

Missing from Home or Care (Under 18 years)

**Practice Guidance for Children's Services
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Contents

	Page
Introduction	3
Definitions	3
When a Child Goes Missing	5
Responsibilities of the parent/carer prior to notifying the police	
Reporting the child missing/absent	
Parent/carer reporting the child as missing	
Professional agencies/community members reporting the child as missing	
Child missing from education	
Looked after child	
Notifications by social worker	
Locating the Missing Child	7
Police Action	
Child unknown/closed case	
Looked after child	
Planning for the child's return	
When a Child is Found/Returns	8
Role of the Police – missing debrief	
Role of the social worker	
Independent return interview	
Looked after child	
Looked after Children placed in Birmingham by another Local Authority who go missing	10
Looked After Children placed by Birmingham in the area of another Local Authority who go missing	10
Recording of Missing Episodes	11
Recording on CareFirst	
Recording of police notifications	
Recording of return interviews	
Missing Child Flowchart	12
Useful Contacts	13
Tools and Resources	14

Introduction

The purpose of this guidance is to give professionals a clear process and set out what they are required to do when a child or young person goes missing or absent from home or care. It should be read in conjunction with the [statutory guidance](#).

Our collective ambition is to reduce the number of children going missing by responding to young people, listening to those who have gone missing and providing the right support so that they do not go missing in future and are able to keep themselves safe. To achieve this we all need to play our part. Effective prevention strategies, education work and early intervention by local agencies in repeat cases will all help reduce the likelihood of vulnerable children going missing and reduce the number of repeat cases.

This document will define the roles and responsibilities of parents, carers (including kinship carers and foster carers), residential staff, the Police, Children's Social Care Services and other relevant practitioners. It applies to all children that are absent or missing including:

- Looked after children in the care of Birmingham City Council placed within the city;
- Looked after children in the care of Birmingham City Council placed outside the city;
- Looked after children in the care of any other local authority placed within the city;
- Children with disabilities; and
- Children who go missing from their family home.

The same measures are required to protect all children – children who go missing are all vulnerable, whether they are missing from home or from care.

Definitions

Child	Anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means children and young people.
Unauthorised Absence	Where a child's or young person's whereabouts are known or thought to be known but unconfirmed, they are not missing and may instead be considered as absent without authorisation from their placement. However if a risk assessment concludes that the child is at risk of harm, the child should be regarded as missing.
Away from placement without authorisation	A looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.
Child Abduction	Where a child has been unlawfully or forcibly removed from their place of residence, this is a 'crime in action' and should be reported to the police immediately.

Young Runaway	A child who has run away from their home or care placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.
Missing Child	A child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.
Missing from care	A looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts is not known.
Looked After Child (LAC)	A child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
Responsible Local Authority	The local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning.
Host local authority	The local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority's area.
Care leaver	An eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.
Carer	The adult with whom the child usually lives e.g. a parent, foster carer, supported lodgings provider or manager of residential home or semi-independent unit.
Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)	Child sexual exploitation involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or 3 rd party) receive something (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing and/or others performing on them, sexual activities.
Trafficking	Any child transported for exploitative reasons is to be considered to be a trafficking victim. Children may be trafficked both internally within the UK and externally from or to abroad.
MASH	Birmingham Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub.
Forced Marriage	Some young people run away because they are at risk of abuse. Forced marriage in particular can lead young women running away from home.
Children not receiving a suitable education	Children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll, and are not receiving a suitable education otherwise than being in school, for example at home, privately or in alternative provision.

It is important to understand that the police use specific definitions for the terms 'missing', 'absent', 'high risk' and 'medium risk'.

Additional Police Definitions:	
Missing	Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.
Absent	A child or young person that is not at a place where they are expected or required to be. The Police classification of 'missing' or 'absent' will be based on on-going risk assessment. "Absent" is a category for police intelligence and will not trigger a referral to the MASH.
High Risk	A risk that is immediate and there is substantial grounds for believing that the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability; or may have been the victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.
Medium Risk	The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.

When a child goes missing

When a child goes missing, all relevant agency protocols (for example in respect of court action or action to prevent the child leaving or being removed from the UK) remain in force until the child is found.

Some children go missing for short periods and there may be good reason to believe that they are not at risk or have not run away and they may return home quite quickly. In other circumstances the child's whereabouts are known, but this raises, rather than reduces, concern for their welfare – in this situation, if a risk assessment concludes that the child is at risk of harm, the child should be regarded as missing.

Responsibilities of the parent/carer prior to notifying the Police

The child's parent/carer (including residential staff or foster carers) should take all reasonable and practical steps to establish the whereabouts and wellbeing of the child by:

- Considering the likely reason for the absence of the child/young person, and his/her likely intentions;
- Telephoning, sending SMS (text) messages to the child's mobile phone and checking social media sites if accessible;
- Searching the locality;
- Checking places the child/young person may frequent;
- Speaking to friends and family and, if appropriate, community groups;
- If applicable, checking with the school, college, other education provider or work placement;
- If the child is a looked after child –

- Making appropriate enquiries with the child's parents and other relatives;
- Making appropriate enquiries with other residential homes, foster carers, residential schools;
- Making enquiries with other carers and professionals who have been involved with the child;
- Informing the on call manager to agree a plan of action.

Reporting the child missing / absent

Parent / Carer reporting child as missing:

In most cases a parent/carer will report a child missing from home. In these cases the Police should be contacted for assistance and they will make contact with MASH if necessary (See the Definitions above for the Police criteria).

Professional agencies / community members reporting child as missing:

When a missing child comes to the attention of an agency or member of the community and the incident has not been reported to the Police, they will be responsible for contacting the Police in the first instance. The Police will make contact with MASH if necessary.

Child missing from education

When a child goes missing from education, efforts are made by the school, in the first instance, to trace the family's current whereabouts. If the school are unable to ascertain where the pupil is then a referral is made to Left School No Trace (LSNT) Team based within Education. The LSNT Team assist with lateral checks and complete reasonable enquiries to ensure the child is in receipt of a suitable education.

Prior to referral to the LSNT Team the Head Teacher/Proprietor of the school should carry out a risk assessment. If this risk assessment leads to the conclusion that there are concerns for the child's welfare the Head Teacher/Proprietor will make a referral to MASH.

If following reasonable enquiries the child/family cannot be traced the case is discussed at a Local Authority meeting. If there are concerns for the child and/or the child is not found and all enquiries have been exhausted a referral is made to MASH.

Looked after child

When a looked after child goes missing –

- The foster carer or residential staff will provide detailed information to the Police, in particular the information recorded in the Vulnerable Person's Pen Picture and any reason to suspect that the child is at risk of significant harm in terms of abuse, self-harming behaviour, drugs, sexual exploitation or criminal behaviour.
- The foster carer or residential staff will notify the child's social worker and, if the child goes missing outside normal office hours, the Emergency Duty Team.
- The foster carer or residential staff will normally notify the child's parents as part of the initial checks to establish the child's whereabouts. In some

circumstances it may be more appropriate for the social worker to inform the parents.

- The social worker will ensure that the carer has informed the Police.
- The social worker will notify the child's Independent Reviewing Officer.

Notifications by social worker

When a child with whom a social worker is working has gone missing, the social worker will discuss the situation with the team manager and decide on action to be taken. This must include:

- Sending an alert to the Emergency Duty Team, with specific plans for action if the child is found outside normal office hours; and
- Notifying the Head of Service, Safeguarding, who will decide whether and when to notify partner agencies and other local authorities, and to advise the Left School No Trace Team.

Locating the missing child

Police Action

The Police will carry out a risk assessment and classify the child as 'missing' or 'absent' and this will shape their response in locating the child (see the "Police Definitions" section above for further details).

Where there are immediate concerns, or it appears that the local authority is able to provide information that would be helpful in locating and returning the child, the Police will consult the MASH or, outside office hours, the Emergency Duty Team.

When a child goes missing, or a missing child is found, the Police will make an automated notification to MASH via Compact.

The Police may also make a referral directly to MASH by telephone or email.

If the Police are aware that there is an allocated social worker or family support worker, they will notify the worker that the child is missing, or that a missing child has been found.

Child Unknown / Closed Case

MASH will review all notifications to identify whether the case should be received as a referral.

If the child is unknown, or previously known but now a closed case, the response to a referral will follow existing safeguarding procedures - the MASH RAG rating process will be followed, and children will be triaged to Red, Amber or Green.

- If the rating is RED a Strategy meeting will be undertaken within 4 hours;
- If the rating is AMBER a multi-agency discussion will be held in 24 hours;
- If the rating is GREEN the appropriate support services will be identified.

Looked After Child

If a missing looked after child has not been found within 48 hours the social worker will notify the Executive Director of Children's Services describing the steps taken to locate and return the child.

When there are particular concerns for the child's welfare the social worker will arrange an early missing person strategy meeting – within 72 hours. This may be necessary, for example, if a young person persistently leaves their placement to meet with unfamiliar or inappropriate adults, or to engage in other risky behaviour. These meetings will be particularly important when groups of young people run away together.

If any looked after child remains missing for more than 72 hours the social worker will arrange a missing person strategy meeting to share information and coordinate action to locate the child. This meeting must be held within 5 working days after the 72 hour deadline is met.

The decisions to be made when a looked after child goes missing include whether the child should be returned to the same placement and, if not, what alternatives are available.

Planning for the child's return

Where a child goes missing from home or a care placement, plans must be made to respond promptly when the child is located and to return him/her to a place of safety. This will include considering whether the previous arrangements at home or in the care placement are regarded as safe.

If any agencies have concerns of a criminal nature a response will be coordinated by the police.

When a child is found / returns

Role of the Police - Missing Debrief

Once the young person has been traced/located officers will attend their location to conduct a debrief. The purpose is to check for any indication that the young person has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them. All information obtained is entered onto the COMPACT system (Police) for intelligence purposes.

Role of the Social Worker

If the child has an allocated social worker, s/he should arrange to see the child as soon as possible after any missing episode and consider whether any action can be taken that would reduce the risk of further missing episodes.

The social worker will consider whether s/he should arrange an early review of the relevant plan (child in need plan or child protection plan), and what action should be taken to gather the views of those involved in responding to the missing episode and take them into consideration in reviewing the plan.

The social worker will also consider whether any intelligence that has come to light as a result of the missing incident should be shared with the child's carers.

Independent Return Interview

Statutory guidance requires that return interviews are offered to all young people who go missing. Return interviews should take place within 72 hours of the child or young person returning or being found.

Young people have access to a return interview in order that:

- They can be properly assessed;
- They can be given information about how they can make safe choices; and
- They receive the right service at the right time.

The interviews should ideally be carried out by an independent person or someone the young person trusts.

In Birmingham this service is commissioned. The Service receives notifications from the Police via Compact and referrals from carers, schools, child care and health agencies, as well as self-referrals.

The Service will complete an initial triage of all referrals into Red (high risk), amber (medium risk) and green (low risk). The Service will make contact with all young people who go missing from home or care. Green referrals will receive a letter and a leaflet advising the young people where they can go to get extra help. For Amber referrals, a telephone return home interview will be offered (if significant concerns are raised during this, an additional face to face return interview will be offered). Red referrals will be contacted to offer a return interview.

Within the Red category young people may be triaged as Priority Red or 1st Time Missing to ensure that the most vulnerable young people receive an offer of a return interview as a priority.

The service practitioner conducts an assessment using the following tools:

- A CSE risk assessment using the SERAF risk assessment which scores the level of risk for the young person.
- Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board - Child Sexual Exploitation Screening Tool if required.

Whilst all young people who go missing will be offered a return interview -

- If the young person is assessed as being a persistent missing young person (more than 3 missing episodes) and no other support service is involved, consideration will be given for intensive support.
- If the young person requires a further service and there is a delay in accessing further support then the commissioned service will provide interim intensive support until the alternative service is provided.
- The commissioned service will work in partnership with other agencies to identify follow on work, and will refer young people to agencies such as SPACE, Aquarius.

Upon completion of an independent return interview, the social worker or any alternative appropriate professional (for example school designated safeguarding lead) will be provided with a copy of the Professional Feedback Form. This will detail relevant information relating to the missing episode, along with recommendations that may prevent the child or young person from further missing episodes. The social worker will record on CareFirst that the interview was accepted.

If a return interview is offered but refused or cannot be carried out, the Service will notify the child's social worker of the circumstances. The social worker will record on CareFirst that the interview was declined.

Looked After Child

When a looked after child returns from a period of being missing, the social worker will:

- Ensure that the parents have been informed:
- Notify all agencies that were informed that the child was missing; and
- Consider whether to arrange an early review of the care plan.

Looked After Children placed in Birmingham by another Local Authority who go missing

When a looked after child placed in Birmingham by another local authority goes missing the registered manager of the children's home, or of the fostering service, must notify Birmingham City Council. These notifications will be passed to the Head of Safeguarding. If there appears to be a pattern of missing episodes the Head of Safeguarding will contact the responsible local authority to ask what action they are taking to safeguard the young person.

Looked After Children placed by Birmingham in the area of another Local Authority who go missing

When a looked after child who has been placed by Birmingham in the area of another local authority goes missing, the care provider (the fostering service or children's home) will follow the local Missing from Home and Care Procedures. The child's social worker will consider the need for a missing person strategy discussion,

and will ensure that a return interview is arranged, as above. It may be appropriate to arrange an early review to address issues for the child and the placement.

Recording of Missing Episodes

Recording on CareFirst:

When a child is reported as missing from care for any length of time the social worker will open a 'Notification of Missing Child Episode' on CareFirst. The episode is used to track action taken both to find the young person and when they are found, as well as for reporting purposes.

A new episode must be opened for each incident of a young person reported missing.

The social worker is responsible for recording on CareFirst whether the young person was offered an Independent Return Interview and whether the young person accepted or declined the offer.

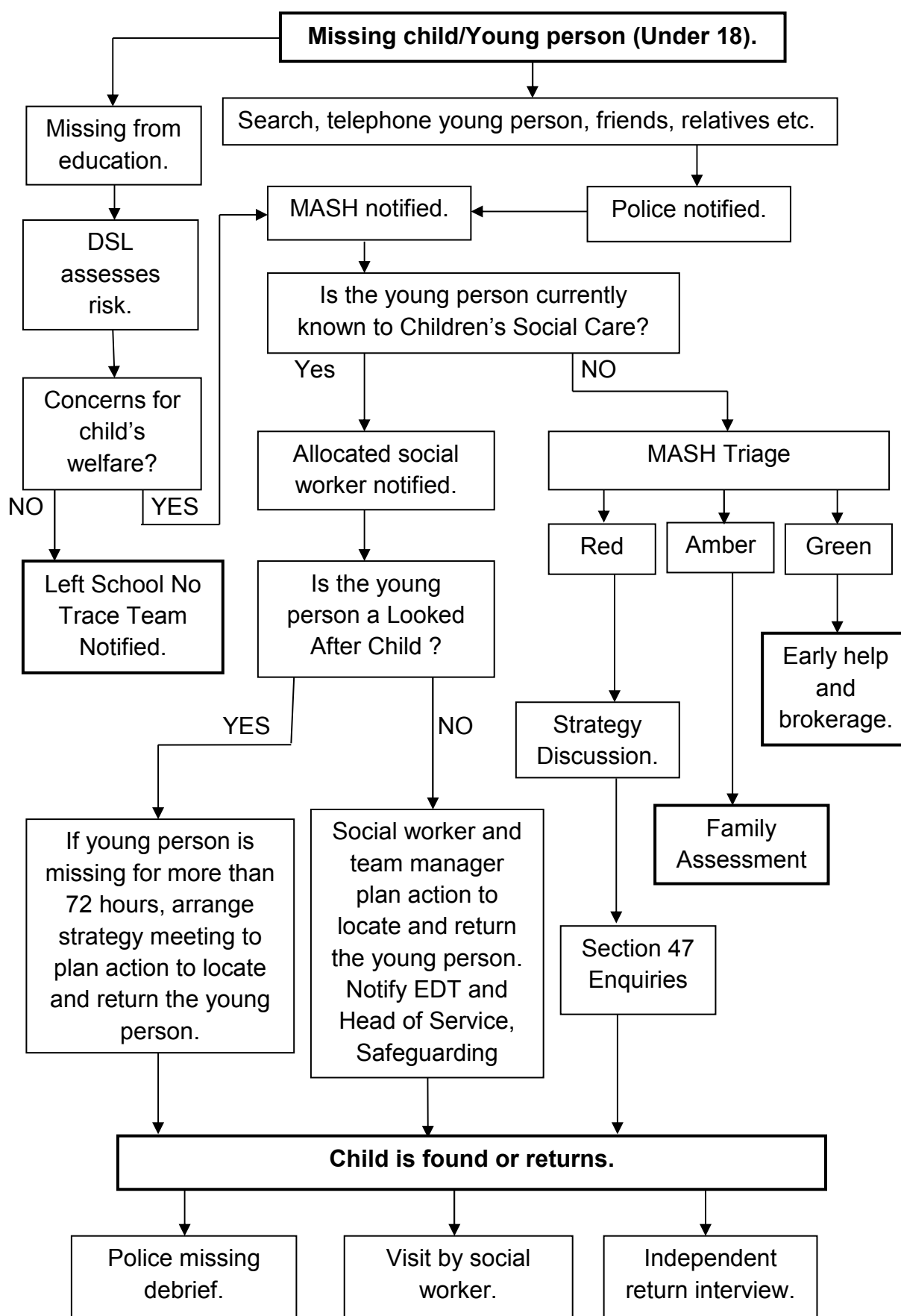
Recording of Police Notifications:

The Police Compact system is used to send automated notifications to the MASH GCSX email inbox for all missing and found children.

Recording of Return Interviews:

The Children's Society monitoring system (MOSAIC) is used for all contact with service users, for case and group recording, and to analyse progress, outcomes and to record interventions. Streetwise will use tools to measure feedback from young people and professionals, and a return interview report form that will also collect data on demographics, people, places and perpetrators.

Missing Child Flowchart



Useful Contacts

Organisation	Phone Number	Email/Website
MASH	0121 303 1888	MASH@birmingham.gov.uk secure email: Secure.MASH@birmingham.gcsx.gov.uk
Emergency Duty Team	0121 675 4806	
Children's Society	0121 212 5599	www.childrenssociety.org.uk
Birmingham Involvement & Engagement Team	0121 303 7217	Lisa.Carter@birmingham.gov.uk
Runaway Helpline	Freephone 116000	www.runawayhelpline.org.uk/ 116000@runawayhelpline.org.uk
NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre	0808 800 5000	help@nspcc.org.uk
Family Lives (formerly Parent line Plus)	0808 800 2222	http://www.familylives.org.uk/
Child line	0800 1111	https://www.childline.org.uk
Barnardos	0121 359 5333	http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what we do/our work/cse-home
CSE coordinators	0121 303 2208 07825 318075	Elisabeth.Richards@birmingham.co.uk Tracey.Johnson@birmingham.co.uk

Tools and Resources

Resources for professionals:

DFE Statutory Guidance	https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care_3.pdf
Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board	http://www.lscbbirmingham.org.uk
Police Definitions and 16 Questions	http://www.proceduresonline.com/birmingham/scb/chapters/docs_library.html#sg_practice_guidance
Procedures Children Missing from Care, Home or Education	www.proceduresonline.com/birmingham/scb/chapters/p_ch_missing_home_care.html
Procedures – Children Missing from Care	http://birminghamcs.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_ch_missing_care.html
BSCB - Child Sexual Exploitation	http://www.lscbbirmingham.org.uk/index.php/cse This page has links to – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Birmingham CSE Strategy; • The CSE Screening Tool; • The SCE Risk Assessment Tool; and • Two practice resources for professionals working with children and young people.
BSCB - E-Safety	http://www.proceduresonline.com/birmingham/scb/chapters/p_esafety_abuse_dig_media.html
BSCB - Trafficked Children	http://www.proceduresonline.com/birmingham/scb/chapters/p_trafficked_ch.html
BSCB - Honour Based Violence	http://www.proceduresonline.com/birmingham/scb/chapters/p_honor_based_viol.html
BSCB - Radicalisation and Violent Extremism	http://www.proceduresonline.com/birmingham/scb/chapters/p_sg_ch_extremism.html
BSCB - Forced Marriage	http://www.proceduresonline.com/birmingham/scb/chapters/p_force_marriage.html
BSCB - Self-Harm and Suicidal Behaviour	http://www.proceduresonline.com/birmingham/scb/chapters/p_self_harm_suicide.html

Barnardo's	http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_work/cse-home
Children's Society	http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk

Resources for young people:

Runaway Helpline	http://www.runawayhelpline.org.uk/
Barnardo's	http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_work/cse-home
Children's Society	http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk
CSE	<p>Know the signs - Emma's Story - Victims Perspective - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnTYFeZNLkQ</p> <p>Website offering support to young people - Thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk</p> <p>Awareness raising film and website - www.mydangerousloverboy.com</p>

Resources for parents, carers and guardians:

Informal Chat network for parents/carers	www.netmums.com
Parents Against Child Exploitation	www.paceuk.info
Runaway Helpline	http://www.runawayhelpline.org.uk/
Barnardo's	http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_work/cse-home
Children's Society	http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk