

# missing people

Registered charity in England and Wales (1020419)  
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**A lifeline when someone disappears**

**Don't make  
me feel guilty  
or punish me,  
going missing  
might be how  
I cope when  
I can't ask  
for help**

**Children's views on being  
reported missing from care**

**April 2021**

# Introduction

Children who are looked after in the care system are disproportionately likely to go missing. One in every ten looked after children will go missing compared to an estimated one in every two hundred children generally.<sup>1</sup> They are also much more likely to be reported missing on multiple occasions: in 2020, over 12,000 children who were looked after went missing in over 81,000 missing incidents. Nearly 65% of missing looked after children were reported missing more than once in 2020.

Going missing can be a warning sign of a range of serious harms including sexual and criminal exploitation; bullying; mental health issues; and unhappiness in the home. Looked after children may also go missing because they want to spend time with family or in their home area if they have been moved away to a placement.

Evidence suggests that looked after children can be at increased risk of many of the harms known to be linked with going missing. It is therefore important that professionals and carers responsible for a child's care prioritise the response to missing and know how and when to report an incident to the police.

However, there are also risks to reporting a child to the police as missing inappropriately. Research<sup>2</sup> has shown that over-involving the police in a child's life, including by reporting them missing unnecessarily, can cause significant harm and can damage the child's relationships with the professionals around them.

Good practice guidance is needed to help inform professional actions when a child is missing. All agencies who have a role in children's care, including carers, residential staff, social workers and the police should be working together in the best interests of every child. It is important that the voices and views of care-experienced young people themselves are heard in developing this guidance.

We should always centre the voices of those affected by any professional practice. Young people should have a say in the support that is provided to them and the response they receive from those in place to care for them.

This report is a summary of a consultation with children and young people in the care of a local authority conducted in early 2021.



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1 Department for Education, Children looked after in England including adoptions, 19 February 2021: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2020>  
2 <https://howardleague.org/publications/ending-the-criminalisation-of-children-in-residential-care/>

# Methodology summary



The consultation took place via a mixture of depth interviews, paired depth interviews and small discussion groups with children and young people in the care of a local authority.

Missing People provided a topic guide and brief guidance on recruiting participants and conducting the consultation, and the consultations were then conducted by professionals the young people were already engaged with. For a full description of the methodology and any limitations, please see Appendix A at the end of this report.

The consultations took place over 11 sessions involving 27 children. All of the children and young people who took part had been missing themselves in the past, with most having multiple missing episodes. The majority are living in residential care, but others were in foster care, in the care of a grandparent, or in a semi-independent living setting. All except three were female. The table in Appendix B summarises the demographic profile and experience of missing of the participants in more detail.

## Key Findings: What do children want?

- The young people we consulted want carers, social workers, and the police to avoid making assumptions about them and why they might have gone missing. These professionals should try to understand their reasons, acknowledging that every child is different and will be facing different challenges.
- It is not inevitable that young people will go missing. Carers should genuinely attempt to mitigate any issues that may cause a young person to go missing. This should include building positive relationships with the young people in their care and getting to know them. This can also help to inform decision making if the child is not where they are supposed to be.
- Young people do not want the police to automatically be contacted if they are not where they are supposed to be. They want decisions around contacting the police to be made based on their own unique situation, including any risks and the circumstances at that time. The police should not be contacted as a disciplinary measure. However, it is vital that they are contacted when a child is at risk of coming to harm.
- When the police do have contact with a missing young person, they should act supportively and respectfully towards them.
- Professionals should try to understand the unique challenges facing looked after children, including the conflict in wanting to be treated like other children but also needing their often complicated circumstances to be taken into account.



## Findings: What young people told us

The first two questions introduced the discussion around missing by asking the young people to consider why children go missing, and what they would do for a friend who was thinking about running away.

### ‘Why do you think young people might go missing?’



The young people spoke about a range of push and pull factors that might cause people to go missing. Their responses reflect the complexity of reasons for going missing and acknowledge many of the risk factors that we know to be true for all missing children. However, the responses also emphasised the unique experiences of looked after children. Many spoke about the challenges facing young people in placements where they don't feel happy, in missing a family they no longer live with, or in the rules that they felt other children don't live under.

#### Push factors

- **Unhappiness with care placements**

*“Living in care isn't the same, people are paid to care for you, you don't get the same affection as with a family, its lonely.”*

*“Problems at home, issues with other young people, not liking staff... You don't want be at the placement as it doesn't feel like home.”*

- **Issues with the boundaries or rules set by placements:**

*“Cos you're not allowed to stay out. You want to be spontaneous, it takes too long for placement to sort out permission to stay out, social workers don't answer their phones or make decisions quick enough. Once you're out you don't bother answering your phone or going home cos you know you've been reported missing so you might as well stay out, the outcome will be the same if it's that night or the morning, the police are gonna pick you up.”*

- **Wanting time to themselves or becoming more independent**

*“To have some freedom... to force yourself to grow up quicker.”*

*“because it's so stressful so they want to be alone and clear head and be out”*

- **Escaping unsafe home environments**

*“Because you don't feel safe at home”*

*“Families may not be supportive, may be addicts or cannot look after us”*

## **Pull factors**

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- **Seeing family and friends**

*“The reason I go missing is to see my family and friends, to see my mates and smoke weed”*

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- **Seeing friends without the restrictions associated with being in care**

*“He feels that young people go missing because they want to stay out with their friends and they are not ready to go home. They want to have a drink and don’t want to go home drunk. Sometimes they just want to stay over a friend’s house and staff haven’t seen the home and this is embarrassing to them because he doesn’t think it is normal for staff to have to go to the home and speak to parents to see if they are ok. Staff should just trust the young people sometimes. Also some of their friends may not know they are in care and they don’t want people to know.”*

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- **Exploitation:**

*“May be being exploited. Could be in gangs and are being forced to run away or be involved in county lines.”*

- **Drug or alcohol abuse:**

*“To get high, to forget about everything, to escape their life... If you have a family that love you its different, but in care they don’t love you. That’s why we do drugs, its another way to escape.”*

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It was clear from the responses that the young people felt going missing could be a warning sign of serious harm, but that on other occasions they might just be socialising with friends. There was some feeling that looked after children were treated differently and were less likely to be given leeway than their peers if they did decide to stay out too late with their friends.

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## **‘What would you do if you knew that one of your friends was thinking about going missing or running away?’**



The young people expressed the desire to help and protect their friends if they were thinking about going missing. This desire came through in different ways.

Some said they would advise them not to go and offer to talk it through:

*“I would try to help them”*

*“Try and find a way for them not to go”*

*“I’d tell them to talk to someone or at least stay in touch”*

*“Tell them to come to mine, give them somewhere safe to go.”*

Some of the young people also spoke about it being their friend’s choice if they did go:

*“If your friend is going missing and it is in their mindset, they are going to go no matter what you say, even if you are trying to help them, they will still run away”*

*“It’s up to them it’s their choice.”*

A few of the young people said that they would go with their friend as this would better ensure their safety, despite the risks to them:

*“I would stay with them, comfort them the best I could then I would message parents and say I’m staying with her and tell them we were going.”*

*“if you have to, go with them to make sure they are ok, although its best not to go cos of all the stuff afterwards, with police, placement and risks.”*

Some of the young people were clear that they would not want to tell an adult what was happening as this would betray their friend’s trust:

*“I wouldn’t rat them in I’d just make sure they were safe and well”*

However, a few young people did suggest that if there was serious risk they would speak to an adult:

*“If I thought they were at risk I would tell someone”*

*“[Child] said that he wouldn’t speak to their Carers or family because they are friends and they trust each other... [child] said that if they were in trouble or if something more serious was going on then he would contact their Carers so that he could get them help so that they were safe.”*

The responses show that the young people acknowledged the need to provide help and support to their peers if they wanted to run away. They would offer this themselves if necessary although some spoke about the need for the other young person to speak to ‘someone’ possibly suggesting that professional support would be helpful. The response and whether they would be happy to escalate any concerns to an adult seems to be based on the level of risk they thought their friend was facing.

# SCENARIOS

For the next set of questions we gave the young people three scenarios:

## SCENARIO ONE

**Leonie:** A 15-year-old girl who was struggling with her mental health and was not back by her curfew.

## SCENARIO TWO

**James:** A 17-year-old boy who had been missing before and was spending time with older people who may be involved with drugs.

## SCENARIO THREE

**Laura:** A 16-year-old girl who left her care home after an argument shortly before curfew.

We asked the same questions for each to understand what the young people thought should happen and what any concerns might be.

## ‘Would you be worried about them? When do you think their carer should start to worry?’



There were mixed views in response to this question. Some young people spoke about the risks the scenarios suggested and the need for immediate concern, whereas others emphasised the need to give young people space and that carers should not always jump to the worst conclusions. Where the young people gave specific times for when to worry there was significant variation.

Most of the young people identified that risks like existing mental health issues should increase the level of concern:

*“Yes of course [carer should worry as] Leonie has mental health problems. Her carer is there all the time and should be worried all the time and be there to help her. She knows she has mental health problems so should take extra care of her.”*

This was also recognised where the young person was at risk of criminal exploitation:

*“[Carer should be worried] because he is high risk, he is mixing with older people and drugs, he won’t recognise it until he gets dragged into it, he needs help to get away from that situation.”*

*“[Carer should worry as] he might not know how to deal with it. They should worry after the first time he was gone for 2 days.”*

Where there was thought to be very little risk, including going missing after an argument, the young people were more likely to suggest that the person just needed some time and that concerns should not be raised too quickly:

*“No, she just needs to get out, everyone feels like that at some point. Living in care makes things so much bigger, you can’t just lose it without people making it into a big deal.”*

*“Give her some space and time but be worried without smothering her.”*

Broadly speaking the responses suggest that the young people felt that the carer should be balanced in their response. They should care and be concerned for the young person, making their decisions based on their knowledge of the young person as an individual and the risk they are facing. But that there should not be an over-reaction to the situation – in particular an immediate report to the police – as the young person should be given a chance to return.

*“They should be worried about her all the time if she has poor mental health, but that doesn’t mean they should panic.”*

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## **‘What do you think their carer should do first?’**



The young people suggested a number of actions that carers should take. These were fairly similar across the different scenarios although with some elements tailored depending on the circumstances and perceived risk level:

### **Contact the missing young person (phone, text or use social media)**

Young people said they thought the carer should try to contact the missing person, but there was variation about how. Some young people said phone would be best, but others said texting or using social media would be better.

*“Call her to see if she is ok, don’t have a go at her... Find out who she is with, what she is feeling.”*

*“Give him a bell to see if he’s ok and text him and stuff. I always text to say I’m safe and well to let you know I’m ok when I’m missing.”*

*“Texting instead of phoning all the time, especially if I had no credit on my phone.... (House iPad could make a blank Facebook (private) means that he could get in touch with staff at the home via the internet if he uses WIFI) This way I could arrange what I was doing and then staff would not need to contact my friends.”*

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### **Contact the young person’s friends**

*“Ring her friends and her friends’ parents to see where they were.”*

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### **Contact the young person’s family (if they have a good relationship with them)**

*“I think that staff should call her parents if they have a good relationship because they may be able to contact [the missing child] and persuade her to go back to the home. Staff should wait for her mum to call back and say if she has got in touch with Laura first before calling the police.”*

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### **Go out looking for the young person**

*“Go look around the area first and then call the police if there is no sign.”*



*“I think that two staff should go out looking for her after the police had been called to help the police to look for her. If any of the other kids at the home knew where she liked to go then they should go with the staff to help them to find her as they could have a better chance.”*

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Some young people said that if they leave from the care setting follow them but do this carefully and give them space

*“Follow her at a distance, when she cools off try to speak with her. She probably won’t like being followed, it can take some time to understand that they are doing it to keep you safe.”*

*“I think that staff should follow her and try to get her to go for a drive, maybe a McDonalds for an ice cream so they can talk through what is wrong... I think the staff with the best relationship should do this as she may listen better to them.”*

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Other young people specifically said not to follow a child who has left

*“Leave her alone, don’t follow her, that makes me more angry, she will probably come back... .. She needs space not everyone getting involved.”*

*“Leave her, she obviously needs time and annoying her isn’t going to help.”*

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## **What the carers should think about when deciding what to do**

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A few of the young people emphasised the importance of being sensitive in both contacting the young person themselves, and in any contact with their friends or friends’ families.

When contacting the young person carers need to ensure that they do not feel pressured or blamed, and when contacting their friends they should allow the missing child some privacy and not single them out for being in care.

*“Try to talk to him, explain you are worried and that will need to call the police, let him know what they plan to do. If you can’t speak to him, text, don’t threaten with the police, but let him know what you need to do.”*

*“Maybe [contact] friends as it’s her mental health and she could be at risk of hurting herself. But don’t tell people everything, she needs privacy too.”*

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There was also a feeling that carers need to get to know the children in their care so that they could best support them and as a result know the most appropriate response if they were away:

*“They need to get to know him and his friends so they can call them if they are worried.”*

*“They should sit him down and talk to him about what’s going on, try to see it from his point of view.”*

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Despite suggesting these range of actions, some of the young people were clear that carers should not act immediately unless the risk made it necessary, and if possible they should give the missing child time and space before becoming too insistent in efforts to contact them.

## ‘Do you think they should be reported missing to the police? Why or why not?’



The young people’s responses to this question varied between the different scenarios although there were some general themes across all three.

Where there were thought to be risks for the young person in the scenario, most of the young people we consulted with spoke about the need to report this to the police, although there were varying opinions about how quickly this should happen.

### **Mental health concerns**

In response to the first scenario, which focussed on a girl struggling with her mental health, some of the young people spoke about the need to report immediately to the police because of the risks, because they would be more likely to find her than others, and because they would be the best placed professionals to respond.

*“[The police] need to know straight away cos of her mental health”*

*“It’s best if the police approach young people as family/carers can have an emotional attachment which can make it difficult for them to see them when they are in that state, they can feel angry towards to them or feel guilty or ashamed.”*

In fact almost all the young people thought that the police needed to be contacted, although some suggested this should not be done straight away.

*“Give her time to come back before you call the police... [but] probably [need to involve police] because of her mental health, she’s vulnerable, she could be taken advantage of. She’s probably at risk cos of how she feels.”*

A few of the young people specified that the police should be contacted if the carers attempts to contact the girl failed.

*“She should phone the police if she gets no response [from phone call to Leonie] straight away.”*

Only one young person suggested that involving the police might not be helpful:

*“They need to think how she is feeling though, police might make her feel worse.”*

## Potential exploitation

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The second scenario, which spoke about a 17 year old boy spending time with older friends who may be involved with drugs, elicited even more responses suggesting the police be contacted.

Some of the young people felt this should be considered urgent because of the risks associated with drugs:

*“[Need to report missing to police because] he is hanging around with people that might be unsafe, he might be trying drugs, he could have a reaction, or being exploited, his previous missing for 2 days is worrying, something isn’t right for him.”*

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Others felt that the police did need to be involved but that the carer should wait for a short period or base their decision on the risk of the situation:

*“Staff should not phone the police straight away but if he is still missing by his curfew then phone the police.”*

*“if staff have not had any contact with him all day.... I would ring before the curfew depending on the area you think that he is in.”*

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A small number of young people said that the police should not be involved, even when the young person may be at risk:

*“It’s hard cos when the police are involved you just want them to leave you alone, it can put you at more risk.”*

*“Only when [the carers] haven’t been able to speak to him or his friends don’t know where he is, they could call the next day cos police won’t bother look for you till you have been gone for 24 hrs.”*

*“Police might make things difficult for him”*

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## Leaving following an argument

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Where the young person had left following an argument, the young people we consulted were less likely to suggest involving the police, and where they said they should be called this was felt to not be needed immediately.

However, two young people felt the police should be called straight away:

*“Laura could get on a train and go anywhere and then we might not be able to find her.”*

*“It is dangerous to be out and she is only young. [Need to involve police] in case she’s in danger and cannot fend for herself!”*

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## Summary of scenarios



The young people identified risks within each of the scenarios and clearly felt action needed to be taken to make each of the missing children safe. Many of the young people did acknowledge that involving the police would be vital to making the young person safer, although there were varied attitudes to when it was appropriate to contact them. Ultimately the police were seen as a key agency that can save people from serious harm. However, there were also a number of suggestions about what carers could do first and the need to understand the context and the missing child's history.

## The young people's experiences of missing



The next set of questions asked the young people more specifically about their personal experiences and attitudes towards the professional response, in particular their feelings about the police.

In general, the young people's responses suggested that contacting the police is a moment of escalation and therefore it is important to use other options to contact the missing child or facilitate their return first, unless the circumstances suggest there is an immediate risk.

The young people felt that being in care made it more likely that the police would be contacted and at an earlier stage, which was a source of some frustration.

Some of the young people did recognise that police involvement is appropriate and necessary but emphasised that the police need to act sensitively and kindly with understanding of the challenges that the missing young person might be facing.

Many spoke about the negatives of any police involvement as well and there was generally a strongly negative reaction in most cases when we directly asked how the young people would feel if being looked for by the police themselves.



**The young people felt that being in care made it more likely that the police would be contacted and at an earlier stage, which was a source of some frustration.**

## 'When do you think the police should be involved when a young person is missing or away from home?'



Only a few of the young people answered this question. Amongst those who did some suggested that it should be a risk-based decision:

*"Depends on their history, if they are at risk then straight away"*

*"You got to just text them or ring them. If they are f\*\*ked up, like with Mental Health or stuff, or they say they are going to kill themselves then you got to report them straight away. If they are just chillin then wait till they should be back before ringing the police. You got to anyway."*

One young person felt that carers should contact the police straight away:

*“When they are not back at the flat when they are supposed to be. You have to call the police as it’s your job if we are not back on time”*

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Another felt that there should be short delay to allow the child some space but that, again, it depended on the risk:

*“I say depending how bad the scenario is 10 mins or 20, let them cool”*

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## **‘How would you feel if the police were looking for you if you had been reported missing? Would it make you feel safer?’**



This question elicited some negative responses including some obvious frustration in the circumstances when the police have been called in the young people’s personal experience. However, there were also some suggestions about when police involvement is positive and necessary.

It is clear from the young people’s responses that their attitude to police involvement was dependent on how the police act towards them, with a need for more understanding from officers when they do attend.

### **Negative impacts**

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- **How it makes the young person feel**

The young people who spoke about the negative impacts gave a range of reasons including the police being forceful when they are found; feeling carers have betrayed them by contacting the police; and feeling embarrassed at the police attending when they’re just at a friend’s house:

*“I would feel betrayed by my carers”*

*“It looks really bad when you’re at a friend’s and the police come, how is that normal?”*

*“I am just having a good time with my friends and then they ask my friends if they have seen me, it is embarrassing”*

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- **Police attitude**

Some responses mentioned the police’s attitude or actions when they engage with young people being vital to how young people feel about their involvement:

*“When they do the welfare check I feel like I’m being interrogated, they just stand in the kitchen with everyone around and make you feel uncomfortable.”*

*“Sometimes, it depends on your experience with the police. Police need to think about they approach young people, it makes a huge difference to how we react. If you’re wound up like Laura you might just need to talk to someone and not made to feel like a criminal, you are unhappy for a reason.”*

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For some young people, a poor response from the police, including in past experiences, can actually drive them to situations of increased risk:

*“It creeps me out, as soon as I see a cop car, I leg it, it makes me paranoid, feel less safe as I have to hide. If they used unmarked cars that would be better. When they find us don’t drag us or get angry or restrain us, that doesn’t make us feel safe.”*

*“The police make you more paranoid, they can make the situation worse, by contacting friends and then they get into trouble with their parents. It may make you put yourself in more risky situations by trying to get away from the police.”*

## Positive impacts

- **Feeling cared for:**

*“Yeah it would make me feel like my carers cared.”*

- **Police were felt to be independent from the care setting:**

*“I would rather be picked up by the police, if I’m pissed off with the staff at the care home, the police are different, they are separate from the issues.”*

## ‘What should happen before the police are called?’



The young people’s responses to this question again highlighted the perceived difference in how looked-after children are treated differently from their peers who live with their families.

They spoke about the need for carers to know the young people in their care well so they can understand what may be happening for them and to make sensitive attempts to contact or find them before calling the police.

*“All need different responses. Depends on the person, what was happening before they went missing, were they having a breakdown, did they plan it?”*

*“Calling police is not giving young people a chance to cool off. Keep lines of communication open and do best to find them yourself and then call the police.”*

*“Try to speak with them or friends, don’t make it a big issue.”*

*“Think about why they have gone”*

However, one young person did highlight that their carer might not be best placed to make contact if the young person left because of frustrations with the placement:

*“Be aware young person may not want to see you and could trigger them to go further, so police may be a better option. If I run away from a placement, I probably don’t want that carer coming to get me, they could be the reason I ran.”*

## ‘What are the things going on in someone’s life that might mean it is more important to report them missing to the police if no one knows where they are?’



In response to this question the young people mentioned a range of factors which could mean that a young person is at higher risk and therefore when the police will need to be contacted sooner:

- Mental health issues
- Drug or alcohol usage
- Exploitation risk
- If going missing is out of character
- Risk of self-harm
- Risk of suicide

*“If they struggle with mental health [or are] depressed, they need help.”*

*“They could be involved with drugs... They might be drunk or taking drugs, and not want to go home looking off their face or drunk. They could be selling drugs and might have to owe money to a drug dealer. Parents finding about their behavior might make things worse. They might get a battering because of what they are involved in.”*

*“If they might hurt themselves, if they don’t care about hurting themselves or what people do to them. I don’t really care what happens to me, I’m gonna come back to a shit care home. If you have a family that love you its different, but in care they don’t love you.”*

One young person highlighted that the child themselves and the context surrounding them should inform what action should be taken:

*“It depends on the kid as to when the police should be called. Every kid is different.”*

**This final point highlights the challenges in getting the response right. There is no simple answer as to when the police should be contacted. To best address this we need all professionals in a child’s life to know them well and to understand the risks they might be facing.**

## Young people's messages for the professionals deciding the response

The final questions focused on what the young people thought the priorities should be for the professionals around a child if they don't know where they are.

### **'If you had to write instructions or advice for your carers on what to do if they didn't know where you were, what would you say?'**



The young people spoke about a range of practical steps that carers can be encouraged to take, but also talked more broadly about the need for supportive, non-judgmental responses.

The need to give young people space or time was again mentioned:

*"Be aware that I need privacy, tell me if you are going in my room, going to call police, give me a chance."*

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There were also further comments about the unique challenges of being in care and the response for them being different than for other children:

*"Remember being in care isn't like being a normal teenager, so don't expect us to be normal. Try and understand our reasons, sometimes you need to leave us alone, you need to listen to what we say when we aren't happy and don't blame us for not being able to cope. Don't threaten my placement because I go missing."*

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Some of the young people spoke about carers needing to recognise that children may go missing to try and cope with the challenges they're facing:

*"Don't make me feel guilty or punish me, going missing might be how I cope when I can't ask for help."*

*"Try to talk to me, don't have a go, check I am ok, tell me its ok."*

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Given that missing may be a red flag for a child needing help, some young people spoke about the need for carers to offer support and understanding if a child goes missing rather than reacting negatively:

*"Carers are supposed to help us but it feels like it's about controlling what we do."*

*"Don't blame me for everything, try to understand why I went. Let me feel I can come back, and you want me back."*

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They also spoke about the need for carers to get to know the young person in their care and their friends:

*"Be involved in a child's life, if you don't know them you won't know if they are going through something. They can't always tell you, you need to know them."*

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Finally, two of the young people spoke about how children can be prevented from going missing in the first place:

- **Ensure rules and restrictions are reasonable:**

*“Don’t make rules they can’t keep too, curfews too early, rules too strict, can’t see friends, have them over etc. In semi [Semi independent living] we are supposed to look after ourselves, be independent, but we can’t make our own decisions about who comes and stays and how long we go out, how does that make sense?”*

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- **Ensure the young person feels cared for and happy in their placement**

*“When you aren’t in a family home it’s not the same, you don’t wanna go back to a care home. Think about how to make them feel important, to feel at home [while in care]. When young people are settled they will want to come home.”*

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## **‘What one thing do you think Missing People should think about when helping to write the guidance for carers about when to report a child or young person missing?’**



This final question elicited some powerful responses from the young people. They spoke about the need for support and understanding; the importance of thinking about the child’s individual needs and situation; and emphasised how young people in care are treated differently from other children.

The following quotes give important insight for the professionals working with young people:

*“Try to really understand why people go missing don’t just focus on what we did, ask carers what they are doing.”*

*“If staff and police are rude they can’t expect you to respect them, police need to give us a chance.”*

*“Everyone is different so don’t treat us all the same, we do things for different reasons, you need to know us.”*

*“Think about what would you do if it was your child, do that.”*

*“Talk to me, get to know me, don’t judge me, understand why I might go missing and help me manage those feelings and situations before it gets out of hand. Young people go missing for a reason, try to understand that. When we go don’t be angry or make us feel bad.”*

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## Appendix A: Methodology

The consultation took place via a mixture of depth interviews, paired depth interviews and small discussion groups with children and young people in the care of the local authority. Missing People provided a topic guide that was used in all of the discussions, as well as brief guidance on recruiting participants and some guidance about conducting this type of qualitative research.

The children and young people who took part were recruited by their carers or other professionals responsible for their care. This meant that participants had an existing relationship with the adult leading the discussion. This approach was taken largely for practical reasons but does offer other potential advantages including the willingness of the children and young people involved to refer to sometimes very sensitive information about their own experiences, which in most cases would have already been known to the interviewer. It also ensured that if any disclosures were made that required safeguarding action, these could be appropriately dealt with. Conversely, the interviewers' lack of independence is also a potential disadvantage, particularly when the participants are talking about their own experience of going and being reported missing and their relationship with carers. There is also a potential impact on recruitment and the children and young people willing to be interviewed by their carer. We are not able to determine the nature or extent of the impact this interviewer-participant relationship had in practice, but the potential influence should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings.

Missing People completed the analysis based on interviewers' records of the discussions. Where possible, interviewers tried to preserve the voice of the child and write the participants' comments in the language they used, but as the discussions were not fully transcribed, there may be some element of paraphrasing or rewording in the quotations. In addition, one of the depth interviews was written up in the third person summarising what the interviewee had said. Finally, it is worth noting that in the paired depths and group discussions, a consensus was presented in most cases, unless there were obviously contrasting views, so it is not possible to identify which young person expressed which view within the group or the extent to which each young person contributed to discussions.

### Profile of participants

The consultation took place over eleven sessions involving 27 children. All of the children and young people who took part had been missing themselves in the past, with most having multiple missing episodes. The majority are living in residential care, but others were in foster care, in the care of a grandparent, or in a semi-independent living setting. All except three were female. The table below summarises the demographic profile and experience of missing of the participants in more detail.

**11 sessions**

**27 children**

**All of them had been missing themselves in the past.**

**The majority are living in residential care.**

## Appendix B: Table detailing the profile of participants

Area	Number of participants	Age	Gender	Experience of missing
Session 1	3	14	Female	One or two missing episodes
		16		Multiple missing episodes
		15		Multiple missing episodes
Session 2	2	15	Female	Multiple missing episodes
		16		
Session 3	2	16	Female	Multiple missing episodes
		16		
Session 4	1	16	Female	Multiple missing episodes
Session 5	4	15	Female	Multiple missing episodes
		18		
		18		
		18		
Session 6	1	13	Female	One or two missing episodes
Session 7	4	15	Female	One or two missing episodes
		17		Multiple missing episodes
		16		Multiple missing episodes
		16		Multiple missing episodes
Session 8	1	17	Male	Multiple missing episodes
Session 9	1	17	Male	Multiple missing episodes
Session 10	6	16	Female	All have been missing <i>(frequency not recorded)</i>
		13		
		15		
		13		
		13		
		15		
Session 11	2	17	Male	Multiple missing episodes
		18	Female	
<b>SUMMARY: 11 sessions</b>	<b>27 participants</b>	<b>Aged 13-18</b>	<b>24 x F 3 x M</b>	<b>All been missing at least once</b>