm. If you have any child protection concerns related to the child or young person's absence (such as concerns over child exploitation eg criminal, sexual or financial) then you must follow national and organisational Child Protection procedures.

The Scottish Government's [National Missing Person's Framework](#) defines the roles and responsibilities of key partners to prevent, respond to, support and protect children, young people and other vulnerable persons who may be regarded as missing. It describes a missing person as anyone whose whereabouts are unknown **and**:

- where the circumstances are out of character, **or**

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- the context suggests the person may be subject to crime, **or**
- the person is at risk of harm to themselves or another

Deciding to report a child or young person as missing involves considering the context of the child's absence, taking account of their needs, behaviour and circumstances.

There may be situations in which it is considered that the behaviours displayed are tolerable to the carer who will manage them as per their professional judgement, care plan and in the interests of the child or young person given the unique and individual set of circumstances. This should be kept under constant review.