Definition

Missing child: a child (aged under 18) reported to the Police by their parents / carers or other concerned party because their whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located and their well-being, or otherwise, confirmed.

Risks and Vulnerabilities

One or more of the following 'push' and 'pull' factors can precede a missing incident; any one factor may be a trigger for a child actually going missing:

'Push' factors include:
- Not feeling accepted or safe in the environment where children should be safe and happy
- Family breakdown and children being drawn into parents'/carers' conflicts
- Domestic abuse
- Poor family relationships including step parent issues
- Physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse or neglect
- Issues over appropriate boundaries
- Bullying (including e-safety/sexting etc.)
- Teenage pregnancy (or fear that they may be pregnant)
- Fear of forced marriage or female genital mutilation

'Pull' factors include:
- Staying out with peers, boyfriends or girlfriends
- Wanting to be with someone they can only be with by running away
- For someone in Care, running to be near friends and family
- Wanting freedom and independence
- Caught up in risky behaviours such as substance misuse or crime
- Grooming and/or coercion by a peer or an older person
- Fear of repercussion for self or family if they don't go

The immediate risks associated with going missing include:
- Child sexual or other criminal exploitation
- Involvement in criminal activities
- Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and exploitation
- Alcohol/substance misuse
- Deterioration of physical and mental health
- Missing schooling and education
- Vulnerable to trafficking

Key principles

➢ Children going missing is a safeguarding issue and their safety and well-being is paramount;

➢ Locating and returning the child to a safe place is the main objective and timely information sharing is key to quickly finding them and planning to keep them safe. There is no data protection issue in sharing missing person's reports in order to achieve this;

➢ Child protection procedures will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child who is missing or has been missing may be at risk of significant harm;

➢ We will actively support the 'reintegration' of children who have been missing to reduce the risk of reoccurrence and promote their achievement of positive outcomes.

What should practitioners do when a child is missing?

Reporting - parents/carers and schools are responsible for reporting to the Police when a child goes missing. Reports of missing children should include as much identifying information as possible and full details of the circumstances.

Investigation - Avon and Somerset Constabulary is the lead agency for investigating and finding missing children. They will risk assess the notification they have received.

Planning for Return - from the moment a child is reported as missing, their parents/carers, Social Worker and Police will also start planning for when they are found. This is particularly important for children who repeatedly go missing;

What should practitioners do when a child is found?

Prevention Interviews - Police will undertake a face-to-face Prevention Interviews as soon as possible after the child has returned to check for indications they have suffered harm.

Independent Return Home Interviews - the Youth Offending Service will carry out an independent Return Home Interview and may refer or signpost on if they identify concerns.

All agencies involved – contribute to an integrated approach to keeping the child safe from going missing again. Listen to what they have to say and consider what work can be done with them and their parents / carers. Also, consider any risk to any other family member.

If a risk of harm is identified – complete or update an Early Help Assessment

If there is an immediate risk of significant harm – consult with your agencies' safeguarding lead and discuss with the Duty and Assessment Team on 01225 396312 or 396313

Request for Service Forms can be found at: https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/children-young-people-and-families/child-protection