

Missing Persons Incident Closure

Policy Guidance

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[Based on the College of Policing
Authorised Professional Practice](#)

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**PROTECTING THE PUBLIC.
KEEPING THE
VULNERABLE SAFE.**

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Missing Persons Incident Closure

Subject Located

Subject Returns of Their Own Accord

The CAD will be reviewed at the point of receipt by the BCU. This review does not demand a specific role or rank, but must be timely and, if necessary, seek to manage any remaining risk or vulnerability. The **Incident Manager** and/or **MPU** will be informed of the return.

A Prevention Interview must be completed within 24 hours from the time of return (**high risk – 1 hour**).

- Review CAD and respond to any remaining risk or vulnerability, if necessary.
- Inform the Incident Manager and MPU (if ownership has been handed over).
- Determine the appropriate methodology for completion of the prevention interview (e.g. in person, telephone, partner/family liaison).
- Deploy suitable resources, if necessary, within set timeframe and complete the Prevention Interview.

If there is a delay in police being notified of the return, timeframes for completion should not change, but any resulting delay to the prevention interview should be recorded.

If notified directly (e.g. a phone call to MPU), the return CAD will be created by the BCU.

Subject is Located by Police

The **finding officer** will be responsible for informing the **Incident Manager** and/or **MPU** from the scene and for taking appropriate action to manage any concern for safety, if necessary.

- Inform the Incident Manager and/or the MPU (if the investigation has been handed over) from the scene.
- Assess the overall wellbeing of the subject – risk or vulnerability to be recorded and managed as appropriate.
- Consider necessity for immediate action – of increased importance if dealing with a child or someone who is particularly vulnerable.
- Complete the Prevention Interview.

If the subject is found at a location that is not their home by a third party (e.g. professional partner, member of the public) police will respond in line with the process above that is suitable for the circumstances.

Public Protection

Any officer completing a prevention interview will be responsible for managing signs of risk or vulnerability, whether the subject returned of their own accord or has been located by police (or third party).

- Take action that is appropriate and relevant to the subject and the circumstances.
- Consider the [police protection of children](#) in relevant cases where there is a reasonable belief of significant harm.

Police have a duty under Common Law to protect life and investigate crime; for those reasons we must ascertain the wellbeing of the missing person as soon as possible after they are located or otherwise return.

Consider the protected characteristic(s) of the missing person and treat according to their needs (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation – defined by Equality Act 2010).

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Prevention Interview (Police)

A Prevention Interview must be completed by police **within 24 hours** of the missing person being located or having returned. The methodology for completing the interview should be proportionate to the risk and circumstances, as follows:

- Liaise via telephone with the parent/carer/medical professional in charge of the subject and confirm wellbeing.
- Liaise directly via telephone/video call with subject and confirm wellbeing.
- Deploy and conduct a formal face to face prevention interview.

High Risk incidents will require a **face-to-face** Prevention Interview **within 1 hour** of being located or being notified of the return.

Record full details of any identified criminal allegation on Merlin and create any CRIS or Crimint reports as required.

The following should be considered when completing a Prevention Interview:

- That the person being spoken to is confirmed to be the person that was reported missing.
- Their reason for going missing.
- Their location while missing.
- What they were doing while missing.
- Any people they were with while missing.
- Any further police assistance that may be required.
- Any partner service assistance that can be offered.
- That they were missing of their own accord and not kidnapped or abducted.
- Whether there was any trigger event that precipitated the missing episode that requires recording and/or investigation.
- Intelligence gathering to assist enquiries in case of a repeat missing episode.
- Whether they were a victim of crime whilst they were missing.

A missing person is under no obligation to speak to police, nevertheless, officers should make every effort to obtain an account. Do not approach the Prevention Interview with a generic list of pre-determined questions – **what is raised should be relevant to the individual and their circumstances.**

It is common for missing persons, especially children, to be unwilling to engage in this process. If this is the case, it is important to obtain a sense of their demeanour, physical state and any other factors that may be relevant, especially where any form of child exploitation is suspected. **Care and support for individuals is not dependent on their cooperation and no one should be treated unfavourably due to any perceived unwillingness, disinterest or hostility.**

Consider forensic and/or intelligence opportunities in cases where a risk of child exploitation is evident in order to secure evidence against perpetrators, including seizure and appropriate packaging of clothing/underwear. Liaise with the local BCU Public Protection Team for support/advice – view the CSE toolkit on the Intranet.

Police Protection of Children

If a child is located in circumstances in which they are reasonably believed to be at risk of significant harm, police protection should be considered:

- **Children Act 1989 Section 46** (search 'Children Act 1989' on the Intranet)
- **Police Protection of Children Policy** (search 'Police Protection of Children' on the Intranet)

When a child is located, it should not be assumed that there is an overriding need for their removal/return just because they were reported missing. If a risk of significant harm cannot be evidenced, police protection powers cannot be relied upon.

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Uncooperative Children

Uncooperative children, for example, a located child who refuses to accompany police or will not offer satisfactory reassurances that they will return home present a public protection challenge.

Police will need to carefully consider the wishes of the child, their age, the time/location found, who they are with, any identified risk and intelligence. It may be the case that police ascertain the child's welfare, communicate the location of child to their parent/carer and discuss with all parties the option of facilitating the child making their own way home. Such arrangements must be carefully documented.

If a child does not wish to be taken into police protection and physically resists, officers must consider the possible outcomes of the use of any force (**S.46 Children Act does not provide police with use of force powers**).

Each case must be addressed on its merits, but police must consider that failure to take action when dealing with a missing child may pose a far greater risk than criticism over the use of s.46. Consider the child's age / maturity / mental state, time of day, ability to get home unaided, weather conditions, local circumstances, high crime areas, who they are with, gang associations, risk of exploitation and any other factors known to be relevant.

If a child is found by police, but is then left to make their own way back to their parent/carer then the Merlin report should be updated, but not closed until the person with primary responsibility is satisfied that their whereabouts is known.

Return Home Interview (Partners)

Although not a responsibility of the police, return home interviews are particularly important to missing children. An independent party, best placed to conduct an interview within 72 hours of the person being located or returning, should provide the return interview.

The interview and actions that follow should be used to:

- Identify and deal with any harm the missing person has suffered, including harm that may not have been disclosed to the police during the Prevention Interview;
- Understand and try to address the reasons why they went missing, and;
- Try to prevent it happening again.

For looked after children, it is the responsibility of the residential unit manager/supervising social worker and placing authority to ensure the interview happens.

For children living in the community, the police and children's social services have responsibility for ensuring that opportunity for an independent return interview is provided.

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Incident Closure

The circumstances of locating the subject, the prevention interview, closing of any outstanding or ongoing actions, notifying partners or others, and any necessary referrals will be recorded/completed. The responsibility is not role or rank specific and will be determined on a case by case basis.

- Record the circumstances of the subject being located on Merlin (and CRIS if in use for the investigation).
- Create a record of the Prevention Interview to capture any disclosures on the appropriate Merlin incident closure screen – additionally create a CRIS and/or Crimint as required in the event of a crime suspected or alleged, or other relevant information.
- Cancel PNC circulation (through Merlin).
- Create a PAC or ACN for a child or vulnerable adult respectively if appropriate to do so – this can be triggered through the incident closure screens.
- Cancel any open lines of enquiry or other relevant actions (e.g. cancel CADs that are no longer required, remove publicity, inform supporting units or external partners).
- Inform family (if appropriate to do so) and any other relevant partners (e.g. a social worker).
- Update Merlin Enhanced Concerns, if necessary.
- Complete Merlin closure screens using correct outcome description and time located.

Informant/Family Considerations

Where appropriate to do so the informant or a family member will be informed that the missing persons has been located as soon as possible.

If appropriate, the views of the informant or family members will be used to enhance the Prevention Interview record, particularly in the case of children being unwilling to engage. This may consider:

- Demeanour on return.
- Any statements made.
- Suspected alcohol or drug use.
- New clothing or items (e.g mobile phone, trainers, jewellery).

Missing Person does not want their location to be disclosed

Adult: If the missing person is an adult and not vulnerable in any way then their location can be entered on the Merlin Dets screen; however it must be made clear that this information is not to be revealed to the informant - The **right to a private life** under ECHR remains pertinent in such cases. Only in circumstances justified by the BCU Public Protection DCI may disclosure be considered.

If there is any reason to suspect that the reluctance for the subject to have their location disclosed is due to **domestic abuse or honour based violence** then a restricted CRIS report, with appropriate flags, must be raised and the location recorded on CRIS, not on Merlin.

Child: If the missing person is a child then a number of questions must be answered before a decision is made as to whether to let the informant (their parents, guardians or carers) know where they are.

The following factors must be considered:

- How old is the child?
- What is the outcome of research on the child and their family?
- What type of situation have they gone missing from?
- What situation are they currently in?
- Does the child have the maturity and mental competency to make a decision?

The occasions when a decision will be made not to tell parents/guardians of the child's location will be very rare. If they are under 16 years then this decision must be made in conjunction with children's services.

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If the child is aged 16-18yrs and not vulnerable but there is still involvement with children's services then the two primary questions to be answered must be:

- What has the person run away from?
- What type of situation do they find themselves in now?

All decisions and rationale must be recorded on the Merlin Dets screen or on a restricted CRIS. The final decision regarding whether to tell the informant of the missing person's location rests with the BCU Public Protection DCI.

Pre-Assessment Checklist (PAC)

The PAC is the method for recording incidents where a child comes to the notice of police and there are concerns about their wellbeing or safety. The PAC will be assessed by the local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) and graded Red, Amber or Green according to identified risk and safeguarding needs. The PAC is shared with appropriate partner agencies, including Local Authority Social Services and Children's Services.

Completion of a PAC is mandatory in all missing children cases.

Adult Come to Notice (ACN)

The ACN is the method for recording incidents where a vulnerable adult, at a risk of harm to themselves or others, comes to the notice of police. Consider factors such as physical health, mental health or risk of exploitation/abuse.

Not all adult missing persons investigations will necessitate the creation of an ACN.

Closing the Merlin

The result of every Prevention Interview needs to be reflected fully in the Merlin report before it can be closed and put away.

Cancel the missing person on PNC via Merlin on every occasion.

Do NOT alter the risk grade at closure. For example, locating a high risk missing person is not rationale for downgrading the incident to low risk.

At the completion of any Missing Person investigation any documents / other material must be retained. Search 'records management policy' on the Intranet for further guidance.

Other circumstances in which a Merlin can be closed

An investigation must never be closed on the Merlin system until the missing person is located, except in the following circumstances:

- It is determined, through investigation, that the incident was inappropriately reported to police or that a police response is otherwise not required – this will generally not occur beyond the initial response (i.e. during the pre-48 hours process).
- A person has been reported missing and their true identity is not known, giving no hope to that individual being traced or matched to a located person or human remains.
- In exceptional circumstances, a Senior Investigating Officer (Chief Inspector or above) may decide to close an investigation without the subject being located, but **not before all investigative leads have been pursued to a satisfactory conclusion**. It should be carefully considered that once reports are cancelled, they are no longer included when descriptive cross-match searches are run on Merlin to try and identify found persons and bodies. Premature cancellation of a missing person incident may result in a link to an unidentified person or body incident (of which there are many notified to the Met each year) being missed. A delay in identifying a found person or body and informing next-of-kin (where they had been reported missing) may lead to criticism of the Met. In the case of suspicious deaths, a delay in identifying a body may also hamper the tracing and arresting of a suspect.

The age of a case is not sufficient reason in itself to justify cancellation of a report.

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