

INDEPENDENT HORIZONS MISSING FROM CARE POLICY AND PROCEDURE



Date reviewed and reissued	27 June 2026
Next review due	27 June 2027, or sooner if legislation, guidance, local protocols or service arrangements change
Version	2026 v2
Approved by	Karen Plunkett [Registered Manager / Nominated Individual]
Applies to	All team members, agency workers, volunteers and managers supporting looked after young people and care leavers aged 16 and 17 at Independent Horizons

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to ensure that Independent Horizons prevents, responds to, records and learns from missing from care episodes in a timely, proportionate, trauma-informed and safeguarding-focused way.

It sets out what team members must do when a young person is away from the accommodation without authorisation, missing from care, or returns after a missing episode. It also embeds the Philomena Protocol and reflects the Norfolk Missing from Care Strategy 2026-2029.

AIM

Independent Horizons aims to keep young people safe while respecting their age, rights, privacy, independence and voice. Our response must be risk sensible: we avoid unnecessary criminalisation or over-reporting, but we never delay emergency action where there is real, immediate or significant risk of harm.

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- prevent missing episodes through strong relationships, clear planning and meaningful support;
- respond quickly when a young person cannot be located or their welfare cannot be confirmed;
- share accurate information with police, Norfolk Children's Services, the responsible local authority and other safeguarding partners;
- use the Philomena Protocol as a live prevention and response tool, not only as a form;
- listen to the young person after every episode and use learning to update support, risk and safety plans;
- ensure all records are accurate, timely, factual, secure and available for review.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all young people aged 16 and 17 living in Independent Horizons supported accommodation, including looked after children, eligible children, relevant children and other care-experienced young people where the placing authority has duties to accommodate or arrange accommodation.

The policy applies during planned support time, out-of-hours contact, overnight periods, education or activity attendance, visits to family or friends, community time and any situation where staff are expected to know or help establish the young person's welfare.

RELATED POLICIES, FORMS AND RECORDS

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Positive Behaviour / Behaviour Management Policy and Procedure
- Individual Young Person Risk Assessment and Support Planning documents
- Missing Action Plan and Definitions
- Philomena Protocol form and risk assessed locations/associates record
- Incident and Action Log, LIEF records and case notes
- Missing Young Person Report / Missing Persons Information Record
- Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation, Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking, Gangs and Youth Violence, and Prevent policies
- Confidentiality, Information Sharing and Data Protection policies
- Young Person's Guide and complaints/advocacy information

LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK



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This policy is drafted to align with the following legislation, regulations, standards and guidance. It is not legal advice and should be reviewed by the Registered Manager, senior leadership and placing authority where service-specific arrangements change.

Legislation / guidance	How it applies to this policy
Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004	Core duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, including looked after children and children in need.
Care Standards Act 2000	Registration and regulatory framework for social care services.
Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023	Key duties for supported accommodation, including Regulation 5 Protection Standard, Regulation 7 Support Standard, Regulation 20 Safeguarding Policy, Regulation 21 Missing Child Policy, Regulations 24-26 Records, Regulation 27 Notification of a Serious Event and Regulation 32 Quality of Support Review.
DfE Guide to the Supported Accommodation Regulations including Quality Standards	Guidance on how providers should meet the quality standards and operate safe, nurturing supported accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds.
DfE Children who run away or go missing from home or care statutory guidance	Expectations for preventing missing episodes, responding when children go missing, return interviews and multi-agency working.
Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026	Multi-agency safeguarding duties, information sharing and response to harm inside and outside the home, including exploitation.
Ofsted SCCIF: supported accommodation for looked after children and care leavers aged 16 and 17	Inspection expectations for safeguarding, leadership, record keeping, quality of support and outcomes for young people.
Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010	Care planning, placement planning, review and responsibilities for looked after children.
Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010	Pathway planning and suitable accommodation expectations for eligible, relevant and former relevant young people.
Children Missing Education statutory guidance	Relevant where missing episodes link with non-attendance, persistent absence or education safeguarding concerns.
Human Rights Act 1998, Equality Act 2010, UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018	Rights, non-discrimination, privacy, lawful information sharing and secure handling of personal information.
Crime and Disorder Act 1998	Information sharing powers and duties where relevant to safeguarding, crime prevention and community safety.
Modern Slavery Act 2015, Sexual Offences Act 2003 and Serious Crime Act 2015	Relevant to exploitation, trafficking, coercion, grooming, sexual harm, county lines and serious youth violence.
Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and Prevent duty guidance	Relevant where missing episodes may indicate radicalisation or extremist influence.
College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice for missing persons	Police risk assessment, missing person response and safe and well check practice.
Norfolk Missing from Care Strategy 2026-2029 and Norfolk local safeguarding partnership procedures	Local multi-agency expectations, Philomena Protocol use, risk-sensible practice, return home interviews and analysis of missing episodes.

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DEFINITIONS

Child / young person	Anyone under the age of 18. This policy uses young person because Independent Horizons supports 16 and 17 year olds, but all safeguarding duties for children still apply.
Missing	A young person whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests they may be subject to crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another person.
Away from placement without authorisation / unauthorised absence	The young person's whereabouts are known or reasonably confirmed, but they are not at the accommodation or agreed location and the address or arrangement has not been authorised by the social worker or placing authority.
Absconder	A young person who is wanted for an offence or subject to a criminal justice requirement, secure order, curfew, tag, residence condition or similar order. Safeguarding duties still apply.
Responsible local authority	The local authority responsible for the young person's care planning or pathway planning.
Host local authority	The local authority area where the young person is placed, if different from the responsible local authority.
Safe and well check	A police check after a missing person has been located, intended to identify immediate harm, where and with whom the young person has been, and any offences by or against them.
Return home interview	An independent discussion offered after a missing episode, normally within 72 hours of return, to understand what happened, identify harm and reduce the risk of further episodes.
Philomena Protocol	A nationally used missing person information and prevention tool completed with the young person where possible, kept updated and shared quickly with police when a missing episode occurs.

POLICY STATEMENT

Independent Horizons recognises that when a young person goes missing from care they may be at increased risk of harm, including exploitation, violence, trafficking, substance misuse, self-harm, radicalisation, abuse, neglect, unsafe relationships or offending by or against them. A 16 or 17 year old is not less vulnerable because they are approaching adulthood.



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At the same time, Independent Horizons recognises the views reflected in the Norfolk Missing from Care Strategy: young people in care may feel over-scrutinised, embarrassed, interrogated or treated differently from peers. Staff must therefore use professional curiosity and balanced judgement. We must ask whether we are managing risk for the organisation or for the young person, and we must build plans with the young person wherever possible.

Team members must not treat missing episodes as rule-breaking or respond with blame, shame, threats or punishment. The response must be calm, respectful, proportionate, safeguarding-led and focused on locating the young person quickly and safely.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Registered Manager / Nominated Individual	Ensures this policy is implemented, reviewed and understood; ensures missing episodes are monitored; escalates serious or repeated concerns; ensures Ofsted and relevant persons are notified where Regulation 27 thresholds are met; ensures staff training, supervision and quality review.
Operations Director / senior leadership	Supports oversight of serious incidents, repeated missing episodes, local authority escalation, quality assurance and service learning.
Senior Support Worker / shift lead	Coordinates immediate actions, checks that reasonable enquiries are completed and recorded, supports staff decision-making, and alerts the manager/on-call where risk increases.
All team members	Know each young person's plan, complete reasonable enquiries, contact police/local authority when required, use the Philomena Protocol, record accurately and respond in a trauma-informed way.
Key worker	Supports preventative planning, updates Philomena information, reviews missing patterns, completes debriefs with the young person when appropriate and contributes to updated support/risk plans.
Allocated social worker / responsible local authority	Holds statutory care/pathway planning duties, agrees authorised addresses and safety plans, arranges or commissions return home interviews, and leads multi-agency planning.
Police	Receive missing reports, complete risk assessment and missing enquiries, undertake safe and well checks where appropriate, and share relevant safeguarding information.
Young person	Where safe and appropriate, is supported to understand the policy, contribute to their Philomena Protocol form and safety plan, share safe contact arrangements, and take part in return discussions without fear of punishment.

PREVENTION AND PLANNING



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Preventing missing episodes begins before or at admission and continues through everyday support. Team members must understand the young person's history, relationships, wishes, routines, triggers, known locations, online risks, exploitation concerns, mental health needs, medication needs and any previous missing patterns.

- Complete and review an individual risk assessment, support plan and missing/safety plan for every young person.
- Complete Part 1 of the Philomena Protocol form as early as possible, with the young person's involvement wherever safe and appropriate.
- Keep an up-to-date photograph and essential information available securely for urgent use.
- Agree with the social worker what locations, addresses or family/friend contact may be authorised, unauthorised or unsafe.
- Explain to the young person, in plain language, what will happen if staff cannot confirm where they are or that they are safe.
- Build trusted relationships so the young person is more likely to communicate and return safely.
- Offer meaningful routines, education/training support, activities, advocacy and emotional support that reduce isolation.
- Review missing risks after incidents, changes in relationships, court/criminal justice events, exploitation intelligence, education exclusion, bereavement, anniversaries, family conflict or changes in placement/care plan.
- Use restorative and trauma-informed practice to repair relationships and avoid placement breakdown after incidents.

PHILOMENA PROTOCOL REQUIREMENTS

Independent Horizons adheres to the Philomena Protocol. The protocol is a live safeguarding tool that helps carers and police locate a missing young person quickly and safely. It must be completed before a crisis wherever possible, kept secure, updated regularly and shared promptly when a missing report is made.

- Part 1 must include personal details, recent photograph, key professionals, description, communication needs, medical needs, risk factors, known locations, known associates, online/social media information, family/friend contacts and any safety agreements with the young person.
- The form should be completed with the young person wherever this can be done safely, respectfully and without increasing risk. Staff must explain why the information is gathered and how it may help keep them safe.



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- Part 2 / incident information must be completed or updated when the young person goes missing, including last seen time/date, clothing, demeanour, trigger events, recent contacts, money, travel passes, phone/social media activity and reasonable enquiries already completed.
- The protocol must identify people or places that may increase risk, including those linked to exploitation, violence, trafficking, substance misuse, radicalisation or unsafe relationships.
- The form must be stored securely but be accessible to staff day and night. Digital copies must be protected in line with data protection requirements.
- When reporting a young person missing, staff must tell police that Philomena Protocol information is available and share it through the agreed secure route.
- The protocol must be reviewed after every missing episode and at planned reviews, and updated when new associates, locations, phone numbers, social media details or risk factors are identified.

NORFOLK MISSING FROM CARE STRATEGY 2026-2029

Where a young person is placed in Norfolk, or Norfolk Children's Services is involved, Independent Horizons will reflect the Norfolk Missing from Care Strategy 2026-2029. The strategy emphasises multi-agency working, the Philomena Protocol, early intervention, restorative practice, young people's voices, risk-sensible decision-making, return home interviews and analysis of repeated episodes.

- A young person should be treated as vulnerable until they are identified as safe and well.
- If the young person is at a known but unauthorised address, this is normally an unauthorised absence rather than missing, but safety planning and professional discussion are still required.
- Staff must complete reasonable actions to locate the young person before and during reporting, unless urgent risk means police must be contacted immediately.
- The Independent Reviewing Officer should be informed of missing episodes by the local authority; Independent Horizons will provide information to support this.
- Return home interviews should be offered in a way that feels safe, neutral and less interrogative, taking account of the young person's preference where possible.
- Information from missing episodes and return interviews must inform planning and be used to identify patterns, hotspots, associates, triggers and protective factors.
- Repeated episodes, overnight absence, missing over 24 hours, or significant risk should prompt consideration of a strategy discussion or multi-agency safety meeting.
- For out-of-county placements or locations, Independent Horizons will support communication between the responsible local authority, host local authority, police and MASH/safeguarding arrangements.

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RISK ASSESSMENT

Risk assessment must be dynamic. Staff must consider the young person's individual circumstances, the current incident and any wider intelligence. If in doubt, staff must seek management advice, contact the social worker/EDT, and report to police where whereabouts or welfare cannot be established.

- age, maturity, developmental needs, disability, learning needs, communication needs and mental capacity;
- mental health, self-harm, suicide risk, substance use, medication or urgent health needs;
- history and pattern of previous missing episodes, including where found, who with, duration and harm experienced;
- risk of child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, serious youth violence, gangs, trafficking, modern slavery, radicalisation, forced marriage or honour-based abuse;
- recent conflict, distress, rejection, placement concerns, family events, anniversaries, bereavement, education changes, court/police activity or online contact;
- weather, time of day, transport, distance from home area, access to money, phone battery and travel documents;
- whether the behaviour is out of character, planned, secretive, coerced or linked to known unsafe adults/peers;
- known risks to the public or criminal justice restrictions, including bail, licence, tag, curfew, MAPPA or other legal conditions;
- what the young person is telling staff, including tone, words used, location clues, background noise and any signs of fear or coercion.

MISSING ACTION PLAN AND THRESHOLDS



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Colour	Risk level	Incident description	Required action	Next step and recording
GREEN	Unauthorised absence	The young person is away from the accommodation and at an address or location not authorised by the social worker, but they have spoken with staff, stated where they are, and their location and welfare have been reasonably confirmed.	Contact Norfolk Children's Services/EDT as required by the young person's plan. Record confirmed location, who confirmed it, time of contact, welfare presentation and agreed return plan. Continue welfare contact.	Record on LIEF and case notes. Inform manager/on-call. Review the support plan if this is repeated.
BLUE	Unauthorised absence: concern present	The young person says where they are, but staff cannot speak with a responsible adult, the address cannot be confirmed, the adult appears unsafe, or staff have concerns about exploitation, coercion, intoxication, mental health, violence or other harm.	Call police on 101 unless the risk requires 999. State the young person is looked after/care experienced, aged under 18 and vulnerable. Request a CAD/reference number. Notify social worker/EDT and manager/on-call.	Continue attempts to confirm welfare. Record all reasonable enquiries, decisions and reference numbers on LIEF.
YELLOW	Missing from care: limited contact	The young person is answering some calls or messages but will not confirm where they are, who they are with, or that they are safe. Text-only contact is not enough to confirm welfare.	Call police on 101. Clearly state the young person is missing from care because whereabouts and welfare cannot be established. Share Philomena Protocol information and risk factors. Notify social worker/EDT and manager/on-call.	Continue welfare contact and reasonable enquiries. Record on LIEF, case notes and missing report.



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Colour	Risk level	Incident description	Required action	Next step and recording
ORANGE	Missing from care: no contact	The young person is missing and not answering calls, messages or other contact attempts, or contact has stopped unexpectedly.	Call police on 101 immediately, or 999 if there is immediate risk to life, serious harm, violence, exploitation, abduction, self-harm, medical risk or other urgent danger. Notify social worker/EDT and manager/on-call.	Share the current Philomena Protocol form, photograph, known locations and associates. Keep recording enquiries and updates.
RED	High risk / missing over 24 hours	The young person has been missing overnight, for more than 24 hours, has repeated episodes in short succession, or is assessed as high risk due to exploitation, serious violence, trafficking, radicalisation, self-harm, medical need, learning disability, mental health crisis or other significant harm.	Escalate to police using existing CAD/reference, social worker/EDT, Registered Manager and senior leadership. Request/participate in a strategy discussion or multi-agency safety meeting where risk is significant.	Continue active enquiries, update risk assessment and Philomena information, and keep a clear incident chronology. Consider Ofsted notification if Regulation 27 threshold is met.
PURPLE	Return to accommodation / located	The young person returns or is located.	Notify police and social worker/EDT immediately. Check immediate welfare and medical needs. Support police safe and well check. Offer food, warmth, privacy, reassurance and a calm response.	Record return time, presentation, disclosures, actions, and any immediate safeguarding concerns. Support independent return home interview within 72 hours.



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PROCEDURE: IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

When a team member believes a young person may be missing or away without authorisation, they must remain calm, gather facts, complete reasonable enquiries and escalate according to risk. Emergency action must not be delayed where there is immediate danger.

1. Check the young person's room, communal areas, garden/external areas and any agreed activity or appointment location, while respecting privacy and causing minimum disruption to others.
2. Call the young person. Send clear, non-threatening messages by text, WhatsApp or agreed communication method asking them to confirm where they are, who they are with and whether they are safe.
3. Check the young person's recent plans, sign-out information, support session notes, known triggers, agreed curfew/return plan and any information from other young people or staff.
4. Contact known safe friends, family, education/training provider or agreed professionals where this is appropriate and does not increase risk.
5. Check known locations, addresses and associates listed in the Philomena Protocol and risk assessed locations record, considering whether staff attendance is safe and proportionate.
6. Consider whether personal space needs to be checked for safety reasons, such as medication, phone, notes, travel documents or signs of pre-planning. Any search must be respectful, proportionate, recorded and in line with the young person's plan and safeguarding need.
7. Notify the Senior Support Worker, manager/on-call or Registered Manager according to risk and service arrangements.
8. If whereabouts or welfare cannot be established, or risk factors indicate danger, report to police using 101 or 999 for emergencies. Make clear that the young person is under 18, looked after/care experienced and potentially vulnerable.
9. Notify the allocated social worker or Emergency Duty Team. For Norfolk, use the current Children's Services/EDT contact route recorded in the young person's plan and local contact list.
10. Record all actions, times, decisions, contacts, reference numbers and information shared on LIEF/case notes and the incident log.

INFORMATION TO GIVE POLICE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

- full name, preferred name, date of birth, age, legal status and placing authority;
- recent photograph and full physical description, including clothing last seen wearing;
- when and where last seen, by whom, and last known contact;

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- current risk assessment and why staff believe the young person is missing or at risk;
- medical, mental health, communication, disability or medication needs;
- known triggers, antecedent behaviour, recent incidents or distress;
- known addresses, locations, associates, family/friends and risk assessed locations;
- phone numbers, social media accounts, recent online/contact information where known and lawful to share;
- money, bank card, travel pass, passport or other travel documents taken;
- reasonable enquiries already completed and the outcome;
- whether the Philomena Protocol form is complete and how it will be shared securely;
- any risk to the public or legal restrictions relevant to the incident.

DURING A MISSING EPISODE

- Keep trying to contact the young person using calm, caring and non-judgemental messages.
- Continue reasonable enquiries agreed with police, social worker/EDT and manager/on-call.
- Do not promise confidentiality if the young person discloses harm or risk; explain that information will be shared to keep them safe.
- Update police and Children's Services with any new information immediately, including contact, sightings, associates, locations or risk changes.
- Maintain a clear chronology of all calls, messages, checks, decisions, advice received and actions taken.
- Escalate if the young person remains missing overnight, over 24 hours, repeatedly goes missing, or new safeguarding information emerges.
- Consider whether other young people at the accommodation may be affected, involved or at risk, and take appropriate safeguarding action.
- Ensure staff receive management support and handovers so the response remains consistent across shifts.

WHEN THE YOUNG PERSON RETURNS OR IS LOCATED

The first response after return is important. Young people may fear consequences, feel ashamed, be tired, hungry, intoxicated, distressed, defensive, injured or under pressure from others. Staff must prioritise immediate safety and connection before detailed questioning.

11. Welcome the young person back calmly. Avoid blame, interrogation, sarcasm, threats or repeated questioning.



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12. Check immediate welfare: injury, illness, intoxication, mental health, self-harm, sexual harm, assault, exploitation, coercion, hunger, warmth, sleep and medication needs.
13. Call 999 or seek urgent medical help if there is immediate medical or safety risk.
14. Notify police that the young person has returned or been located and provide the CAD/reference number.
15. Notify the allocated social worker/EDT, manager/on-call and any other agreed persons.
16. Support the police safe and well check where required. Do not obstruct the young person's opportunity to disclose harm.
17. Offer food, drink, privacy, clean clothing, shower, phone charging or rest where appropriate.
18. Record return time, presentation, what the young person said voluntarily, actions taken and any safeguarding disclosures or concerns.
19. Do not carry out an intense debrief immediately if the young person is dysregulated, exhausted or distressed. Agree a safer time to talk unless urgent safeguarding information must be gathered.

RETURN HOME INTERVIEWS AND FOLLOW-UP

A return home interview must be offered after a missing episode and should normally be completed within 72 hours of the young person returning. It should usually be carried out by an independent person who is trained and able to follow up actions. In Norfolk, Targeted Youth Support Service arrangements may apply for Norfolk young people.

- The young person should be offered a choice of safe and suitable setting where possible, such as a neutral room, walk, drive or another agreed place.
- The purpose is to understand what happened, identify harm, reduce repeat episodes and strengthen support, not to punish or interrogate.
- Independent Horizons will encourage and support the young person to participate but must respect that engagement may take trust and time.
- If the young person refuses, staff should still share relevant observations with the social worker and support future opportunities to talk.
- Information from the return home interview, safe and well check and staff debrief must be used to update risk assessments, support plans, Philomena Protocol forms and safety plans.
- Repeated missing episodes should trigger management review and multi-agency discussion to understand patterns and prevent further harm.

SPECIFIC SAFEGUARDING RISKS



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Going missing may be a cause, indicator or consequence of wider safeguarding harm. Staff must remain professionally curious and avoid assuming that a young person is simply choosing risk. Where any concern is identified, the Safeguarding Policy must be followed alongside this policy.

- Child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, serious youth violence, county lines and gang association;
- grooming, coercion, online harm, unsafe adults, peer exploitation or exchange of sex, drugs, money, protection, accommodation, affection or status;
- trafficking, modern slavery and risks for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, including the possibility of trafficker influence;
- radicalisation or extremist influence, including online contact;
- mental health crisis, self-harm, suicide risk, trauma response, substance misuse or withdrawal;
- forced marriage, honour-based abuse, domestic abuse, family conflict or unsafe family contact;
- offending behaviour, criminal justice restrictions or risk to others;
- children missing education or persistent absence from education as a possible indicator of harm.

INFORMATION SHARING, CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION

Safeguarding information must be shared lawfully, proportionately and promptly. Staff should seek consent where safe and appropriate, but lack of consent must not prevent information sharing where a young person is at risk of harm or where disclosure is necessary to protect the young person or others.

- Share the minimum necessary information with the right people for a clear safeguarding purpose.
- Record what was shared, with whom, when, why and any advice received.
- Protect Philomena Protocol forms, photographs, contact details and intelligence from unauthorised access.
- Check information is accurate and up to date before sharing where time allows.
- Use agreed secure routes for sharing sensitive documents with police, local authority and safeguarding partners.
- Escalate any uncertainty to the manager/on-call, Registered Manager or Data Protection lead as appropriate.



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RECORDING AND MONITORING

Accurate records protect young people, support professional accountability and help identify patterns. Records must be factual, timely, respectful and free from judgemental language.

- Record all missing, unauthorised absence and return episodes on LIEF/case notes and the relevant incident/missing forms.
- Include times, actions, decision-making, contact attempts, advice, reference numbers, welfare information, risk factors and outcomes.
- Update the young person's support plan, risk assessment, missing plan and Philomena Protocol after every episode where new learning is identified.
- The Registered Manager must monitor missing episodes for frequency, duration, timing, locations, associates, triggers, return information and staff response quality.
- Patterns must be shared with the social worker and multi-agency network to inform care/pathway planning and safeguarding action.
- Management review must consider whether the accommodation remains suitable and whether additional support, restrictions, safety planning or placement review is required.

NOTIFICATIONS AND ESCALATION

The Registered Manager or delegated senior manager must consider whether any missing episode or related safeguarding concern meets the threshold for notification to Ofsted and relevant persons under Regulation 27. Not every missing episode will require Ofsted notification, but serious events, significant harm, police involvement linked to serious risk, exploitation, hospital attendance, serious injury or other reportable events must be assessed without delay.

- Escalate immediately to police using 999 where there is immediate risk to life, serious harm, abduction, violence, medical emergency, suicide/self-harm risk or other urgent danger.
- Request a strategy discussion where the risk of significant harm is indicated, the young person is missing over 24 hours or overnight with serious concerns, or there are multiple episodes in short succession.
- Escalate to the responsible local authority if the safety plan, authorised addresses, return home interview or multi-agency response is unclear or delayed.
- Inform the Independent Reviewing Officer through the social worker/local authority route and provide information needed for statutory review.



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- Review the young person's suitability for supported accommodation if missing risks cannot be safely managed within the service model.

YOUNG PERSON VOICE AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

Young people have said that missing responses can feel intrusive, embarrassing and like being done to. Independent Horizons must actively reduce this harm by explaining decisions, offering choices and listening carefully.

- Ask what happened, what they needed, what helped, what made things worse and what could reduce future risk.
- Offer neutral and less formal spaces for return discussions where safe and possible.
- Avoid language such as absconder, manipulative, attention-seeking or non-compliant in routine records unless it is a formal legal category and necessary to record.
- Recognise flight, avoidance, silence, anger or minimising as possible trauma responses.
- Keep boundaries clear, kind and consistent; trauma-informed practice does not remove safeguarding duties.
- Support advocacy, including NYAS or other agreed advocacy routes, where the young person wants help to express their views.

TRAINING AND STAFF SUPPORT

- All team members must read this policy during induction and at annual review.
- Staff must understand missing definitions, reasonable enquiries, the action plan, Philomena Protocol, local authority notification routes, police reporting and recording requirements.
- Training and supervision must cover exploitation, trafficking, radicalisation, trauma-informed practice, information sharing and professional curiosity.
- Staff involved in serious or distressing missing episodes must be offered debrief and supervision.
- Learning from incidents must be used to improve practice rather than blame staff or young people.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Registered Manager will review this policy at least annually, or sooner if there is a change in legislation, regulation, statutory guidance, Norfolk local strategy/protocol, Ofsted expectations, Philomena Protocol requirements or service learning from incidents.



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Young people, staff and placing authorities may suggest improvements. Missing episode data, return home interview learning, complaints, safeguarding concerns and quality assurance findings will inform review.

POLICY REVIEW AND AUTHORISATION

This policy is the authorised version agreed by the Directors of Independent Horizons. All employees are expected to follow this policy. Failure to follow safeguarding procedures may result in management action, including disciplinary action where appropriate.

Director's signature	Karen Plunkett
Director	Karen Plunkett
Review date	27 June 2026
Next review due	27 June 2027

COMPLIANCE AND UPDATE NOTES

- This is a full rewrite of the 2025 Missing Young Person Policy and the 2026 Missing Action Plan into a clearer policy-and-procedure format.
- Updated to reflect Supported Accommodation Regulation 21 by setting out prevention steps, actions during absence, roles and responsibilities, recording and review.
- Strengthened alignment with Regulation 5 protection standard, Regulation 20 safeguarding, Regulation 27 notifications, Regulation 32 quality review and Ofsted SCCIF supported accommodation expectations.
- Embedded Norfolk Missing from Care Strategy 2026-2029 themes: risk-sensible practice, young person voice, restorative response, return home interviews, analysis of patterns, out-of-county communication and multi-agency escalation.
- Expanded the Philomena Protocol into prevention, storage, updating, incident reporting and post-episode review requirements.
- Updated language to be trauma-informed and to avoid blame, shame, unnecessary criminalisation or punitive responses.
- Human confirmation needed: current leadership names/titles, Norfolk and out-of-hours telephone numbers, secure route for sharing Philomena forms with police, and any local authority-specific reporting pathways for young people placed outside Norfolk.

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