

Absconders and Children Missing from Education or Home

Date written /reviewed:	25 th June 2026 (reviewed)	
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Board approval:	Date:	22 nd May 2023
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	Position:	Trustee
Review due by:	13 th May 2027	
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Substantive changes since last review:	Updated references to the latest version of guidance in use	

Absconders and Children Missing from Education or Home

Written to comply with DfE statutory guidance – Keeping Children Safe in Education (latest version in force).

Introduction

When a child is referred to Acorn, staff should ensure that more than one emergency contact number for each young person is obtained. This goes beyond the legal minimum and is good practice to give the centre additional options to make contact with a responsible adult when a child that is missing education is also identified as a welfare and/or safeguarding concern.

This policy is written in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education (latest version in force) and Working Together to Safeguard Children (latest version), alongside local safeguarding partnership procedures.

Absconders

Staff should consider that whenever a young person absconds, their welfare and safety is placed at an increased risk. Where a young person absconds on repeat occasions, this could be a potential indicator of an underlying safeguarding issue. Absconding refers to the young person leaving the site where the Acorn centre is. This may look slightly different at different centres due to the local arrangements and setting.

All instances of absconding from the site must be recorded under 'behaviour' on CPOMs. Staff should also raise a concern on the system which will be monitored. If staff suspect that there may be associated underlying safeguarding issues, the concern should be elevated to a 'safeguarding' concern as action may need to be taken to help identify the risk of abuse and neglect, including exploitation and serious violence. All safeguarding concerns must be logged on CPOMs under the appropriate categories.

Where such concerns exist, staff should follow guidance and reporting procedures outlined in the Child Protection Policy.

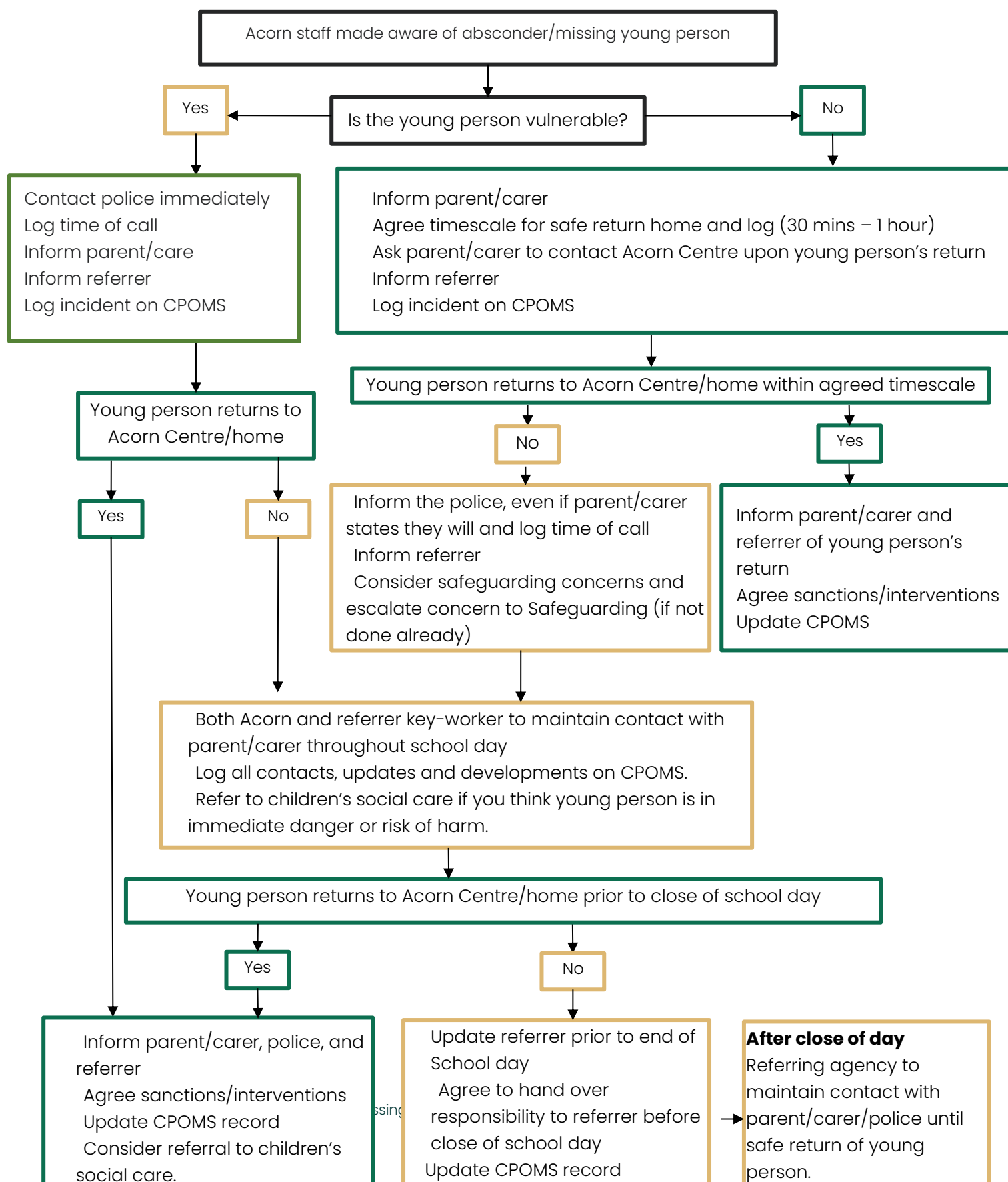
If a student leaves an Acorn Centre without permission, or you discover that they are missing from the premises, you must follow the procedure set out in the flow chart below.

Staff should always liaise with the centre-based DSL or the Acorn Safeguarding Lead on whether there are additional concerns – is a referral to social care needed? Is further support needed (e.g. an early help plan)? In addition, staff should consider what further actions are needed (i.e. sanctions for behaviour that triggered absconding (but not the absconding itself), further support for dealing with anger/anxiety/conflict etc.).

Please note, if a student meets any of the following criteria, we would define them as **'vulnerable'** and the police must be informed.

1. They are a 'Looked after' child
2. There are known safeguarding concerns with this young person
3. They do not go missing normally
4. They have special educational needs or a disability e.g. learning difficulties, asd etc.
5. If the circumstances are totally out of character or the young person is in extreme distress etc.

Absconder Flowchart



Children missing from Education

All children, regardless of their age, ability, aptitude, and any special education needs they may have are entitled to a full-time education. Acorn recognises that a child missing education is a potential indicator of abuse or neglect (e.g. CSE, Forced Marriage, Serious Violence) and will follow the school procedures for unauthorised absence, including reporting the absence to the referring school or agency. Parents/carers should always inform us of the reason for any absence. Even when a reason has been given for absence, staff may still need to exercise a level of professional curiosity in order to be fully satisfied that the reason given is valid.

Schools have a mandatory duty to inform the local authority of any student who fails to attend school regularly or has been absent without school permission for a continuous period of 10 days or more. The Acorn Centre must liaise with the referring school/agency to ensure that this takes place, or in the case of a child being solely on role at Acorn, the Centre must take the necessary action to inform the LA.

The DfE published statutory guidance for local authorities (latest version in force)¹ should also be followed.

Children missing from Home or Care

Children may run away from a problem, such as abuse or neglect at home, or to somewhere they want to be. They may have been coerced to run away by someone else. Whatever the reason, it is thought that approximately 25 percent of children and young people that go missing are at risk of serious harm. There are particular concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual exploitation. Missing children may also be vulnerable to other forms of exploitation, to serious violence, gang exploitation, or to drug and alcohol misuse.

Looked after children missing from their placements are particularly vulnerable.

The DfE statutory guidance for local authorities and professionals on 'children going missing from home or care' (latest version in force)² sets out the steps local authorities and their partners should take to prevent children from going missing and to protect them when they do.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care>