



HOW TO KEEP YOUR CHILD SAFE FROM GOING MISSING

Information & Advice for Parents

**catch
22**



BEFORE

Encourage your child to:

- Store key phone numbers of trusted adults in their phone and learn one or two numbers off by heart.
- Always let you know where they are planning to go, who with and how long they expect to be.
- Ensure their phone is charged before they go out.
- Share contact numbers of their friends and friends' parents with you.
- Arrange a secret code word or phrase they can use when calling you if they feel unsafe so you can pick them up without them losing face.
- Rehearse difficult situations in advance e.g. what would they do if they lost their phone whilst out and had no money with them?

Warning signs that something's wrong

- **Changes in a child's behaviour or how they present themselves.** Are they outgoing, but have become shy? Have they started dressing or presenting very differently?
- **Becoming secretive or withdrawn.** Is a usually friendly child suddenly hiding their activity?
- **Evidence that they are subject to physical or emotional abuse**
- **Isolated from friends – or signs that they are isolating themselves.** Are they moving themselves away from friends they've known for a long time?
- **Signs of mental health problems and emotional wellbeing problems**
- **Changes to their regular friendship group.** Are they hanging out with a different crowd?
- **A breakdown in relationships at home and/or school**
- **Non-compliance to boundaries.** Is a previously well-behaved child suddenly ignoring boundaries?

Don't ignore these signs. If possible, find a good moment to talk to your child and ask questions- maybe a car journey or when something positive has happened and the mood is light. Seek help: call **Catch22** on **02037018641**. You could also speak to your child's teacher about your concerns.

“Looking back now, I can see that something was wrong.”

WHILE A CHILD IS MISSING

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If your child is missing:

- Don't panic! First carefully check your child is not in the house, garden or local neighbourhood.
- Try to call them or contact them on social media.
- Contact their friends and friends' parents and your own family to see if they know where your child is. See if anyone has any information or is willing to help you look.
- Check if they have taken any important items with them like money, clothing or bags.

If you have no idea where they are and are becoming increasingly worried for their safety, call the **Police** on **101** or report them missing online at www.met.police.uk You don't need to leave a certain amount of time or wait until it gets dark to report your child missing.

If you have reason to believe your child is in imminent danger, call 999.

Give as much detail as you can:

- When did you last see them?
- Has anyone seen or heard from them since then?
- What were they wearing?
- What did they take with them?
- What mood were they in?
- Where do they normally hang out?
- Have they updated social media at all?
- Tell the Police if you have already checked the places they often go to and the people they like to spend time with.
- Mention any particular causes for concern or medical conditions.

Ask the police for an incident log number. Make a note of this and record it for future reference.

When the police officer contacts you or visits to take a full missing report, give them as much information as you can, including a recent photograph of the child, ideally with the same clothes and hairstyle as they have at that moment.

When you go out to look for the child yourself, make sure someone stays at home in case the child returns. Take your phone and keep in touch.

AFTER A CHILD RETURNS

- Try to remain calm and collected when the child returns, rather than getting angry.
- First, tell them how happy you are to see them and check they are OK. Offer food and drink if appropriate.
- If not returned by the Police themselves, call 101 to inform Police they are home safely.
- Although it is important that you talk to them about what has happened, they may be tired or distressed so now may not be the right time.
- At some stage over the next 24 hours, talk to them about the risks of going missing. Listen calmly to what happened and don't respond until they have finished.
- Take note of what they tell you. If they have been harmed and/or a crime has been committed, inform the Police and seek medical help if necessary.
- Give them numbers of helplines such as Childline in case there is anything they need independent support with.

The police will visit your child soon after their return to do a wellbeing check called a 'debrief'.

Over the next couple of days, an independent support worker from Catch22 will be in contact to arrange to visit your child for a 'return home interview'. Despite the name, this is just an informal chat and provides an opportunity to identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered; understand and try to address the reasons why they went missing; help the child feel safe; and understand what they need to prevent a repeat missing incident.

After these have taken place, talk to your child and agree what you can all do to make sure they won't go missing again.

Always keep communication open and check in regularly with them to see how they are feeling.

"Thank you so much for all you support, we really do appreciate everything you have done. We just had no idea how to handle it before."

For further details about Catch22's Merton Missing Service, call: **02037018641**, email: mfh@catch-22.org.uk or look at our [website](#). You can also get more advice and information from our online [poster hub](#).