

# Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care

Flowchart to accompany the statutory guidance



Department  
for Education

## Before a looked after child runs away - Planning and prevention

### Carer/s (Children's home / foster carer/s)

Children's homes staff and foster carer/s should be aware of local missing *Runaway and Missing From Home and Care Protocols* (RMFHC Protocols). (P18,20, P28-29, P77)

Children's homes staff and foster carer/s should be trained and supported to offer a consistent approach to the care of children. (P70-71, P72-74). They should also be clear as to when and who they should inform if a child in their care is missing. This will include the responsible social worker or other local authority representative and the police. (P21)

### Responsible authority

The responsible authority has local *Runaway and Missing From Home and Care Protocols* (RMFHC Protocols), including a named senior manager responsible for taking the lead on monitoring policies and performance relating to children and young people who go missing or run away, including looked after children (LAC). (P19,20,28-29)

The responsible authority should collect data on children reported missing from care, unauthorised absences, and other relevant data. The data should be included in regular reports to Council members, especially to the Lead Member for Children's Services; and in reports to Local Safeguarding Children Boards. (P22-24, P30-32)

They should regularly analyse this in order to map problems and patterns.

The responsible authority should work with the police to risk assess cases of children missing or absent from home and analyse data for patterns that indicate particular concerns and risks. (P25)

### Host authority

### Local police

Local police should be aware of local missing *Runaway and Missing From Home and Care Protocols* (RMFHC Protocols). (P20, P28-29)

Using addresses supplied by Ofsted (P75), local police should develop working relationships with children's homes where appropriate in line with Neighbourhood Policing principles and in accordance with local RMFHC protocols.

Local police also develop prevention strategies to address repeat missing or absent occurrences in conjunction with relevant partner agencies; and regularly risk assessing cases classed as 'absent' until the child returns to a place where they should be.

Local police should work with the responsible authority to risk assess cases of children missing or absent from home and analyse data for patterns that indicate particular concerns and risks. (P25)

### Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs)

Local authorities are required to set up a LSCB to coordinate the effectiveness of arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in that area (Section 13 of the Children Act 2004). LSCBs should co-ordinate what is done by each person or body represented on the Board for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the area; and ensure the effectiveness of what is done by each such person or body for that purpose. (P19, 26-27)

### Health and Wellbeing Boards

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 provides that each local authority must have a Health and Wellbeing Board. The Board should involve all relevant partners in the area with special efforts to identify the needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. This would include children who are at risk of, or have, run away, and authorities would have to ensure the right services are commissioned to give those children early help and support.

## Before a looked after child runs away – Care Planning and Review

**Carer/s (Children's home / foster carer/s)**

**Responsible authority**

**Host authority**

**Local police**

Care plans should include a detailed assessment of the child's needs – including the need for the provision of an appropriate placement that offers protection from harm. (P66-67, P84)

Where a child already has an established pattern of running away, the care plan should include a strategy about keeping the child safe and minimising the likelihood of the child running away in the future. (P66-67, P84)

Where a child goes missing from a placement, a statutory review of their care plan can provide an opportunity to check that it addresses the reasons for an absence and help minimise a repeat of the missing episode. (P66-67, P84)

In particular any issues relating to the vulnerability of the child to sexual exploitation, trafficking or crime/gang involvement should be clearly set out in the care plan and review. (P55, P66)

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) should be informed about missing/absent episodes and they should address these in statutory reviews. (P66-67)

IROs have a duty to overview the child's case on an ongoing basis as well as having a role to play in monitoring how the responsible authority is meeting its duties as a corporate parent.

The police and other relevant agencies should be given the opportunity to contribute to the review. (P66-67)

## Before a looked after child runs away – Out of Area Placements

**Carer/s (Children's home / foster carer/s)**

**Responsible authority**

**Host authority**

**Local police**

Local authorities should place LAC in the most appropriate placement to safeguard the child and minimise the risk of the child running away. The care plan should include details of these arrangements. (P63-65, P66-67)

Any decision to place a child at distance should be based on an assessment of the child's needs, including listening to the child (P64-65, P76)

Where the LAC is placed out of area, the responsible authority must make sure that the child has access to the services they need. Notification of the placement must also be made to the host authority and other specified services, including the appropriate background information. (P68-69)

The host authority should receive information from the responsible authority that a child has been placed in their area, including the appropriate background information. (P68-69)

If children placed out of their local authority run away, the local RMFHC protocol should be followed, in addition to complying with other processes that are specified in the policy of the responsible local authority. A notification process for missing/absent episodes should also be agreed between responsible and host local authorities and liaison between the police and professionals in both authorities should be well managed and co-ordinated. (P69)

If the carer/s is caring for a child or young person placed with them by a local authority other than their home authority, it is for the responsible authority to ensure that the carer/s understands the expectations of them by both the responsible and host authority, and if necessary discuss any duplication or inconsistencies as part of the child's placement plan. (P68)

The responsible authority should ensure that the carer understands the expectations of them by both the responsible and host authority, and if necessary discuss any duplication or inconsistencies as part of the child's placement plan. (P68)

# When a looked after child runs away or goes missing from care

## Carer/s (Children's home / foster carer/s)

## Responsible authority

## Host authority

## Local police

Whenever a child runs away from a placement (P8-17), the foster carer/s or the manager on duty in the children's home is responsible for ensuring that the following individuals and agencies are informed within the timescales set out in the local RMFHC protocol:

the local police;

the authority responsible for the child's placement – if they have not already been notified prior to the police being informed; and

parents and any other person with parental responsibility, unless it is not reasonably practicable or to do so would be inconsistent with the child's welfare. (P77)

The carer/s should also take all reasonable and practical steps, which a good parent would take, to secure the safe and speedy return of the child based on their own knowledge and the information within the child's placement plan. If there is suspected risk of harm to the child or those seeking to recover them, however, the carer/s should liaise immediately with the police.

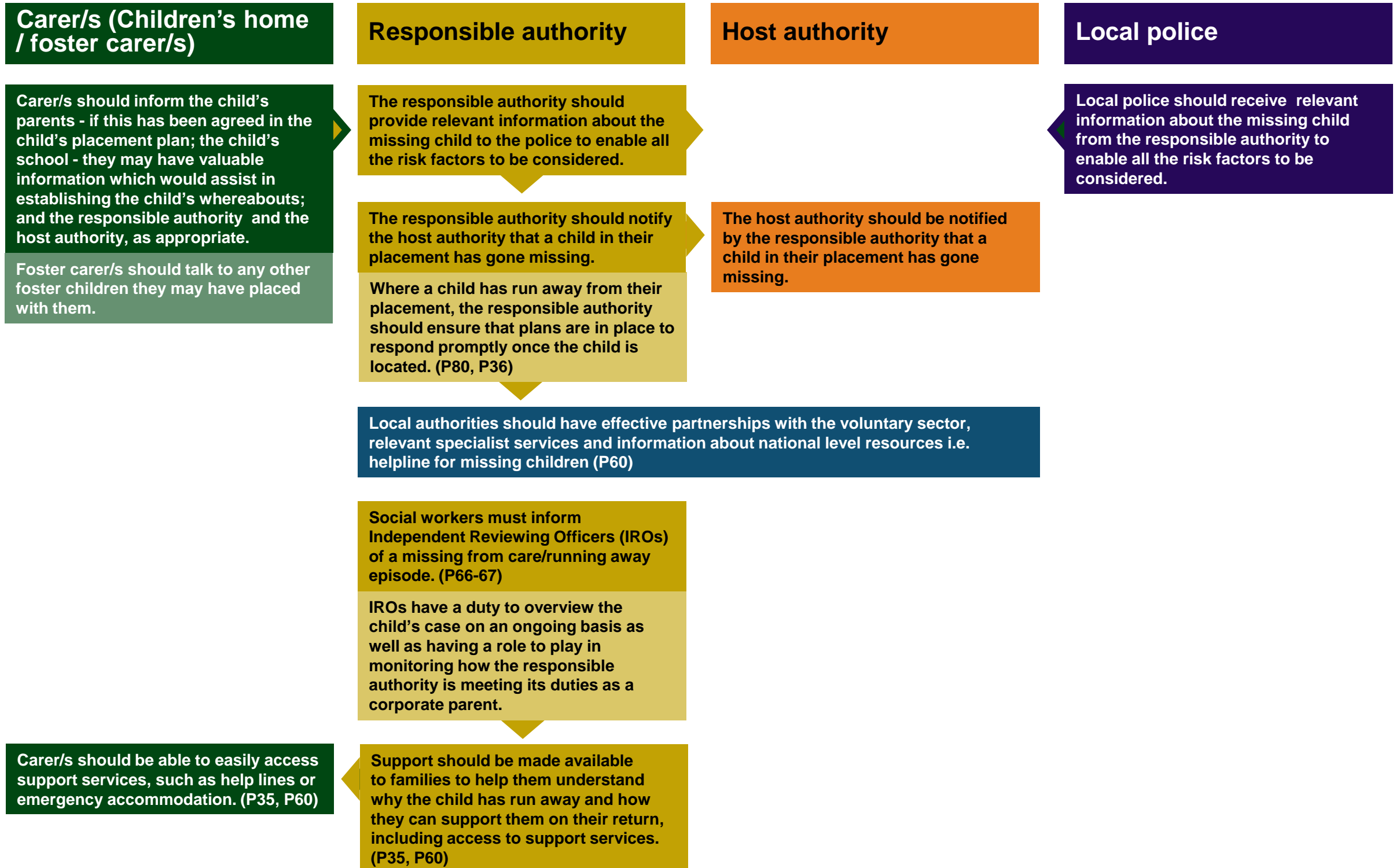
When reporting the missing incident to the police the details required are: the child's name / DOB / whether the child is in care / where, when and who missing with? / what the child was last wearing / description of young person / recent photo / medical history / time and location last seen / circumstances of going missing / details of family, friends and associates / details of the responsible authority.

Agreement between the local police and reporting person about missing or absent and who does what in relation to looking for the child. (P8-17)

Officers perform a risk-assessment which will form the basis for the resulting proportionate actions. (P42-45, 79)

Most absences involving LAC will be treated as child protection incidents to ensure the safety of the child. (P79)

## When a looked after child runs away or goes missing from care (cont.)



During the investigation, regular liaison and communication should take place between the police and referring/involved agencies, including the social worker and management of the responsible authority and the host authority (if out of area placement) for a LAC.

## When a looked after child is found

### Carer/s (Children's home / foster carer/s)

If the carer/s finds the child or is alerted to their whereabouts, the police should be informed immediately. The responsible authority, host authority and school, if applicable, should also be informed. Once the carer has been informed that the child has been found, they should inform the child's parents/residential home as appropriate. (P81)

The carer/s should arrange to collect the child, or encourage them to return as quickly and safely as possible. If there are thought to be specific issues of safety or public order difficulties involved in returning the child, then action should be agreed between the police, the residential unit staff/foster carer and the social worker/emergency duty team.

As part of a managed return, the carer/s should try to provide a positive non judgemental response, check the child's medical condition, provide warm food, someone to talk to, etc. This should include preparing them for their return interview. (P83)

### Responsible authority

If the child is located but professionals are unable to establish meaningful contact, then the responsible authority should contact the police and consider the appropriate action to take. (P80)

If there is concern that the child may be at risk if returned home, the responsible authority should consider what type of accommodation is appropriate in each individual case. (P34, P37)

Children should be informed that they will have the opportunity to talk about their absence to someone independent of their parents/carers on their return. Providing children with an opportunity to talk is key to safeguarding them. (P50)

Aside from the return interview, social workers may talk informally with the child to understand the reasons behind them going missing.

If a child is known to be a repeat runaway or they have run away at least twice, the responsible authority should ensure a discussion is held, either with the child, their family or both, to offer further support and guidance. (P55-59)

### Host authority

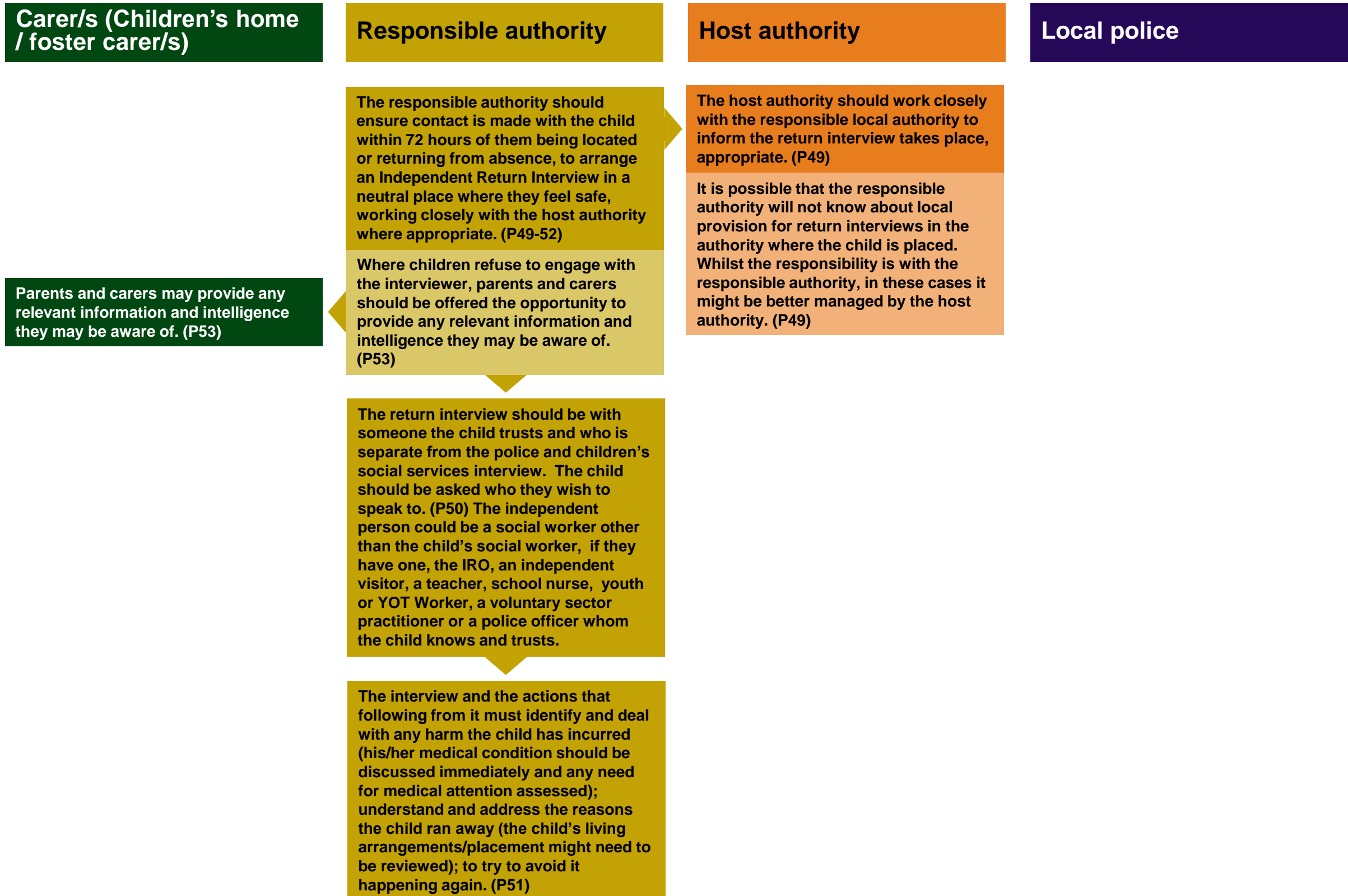
### Local police

Local police record the incident outcome - if Safe and Well check done - and inform the reporting person/agency or person with appropriate care responsibility in the local area, (P46-47)

Where there is a risk of harm present, a police officer may accompany the family or the police may be requested to collect and return the child/young person to the place of residence.

If there is concern that the child may be at risk if returned home, the child should be referred to children's services' social care to assess their needs and make appropriate arrangements for their accommodation. (P34, P37)

# When a looked after child is found – Independent Return Interview





# When a looked after child is found – sharing information and data to safeguard vulnerable children

## Carer/s (Children's home / foster carer/s)

Managers of children's residential units and/or foster carer/s should maintain records of each occasion when a LAC is identified as 'missing'. These records should be made available for inspection under the Children Act 1989 and the information provided to the responsible and host authorities for collation at a national level via the SSDA903 return (P33).

The information should include:

The child's name and date of birth;

If possible, a recent photograph of the child;

Date and time the child was found to be and was reported missing or absent;

A completed Social Care Risk Assessment Record;

Whether the police were informed and the concerns conveyed to the Police/reasons for not informing the Police;

Whether the social worker was informed;

Action taken by social worker;  
The date and time the child returned;

The outcomes of the safe and well check / informal return / and independent return interview with the child on their return.

## Responsible authority

Once the return interview has been completed relevant intelligence should be captured and shared, particularly with the police (and host authority if the child has been placed outside of its responsible authority) to inform the prevention stage and ensure activity is undertaken to address the underlying causes.

Following the Safe and Well Check and Independent Return Interview, local authority children's services, police and voluntary services should work together to build up a comprehensive picture of why the child went missing, what happened while they were missing, who they were missing with and where they were found, and what support they require upon returning home in accordance with the 'Working Together' guidance. (P53-54)

The child's Care Plan should be revised through a review process following the Independent Return Interview. Relevant action should be taken to safeguard the child e.g. the responsible authority could decide to move to a new placement if it is not safe to return.

All incidents of missing or absence that are reported to the police must also be collected and submitted by the local authority to the Department for Education as part of the annual SSDA903 data collection. (P22, P33)

Data on missing LAC should be provided to the Department for Education via the SSDA903 return. (P22, P33)

## Host authority

The host authority should receive relevant information from the responsible authority following the Independent Return to inform the prevention stage and ensure activity is undertaken to address the underlying causes.

## Local police

Local police should receive relevant information from the responsible authority following the Independent Return to inform the prevention stage and ensure activity is undertaken to address the underlying causes.



# Department for Education

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