

# ADVICE ON MANAGING MISSING EPISODES AND WHAT TO EXPECT

It's common to worry about your child running away. Children have a lot going on in their lives and when they can't cope running away seems like a good solution. Enfield council deals with over 1000 missing episodes of children every year. Most missing episodes end with children returning home safely. However, whilst they are missing, they can be exposed to harm and going missing is an indicator of being groomed. It's therefore important that parents and carers do their best to recognise risk and respond swiftly and appropriately.

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## **WHY DO CHILDREN GO MISSING?**

Part of growing up is testing boundaries and most children will at some point be untruthful with their parents or carers about where they are going and what they are doing. However, it can indicate harm. They might be having problems at school. They might be having problems at home that they can't share with you. They could be being groomed and exploited. Usually, going missing suggests that something is wrong.

## **I'M WORRIED MY CHILD WILL RUN AWAY**

It's hard being a child and if they are thinking of running away then they're likely to feel sad alone or trying to fit in. Reassure them that they are valued and loved. Try to be non-judgmental and give them a safe space to share what's on their mind. Consider requesting a school counsellor or a friend relative to see and speak to them regularly.

## **WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT YOUR CHILD ISN'T BEING HONEST**

If you suspect that your child isn't being truthful about their plans or whereabouts, then it's important to have a discussion with them. Be up front and honest with why you don't believe them and that your worried about them being harmed. Give them an opportunity to be honest with you and try and find a compromise. Reward and encourage honesty where you can.

## **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MISSING?**

Do you know where your child is? If the answer is no, then they are missing. If your child has been untruthful about their plans, then they are also missing. You should always clarify your child's whereabouts. Children can be vague on what they are doing and where they are going – make sure you get as much detail from them as possible about where they are going and what they are doing.

## **WHY ARE CHILDREN SOMETIMES UNTRUTHFUL?**

Peer pressure and the sense to belong can sometimes cause children to be untruthful and make risky decisions that have negative consequences. Ask yourself the question why your child has been untruthful? How has your parenting approach shaped their behaviour? Our advice is to try and build a better connection with your child, which leads to more honesty.

## **WHAT ACTION CAN I TAKE IF I DON'T BELIEVE MY CHILD?**

If you don't believe your child, it's good parenting to test what they have told you and verify their plans. Drop round and see them. Send someone to their alleged location. Some parents track their children's phones – particularly when trust has been broken. Children should enjoy freedom, but this should be balanced by protecting them from potential harm.

## **WHERE TO GO FOR HELP?**

Speak directly to your child's social worker or Parenting support services via Early Help 0208 379 2002  
Enfield Children's Services - The Contextual Safeguarding Hub

**HOW TO MANAGE CHANGING PLANS**

Quite often, children’s plans change, and this is OK and a part of life. You should set up a plan with your child about what happens if their plans change. It’s a good idea to ask them to contact you to give you an update. At this point question whether this changes their risk – will they be back later for example?

**WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU REPORT A MISSING CHILD?**

The police will look for them. The police will also notify Enfield Children’s Services and depending on the circumstances additional services may be provided such as a Return Home Interview. Enfield Children’s Services have skilled and dedicated Missing Children’s officers who will try and lower the chances of another missing episode.

**WHAT SHOULD I TELL THE POLICE?**

The police will file a report and look for your child. Any information you can give them to assist them is important. An up-to-date picture, description of their character, who their friends are, where they were last seen, what they said they were going, the clothes they were wearing, their habits and what areas they frequented areas will all help.

**WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MY CHILD IS FOUND?**

When your child is found they will have a debrief with the police and they will be offered a Return Home Interview with a Missing Children’s Co-Ordinator. The police investigation will into their disappearance will end. Children’s Services may offer additional support moving forward.

**WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS MISSING**

Check for signs of where they might have gone. Check their room, check their social media, call their friends, call their friends parents, check their friend’s social media. Search for them. Call the police as soon as you’re sure that they are missing – you do not need to wait 24 hours. The police will look for your child.

**SHOULD I CALL THE POLICE ON MY CHILD?**

We understand that this can be a very difficult decision and should not be done lightly. Please check your surroundings first. However, the police are there to support you and your child and they are not in trouble. When they’re missing, they’re at risk of harm so calling the police to help find them will safeguard them from harm and illegal activities.

**WHAT’S A RETURN HOME INTERVIEW?**

It’s a talk with an independent person who provides the child with an opportunity to be listened to, to understand why they went missing, what happened whilst they were away. It will explore whether they have come to any harm and to discuss what needs to be put in place to prevent them from going missing again.

**WHAT TO DO WHEN A CHILD RETURNS**

The temptation to tell your child off and punish them may be your natural reaction. This tends to push the child further away. Once you’re calm, the recommended approach is to try and re-establish connection with them and to try and understand their behaviour. They might have been harmed or threatened and they need your kindness and protection now more than ever.

**WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF EXPLOITATION?**

Low self esteem  
Feels unloved  
Multiple phones

**Frequently missing**  
Unexplained wealth  
Secretive behaviours

Feels rejected  
Travelling vast distances  
Large age gap friends

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