

# Is there compassion and empathy in our systems in the response to repeat missing incidents?

This was a question we asked ourselves when considering how our systems support parents/carers whose child is going missing repeatedly. In consultation with NWG, practitioners shared gaps and barriers in the response that our safeguarding partnerships are able to provide to parents. In response to this, we collaborated with the office of the NPCC Lead for Missing Persons and the charity Missing People to consider some of those challenges and share what's working well, rooted in practice and informed by the voice of families.

We know that parents/carers, when it's safe to involve them, can be a vital protective factor for children who are repeat missing. They will often know their child best and can be a vital partner: reporting their child missing, providing key information which can help to build the wider picture of risks their child may be facing, and supporting their child on their return. Yet when we spoke with those directly affected by exploitation and those supporting them, parents/carers were often a missing piece of the jigsaw and opportunities to engage were missed which parents told us left them feeling "powerless".

We held a forum inviting colleagues from across all sectors to engage with the issue, hearing from local practice, national leads and critically, the voice of a parent who told us how important it is for professionals to "*be there and work with us together*". This provided a powerful insight into not only the barriers but also how we can make a difference in our response to missing by working together.

Building on the feedback from the forum and speaking to local areas we then developed some key reflective questions for partnerships to support them in their response. These were taken to the National Missing Expert Reference Group for discussion.

We are still on the journey to enhance our response for children and young people who are repeat missing. **By creating a culture where parents/carers are understood as a key partner, and by listening to the voices of families with lived experience, we can develop compassion and empathy in our systems and support better safeguarding outcomes for repeat missing children and young people.**

## Reflective questions



How do we develop a more preventative approach after the first missing episode and ensure that parents/carers are a key partner in the response?



How can we support parents/carers to recognise risk and understand when it is appropriate and necessary to report repeat incidents to the police?



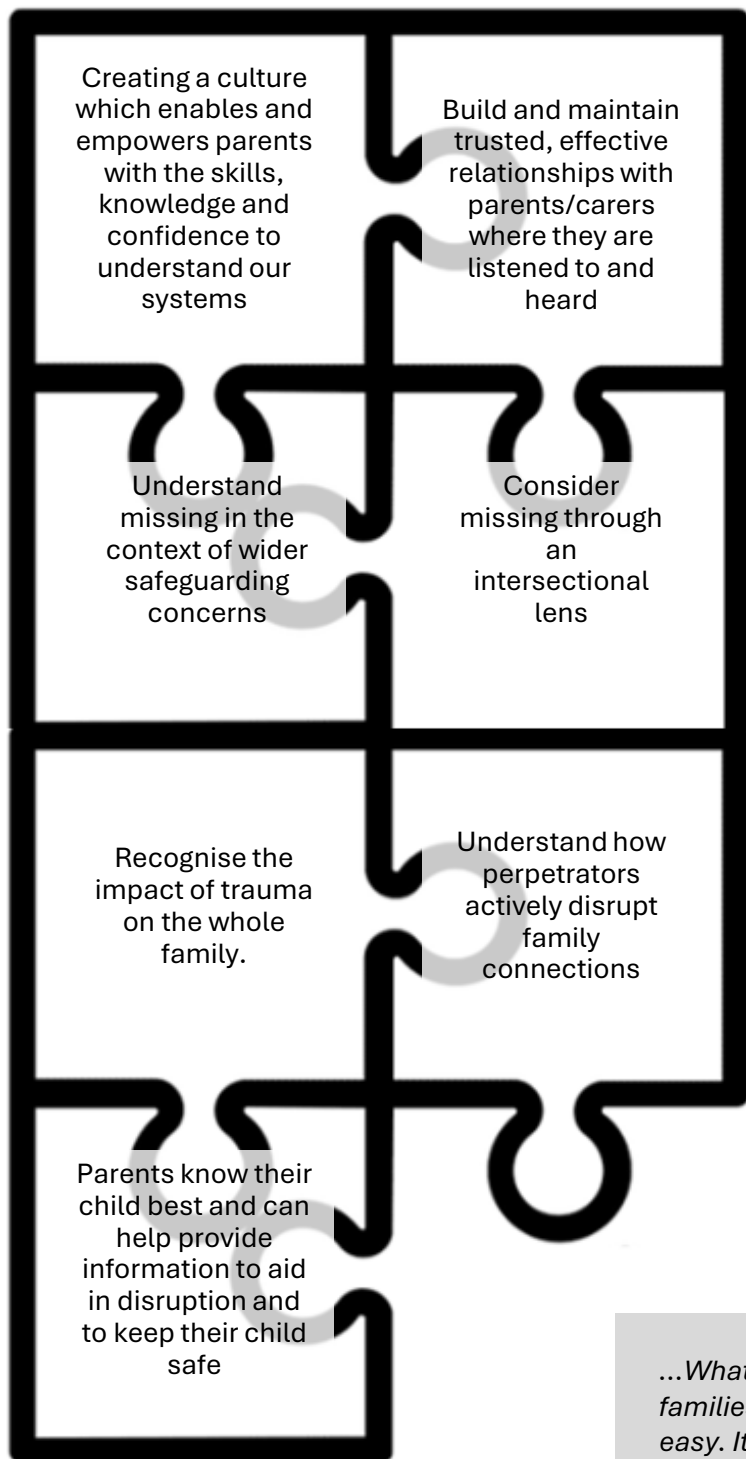
How do we ensure we capture the voice of parents and carers and learn from their lived experience in our collective response to missing?



What are the gaps in training, support and awareness for professionals to enhance how they engage with parents/carers to understand and prevent repeated missing?

# Key Considerations

## Supporting Parents/Carers in the Response to Repeat Missing



**The missing piece of the jigsaw:  
Working with parents/carers as a key partner in the response to missing**

**“** I wanted to talk about was how it feels as a parent to have a child go missing. So to sum it up, it feels absolutely gut-wrenching. You're crippled with fear, anxiety. You feel a mixture of powerless and frustration. We felt a lot of frustration towards the authorities... to be honest, we felt like our voices haven't been heard...

...I've had two nervous breakdowns over the past 18 months, right at the very beginning. It wasn't the way my son was behaving. It was because of the direct way that the authorities were treating us as a family and making everything ten times worse to the point where our son is now totally estranged from us and doesn't want to see us or speak with us...

...What professionals could do better is to work with families when a child goes missing? So it's really, really easy. It's really, really simple. They just need to be consistent, which is something that we have found that they aren't. They need to listen to the parents of exploited children and young people. They need to follow up evidence that families are giving them. And yeah, really just be there and work with us together because that is obviously how you are going to best serve that young person because it's a holistic approach that is required and with all professionals working together with the family to actually help get that child or young person out of exploitation.

**A parent's experience** **”**