

Guardians UK

Missing Students Policy

Introduction

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a key duty of care for Guardians UK. When a child goes missing or runs away, they are at risk. Guardians UK's policy on safeguarding children therefore includes protecting them from that risk, hence the Missing Student Policy.

There are concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual and/ or criminal exploitation. Missing children may also be vulnerable to other forms of exploitation, to violent crime, gang exploitation including county lines, or to drug and alcohol misuse.

This policy sets out the steps that Guardians UK staff should take to prevent children from going missing and to protect them when they do go missing.

This policy considers the following publications:

- Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (January 2014);
- Working Together to Safeguard Children and related statutory guidance (2023);
- Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation (2009);
- Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan (2011);
- Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations
- Children Missing Education - Statutory Guidance for local authorities (2024)

Minimising the likelihood of a child going missing

By following the guidelines laid down by Guardians UK in the Host Family Handbook and the Student Handbook it is anticipated that the likelihood of a child going missing whilst under the care of Guardians UK is minimal. These guidelines suggest the best ways for host families to keep young people safe by providing age-appropriate supervision schedules and curfews alongside encouraging host families and their student guests to have open and frank conversations if there are wellbeing concerns. The Student Handbook reminds students of the importance of communicating openly and honestly with their host family, keeping them fully informed of any plans and taking responsibility for themselves during their stay.

Steps to take if you think a child has gone missing

There are many circumstances in which a child may not be accounted for but in many of these they will not be considered as a 'missing person'. Most children will turn up safe and well, unaware that

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their actions have caused any concern or alarm. However, Guardians UK staff and host families must be aware that if a student has run away and if their absence is unexplained and if there is concern for their safety then urgent action is required to ensure the safety and wellbeing of that student.

The following checks should be undertaken first:

- When were they last seen and by whom?
- Had they informed anyone else (friend, host family member) where they might be going?
- Can they be contacted by mobile or social media?
- Can they be tracked using a location finding device on their mobile?
- Are they with another responsible adult (parent, driver) whom you can contact?
- Are they in possession of their passport or ID card?
- Do they have access to money?

If, after completing these steps, it seems likely the young person's absence is unexplained and the circumstances surrounding the absence are of concern, the host family or other Guardians UK staff need to call the Guardians UK Director at any time of the day or night on 01823 703190 or 07577 691759 and seek advice.

It is not easy to decide whether a missing student has run away and is safe and well or if they have been abducted and/or come to harm. Careful thought needs to be given to this, and any leads appropriately followed up on to ensure the student's safe return.

If the Guardians UK Director is concerned that the student's disappearance might be suspicious or that they might come to any harm they will then decide whether to contact the police, how, when and if to contact the parents or agent and which other interested parties, e.g. school, need to be contacted.

Once the missing student has been found and assuming no harm has come to them, they will be reunited with the host family if both sides are happy with a continuation of the relationship. It is important that the host family continues to offer warm and consistent care when a child returns, and that running away should not be viewed as behaviour that needs to be punished. Guardians UK will work very closely with the host family and the student to ensure the on-going safety of the student and to provide reassurance to the host family.

However, if circumstances dictate that a different host family is required, then Guardians UK will make that change and work closely with both the student and the new host family. The student's school will more than likely be informed of the incident if deemed to be of benefit to the on-going safety of the student once back in school.

Students Missing Education

All students are entitled to an efficient full-time education which is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have. Whether supporting boarding students who may return late or depart early at the respective start and end of school terms or day students whose regular school attendance record is poor, Guardians UK is aware of the need to encourage appropriate attendance and punctuality. This is achieved by monitoring of day students' attendance through the school portals and regular conversations with their key school staff and host family. For boarding students Guardians UK staff remind and encourage parents to book their children's flights

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on the correct arrival and departure days and at suitable times. Guardians UK staff also stay in regular contact with boarding students' house parents and tutors and monitor their students' attendance that way.