

ABSCONDERS POLICY

REFERENCE:

OWNERSHIP: The Patch Project

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REVIEW: Oct 2027

Written to comply with DfE statutory guidance – Keeping children safe in education, September 2024.

Introduction

When a child is referred to The PatchProject, 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.

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.

All instances of absconding from the site must be recorded on behaviour and safeguarding record systems. Staff should raise a concern on the system which will be monitored. If staff suspect that there may be associated underlying safeguarding issues 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 the safeguarding record system 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 The Patch Project without permission, or you discover that they are missing from the premises, you must follow the procedure set out in the flow chart below.

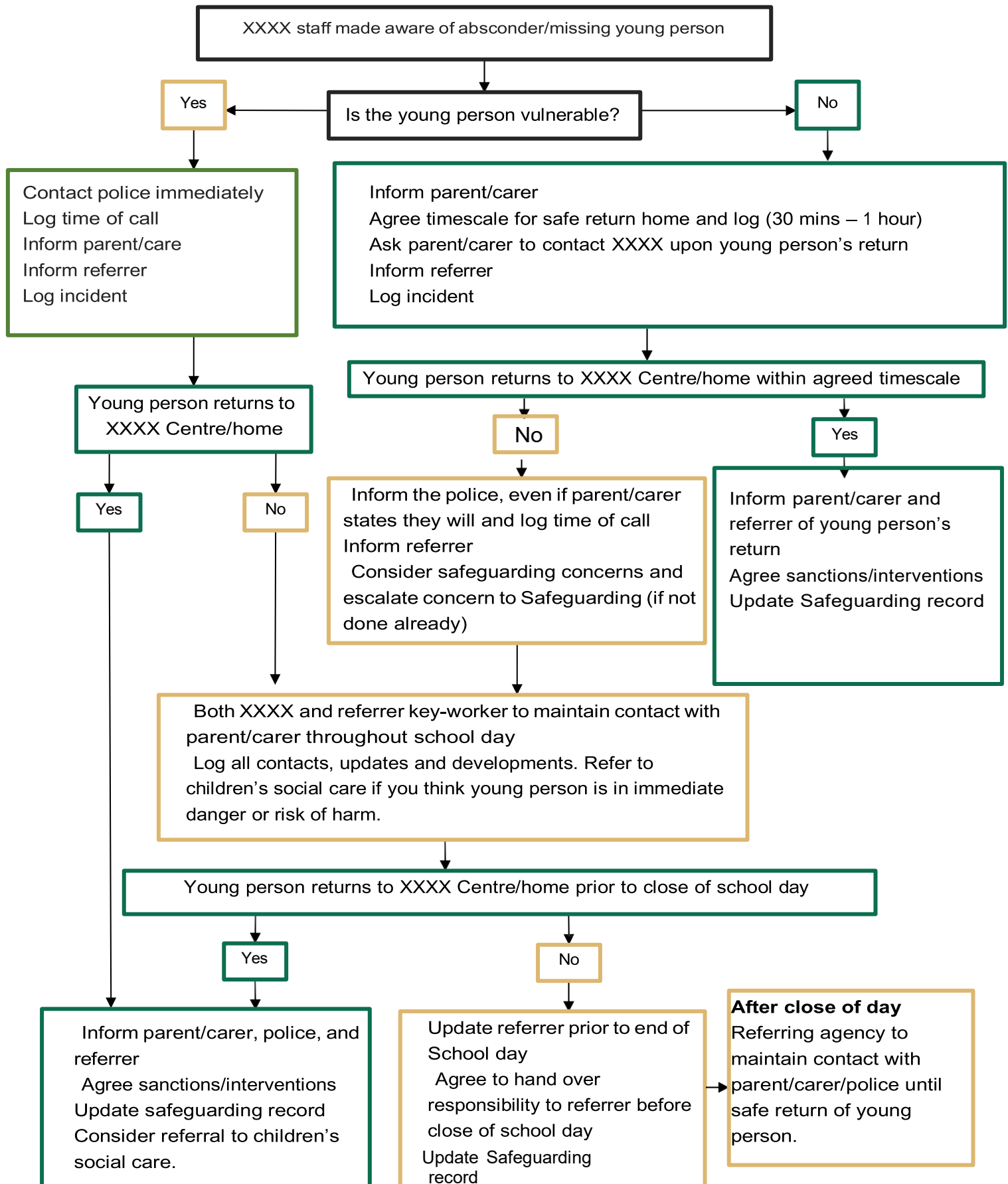
Staff should always liaise with the centre-based DSL or the DDSL on

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.

- They are a 'Looked after' child
- There are known safeguarding concerns with this young person
- They do not go missing normally
- They have special educational needs or a disability e.g. learning difficulties, autistic etc.
- 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. The Patch Project 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 Patch Project must liaise with the referring school/agency to ensure that this takes place.

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 has published statutory guidance for local authorities and professionals on 'children going missing from home or care'¹. The guidance 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-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care>

VERSION CONTROL

| Version | Date | Change Summary | Author/Reviewer | Approved by: |
|---------|----------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1 | OCT 2025 | Initial | Hazel Goodier | Tbc |

