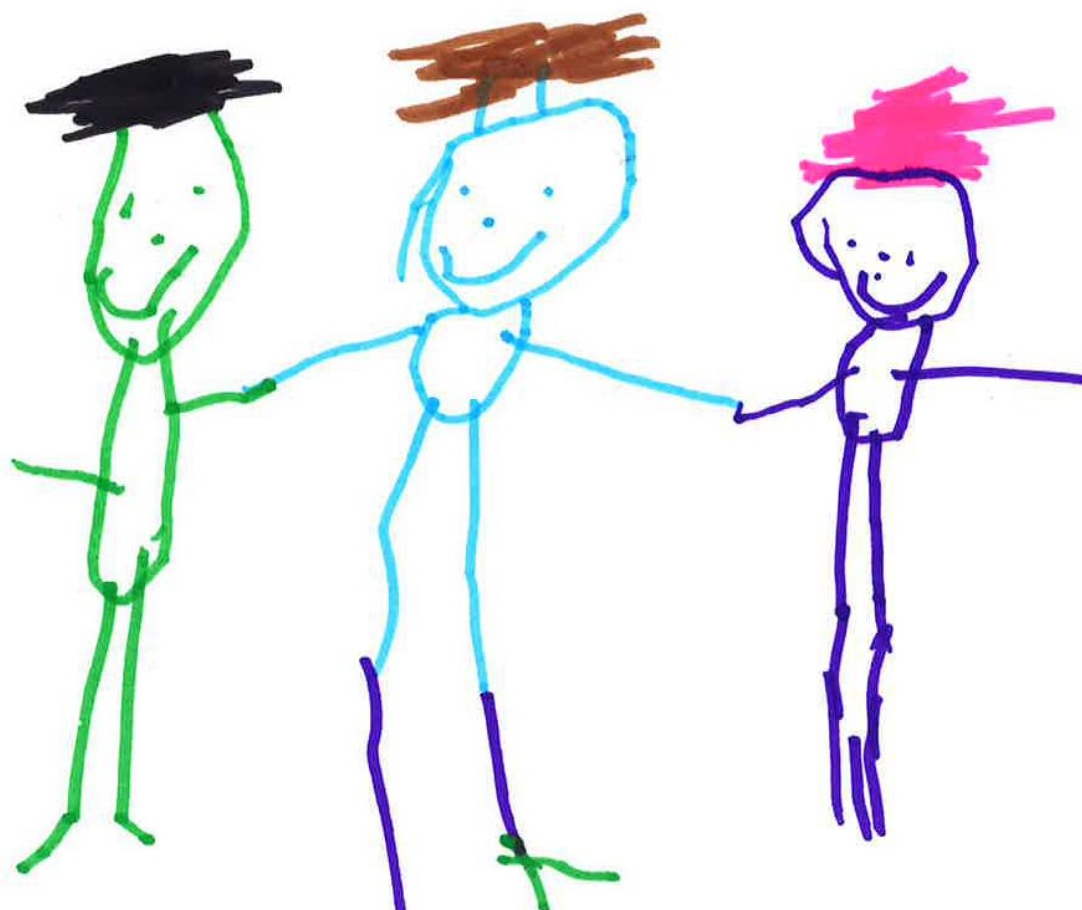


Children Missing from Early Years Services

Good Practice Guidance



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Introduction

This good practice guidance is intended for practitioners and agencies working with children aged 0-5 years. It outlines the steps and procedures which are recommended as good practice in Newcastle when children are missing from services. There is no national guidance for this age group, this guide has been developed in line with the national guidelines for Children Missing from Education (DfE 2013).

In Newcastle we believe all young children have the right to health and early years services to help them to achieve their full potential.

Our Strategic Vision

Newcastle is a great place to grow up where every child and young person is safe and loved, healthy and happy, and free from harm and has the chance to make the most of their talents to fulfil their potential.
Children & Young People Plan 2015-20

Working with our partners throughout the development of the Wellbeing for Life Strategy, we have emphasized the importance of 'getting a good start in life'. It is important to make sure that children and young people living or learning in Newcastle enjoy positive wellbeing and good health throughout their childhood and as a foundation for wellbeing and health in adulthood. Families who do not have access to services may face social, emotional and economic disadvantage and exclusion.

Some families may choose not to engage with services and they have a right to do this. However, recent serious case reviews indicate that persistently not engaging can be a factor of concern in cases of abuse and neglect, as families may conceal a child who is suffering harm, and services may not know until it is too late.

Problems can arise when:

- agencies do not inform others that they have not seen a child or their family for some time;
- agencies are no longer providing, or have tried unsuccessfully to offer a service to a child or family;
- agencies do not check with others that someone is working with the child and that the child is safe.

Early years services in Newcastle will work together to ensure that these vulnerable children are welcomed and re-engaged, and when they go missing that all reasonable efforts are made to trace them.

The guidance aims to provide a minimum standard of safety for children living in Newcastle, regardless of whether they are registered with services. However, it is the aim of all early years' professionals to engage families to ensure that no child slips through the net of services. As the safeguarding of children in Newcastle is of the highest priority, we need to respond quickly to ensure that children and families who fail to engage, or disengage from

services are located. All agencies have a responsibility to share appropriate information, work together and ensure all reasonable efforts are made to trace them.

Who is a Missing Child?

A missing person is described as 'Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be the subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or others'.

An 'absent' person is 'A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be and there is no apparent risk.' (ACPO 2015)

A child missing from education (CME) refers to all children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll nor being educated otherwise (e.g. privately or in alternative provision) and who have been out of any education provision for a substantial period of time (usually agreed as 4 weeks or more) DFE Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, November 2013.

All children born in the UK are registered with agencies such as the General Registry Office, the Department of Work and Pensions and the NHS and are therefore 'known' but some do not access early years services. Some reasons are listed below;

- Families may be aware of the services available but choose not to engage with some or all of them.
- Families with children who start to engage with services but then cease to continue to engage.
- Transient families who move between different authorities and also within the city.
- Those families who move between providers causing temporary anxiety for professionals.
- Children whose families deliberately avoid services and who are known to be at risk

Children born outside the UK may live in families who are not aware of services available to them in this country. For some of them e.g. students, their stay is often temporary and they may choose not to engage with some services during this time.

Those groups of vulnerable children who are more likely than others **not** to engage with early years services are:

- Children living in women's refuges
- Children of homeless families, perhaps living in temporary accommodation
- Looked After children
- Children with a gypsy/traveller background
- Children in families with a transient lifestyle
- Migrant children, whether in families seeking asylum or economic migrants
- Trafficked children and families

The Early Years Foundation Stage 2014 requires that practitioners must take all necessary steps to keep children safe and well. Practitioners need to be vigilant of unplanned moves which have not been out of choice, or are of limited choice. These will include those families who are fleeing from violence, harassment or persecution, and those where individuals have no choice within the move which may include human trafficking or forced marriage. Different cultural norms and traditions will also be prevalent, some of which may be considered potential child protection issues e.g. Female Genital Mutilation.

Why it is important we identify children who go missing or are missing

To ensure that children:

- Have the opportunity to fulfil their potential
- Receive the universal services to which they are entitled to
- Do not slip through the net and become invisible to services
- Stay safe from harm

Maintaining up to date records

It is important that practitioners ensure they keep up to date accurate records for all children accessing their services. Accurate records can be helpful in tracing children who go missing. This should as a minimum include the information below: which should be emailed to the Senior Practitioner at The Community Family Hub (CFH) when reporting a missing child.

Child's details

Legal surname and chosen surname

Legal first name and chosen first name

Any alias or other name the child may be known as

DOB

Gender

Address

Parent's / carer's details

Relationship to child

Surname

First name

D.O.B

Address

Postcode

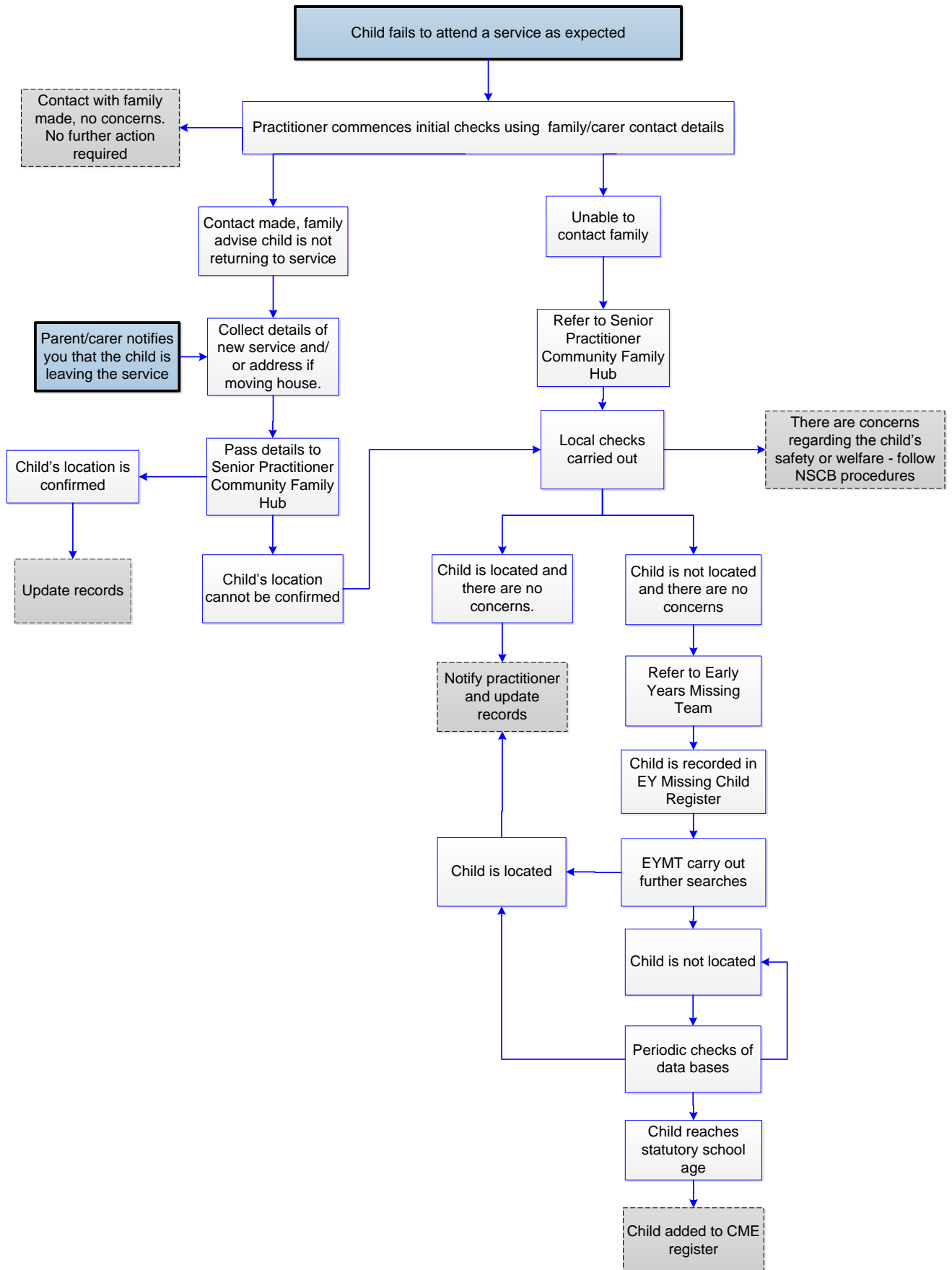
Tel no.

Parental responsibility?

Other significant adults e.g. emergency contacts/next of kin

In order to support early years practitioners within childcare settings and health services, to identify these families who do not engage, or who have ceased to engage, the following processes and procedures are in place.

Early Years Services Process for absent and missing children



At any point in this process if there are concerns regarding the child's safety or welfare follow Newcastle Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB) procedures

Recording actions

Information known or received, people spoken to, decision and actions – and the reasons for taking them, should be recorded contemporaneously. If the child is subsequently reported missing to the police, or is found to be a victim of crime, full records will be required. The checklist at the end of the guidance acts as a tool to support services in recording key actions which will identify the reasonable enquiries which they have made.

Assessing a child's vulnerability: immediate response

Assessing vulnerability requires a combination of professional knowledge and experience of child welfare issues and knowledge of local circumstances. Considering the following questions could assist the process. If in doubt a practitioner should always consult with managers.

Key Questions to consider

- Have there been suspicions in the past concerning this child and family members, which together with any sudden disappearance from service provision is worrying?
- Was there a significant incident prior to the child's unexplained absence from services?
- Is there a history of mobility without full explanations as to why?
- Are there issues raised by the child or by their family's immigration or asylum status?
- Has there been school or local authority intervention in relation to older siblings' attendance e.g. early intervention or prevention services through MASH?

Key Contacts

Senior Practitioners Community Family Hubs

- **Central:** Joanne.Elliott@actionforchildren.org.uk Tel: 0191 213 4100
- **East:** angela.killoran@barnardos.org.uk Tel: 0191 275 9636
- **West:** Elizabeth.bright@newcastle.gov.uk Tel: 0191 277 1928

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Early Years Missing Team: EYMT@Newcastle.gov.uk

Children's Social Care, Initial Response Service: 0191 277 2500

Emergency Duty Team: 0191 278 7878

Northumbria Police: 101 (in an emergency always dial 999)

Newcastle Safeguarding Children Service

Missing Children: Checklist Guidance notes for Practitioners in Early Years and Childcare Settings and Pre-School Health Services

When is somebody described as missing?

Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be the subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or others. In addition an 'absent' person is a person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.

Which children are we concerned about?

Although it is necessary to know about all children thought to be 'missing', there is most concern about those who are vulnerable, or at risk and in need of services. It also includes pregnant women who are not engaging with services. In the case of pregnant teenagers there will be two children that may be cause for concern

When should a referral to the Community Family Hub (CFH) be made?

There are no time scales attached to this screening process. Practitioners will need to make a judgement about how long they spend looking for a child. This will be based on experience and knowledge of the family, and following any agency-specific guidance where this exists. All Early Years Practitioners are advised to follow this guidance and use the checklist as a prompt and recording tool. It is important that every effort is made to contact the family. Following receipt of a referral to the CFH the team may request further information from the practitioner. If the child is not located via local data checks the team will make at least one visit to the home address before referring to the Early Years Missing Team.

Agency checks

The checklist provides common sources of information but it is not exhaustive. There will be other sources not included but these can be added to the form. It is not expected that a single agency can obtain all the information. Involved practitioners will need to talk to each other to agree and gather appropriate information to their service. Some telephone numbers of city-wide services are given but practitioners will have a better knowledge of local services.

Non-professional sources of information

Practitioners will use their judgement about the appropriateness of approaching non-professionals for information about missing children. If in doubt, discuss this with colleagues, supervisors or managers. Do what is reasonable.

What happens next?

As a minimum, a record will be kept of all children currently missing so that ongoing checks can be made and the children tracked where necessary. Further efforts will be made to trace those children felt to be at risk, involving Children's Social Care (CSC) and the Police. If the child should 'turn up' again in your area, please let the EYMT know.

Remember

- Routinely record and amend children's details at all contacts
- Remind mothers, fathers and carers to inform practitioners of any changes of address and telephone etc
- Do everything possible within own agency and contact other involved agencies for support in the search
- Do what is reasonable in terms of searching and time-scales
- Contact the Senior Practitioner in the CFH if unsure how to proceed.

Responsibilities of practitioners

- To maintain up to date records for all children
- To make all reasonable attempts to locate the child
- To liaise with other agencies known to be involved with the child/family
- To refer the case to CSC if there are concerns about the child's safety or welfare
- To refer the case to CFH if there are no concerns

Responsibilities of the Community Family Hub Team (CFH)

- To search additional databases for information about the child/family
- To make at least one home visit if the child is not located
- To maintain a record of actions taken throughout the search
- To refer the case to CSC if there are concerns about the child's safety or welfare
- To refer the case to EYMT if there are no concerns

Responsibilities of the Early Years Missing Team (EYMT)

- To search additional databases for information about the child/family
- To maintain a record of actions taken throughout the search
- To maintain a record of missing early years children notified to the service
- To pass information to the appropriate agencies if the child remains missing
- To identify, monitor and report on the trends in missing early years children data and determine an appropriate response
- To refer the case to CSC if there are concerns about the child's safety or welfare
- To maintain accountability for the case throughout the search

If the child is thought to be suffering or is at risk of suffering significant harm the guidance in the Newcastle Safeguarding Child Protection Procedures must be followed.

Newcastle Early Years Services
Checklist to locate missing children
Please use in conjunction with the accompanying guidance notes

Gather as much information as possible **and print clearly** using the checklist below.

Practitioner making initial referral to complete the grey shaded boxes on pages 8-9

Practitioner details	
Name	
Role	
Agency	
Address	
Phone	
Email	

Child's details	
Legal surname	
Legal first name	
Chosen surname	
Chosen first name	
Gender	
DOB	
Address	
Postcode	
Ethnicity	
Language	
Immigration status	
Nursery/School	
Health Visitor	
GP	
NHS no	

Parent's / carers' details		
Surname		
First name		
D.O.B		
Address		
Postcode		
Relationship to child		
Tel no.		
Parental responsibility?		
Other child(ren)'s details (Include school age siblings' details)		

Surname		
First name		
DOB		
Address		
Postcode		
Gender		
Ethnicity		
Language		
Immigration status		
School/ Nursery		
GP		
NHS no		

Please state when the child(ren) were last seen by you or your agency and detail all checks you have made.	
Date referral to Community Family Hub	
Referral made by:	

To be completed by Community Family Hub

Agency checks	Date	Outcome
Asylum Team		
Child Health database		
Children's Centre		
Early Years/Childcare Setting		
Family GP		
Health Visiting Team		
Hospital liaison services		
MAST team		
Midwife		
Nursery		
Other early years provision (e.g. childminder, after school club)		
Schools		
School Nurse		
Services for older/younger siblings		
Services for mothers and fathers / carers e.g. education courses		
Other		

Non Professional Sources	Date	Outcome
Extended family		
Family's social contacts		
Neighbours		
Other service users		
Other		

Progress notes Please state when the child(ren) were last seen by your own or other agencies.	
Date of Referral to EYMT	
Referral made by	