Authorised Professional Practice on missing persons

Consultation on the definition of ‘missing’

26 May – 16 June 2016

Please send all comments to
APPmpconsultation@college.pnn.police.uk
The College of Policing is committed to helping police forces in England and Wales take appropriate and proportionate action to deal with people who are reported missing. Police actions and resources should be directed in the most effective way that makes people safe and prevents crime. This means prioritising activity so that the most intensive work addresses the needs of those missing people who are assessed as being at the greatest risk.

In 2015 the College of Policing launched a public consultation on draft Authorised Professional Practice (APP) on missing persons. Definitions of the terms ‘missing’ and ‘absent’ drew the most comments.

The College is reviewing these definitions as a result of the feedback received, observations from the 2016 HMIC report *Missing children: who cares? – The police response to missing and absent children*, reports issued by the Children’s Commissioner in 2012 and views expressed by third sector organisations at the All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults.

This is a short consultation focused only on proposed revisions to the definition of ‘missing’. The College intends to publish the full APP by the autumn.

Please send all responses to the consultation to APPmpconsultation@college.pnn.police.uk by **16 June 2016.**
Definition of ‘missing’

‘Absent’ is included in the definition of ‘missing’. References to missing people include individuals who are defined as absent.

Further information

Risk principles
National Decision Model

All reports of missing people sit within a continuum of risk from ‘absent - no apparent risk’, where some people may be classified as absent, through to high-risk cases that require immediate, intensive action.
The police are entitled to expect parents and carers, including staff acting in a parenting role in care homes, to accept normal parenting responsibilities. Children who are breaching parental discipline should not be dealt with by police unless there are other risks. For example, a child who is late home from a party should not be regarded as missing or absent until the parent or carer has undertaken enquiries to find out if the child is still at the party or has gone to a friend’s house. Once those enquiries have been completed, it may be appropriate to record the child as missing and take actions set out in this APP.

All reports of missing people, including people classified as absent, will be subject to review, either because of the passage of time or because new information/evidence comes to light. When a review takes place, the risk assessment will need to be reconsidered and new actions tasked and/or old actions amended (eg, escalating the risk from absent – no apparent risk to low, medium or high), or actions stopped. For children, a comprehensive risk assessment (which is recorded) should take place prior to concluding that there is no apparent risk and placing the child in the absent category.

Where police decide not to take any action other than the minimum actions (as set out below), a review time should be set identifying the latest time when a review can take place. This time must be based on the risk assessment, not category names or assumptions about the missing person.
1.1 Minimum actions

Minimum actions will be undertaken in all missing persons cases. Further activities will be necessary in some cases, especially those which have been categorised as being higher than ‘absent-no apparent risk’.

The minimum actions to be undertaken in all cases are:

- making a report on the force command and control system, the force missing person reporting system or other suitable place
- undertaking a risk assessment and reviewing it at defined intervals which will underpin decisions on what actions should be taken and when (if risk levels change the response should be reviewed)
- creating a plan of immediate actions which may include contacting hospitals, checking friends/relatives etc. – these actions may not necessarily be undertaken by police, but by the reporting person setting the latest time to review the situation.

In cases which have been risk assessed and categorised as ‘absent-no apparent risk’, it may be appropriate for the individual who is making the missing person report to undertake checks of their own before the police are deployed and start conducting investigative enquiries. For example, where a family member is concerned about a person they haven’t spoken to for some time, it may be appropriate for the person reporting to make enquiries with relatives or friends, prior to police undertaking activities to trace the person.

The police may provide valuable assistance in these circumstances by guiding the person reporting’s activities to trace the missing person. It is also important to assure the reporting person that the police care about the missing person and that updates on progress are expected.

A time to review all activities will be set.