



MISSING PERSONS POLICY

The definition of a missing person for the purposes of this policy is as follows:

“Anyone whose whereabouts is unknown whatever the circumstances of disappearance. They will be considered missing until located and their well-being or otherwise established.”

If a Guardians UK student is defined as “missing”, we would expect to be notified immediately so that authorities, parents, agent (if relevant) and school could be notified.

Guidelines relating to a student whose absence is unexplained:

There are many circumstances in which a student might be accounted for – they are not all to be considered as “missing persons”. The vast majority of students will turn up safe and sound, unaware that their absence has caused concern. However, staff and host families must be aware that if a student does run away, or their absence is unexplained and there is concern for their safety, there is an urgency required in any response in order to ensure the safety and well-being of that student, who may well be vulnerable.

Initial checks to consider if a student cannot be accounted for:

- When were they last seen and by whom?
- Had they told another pupil where they planned on going?
- Can they be contacted? Other students will often hold mobile phone contact numbers that may not be listed elsewhere.
- Are they with parents if not returned from exeat?

If it seems likely that the student has run away, or their absence is unexplained and the length of absence causes concern for their safety, the host family should seek advice urgently from the Guardianship Manager or Deputy Guardianship Manager.

Initial response to a student’s disappearance

- Could they have been involved in an accident?
- Could they have been the victim of a serious crime?
- Has the student run away before?
- What reason could the student have for running away?
- If the reasons for the disappearance are totally unknown, what clues do you have, if any?

It is not always easy to decide whether a missing student has run away, or is missing because they have been abducted or come to harm. Care should be taken not to jump to any conclusions.

If the disappearance is suspicious

Although abduction is the most feared reason for a child's disappearance, it is the least likely reason. If the student's disappearance is considered suspicious, and it is feared that they may have been abducted or come to some other harm, contact the Guardianship Manager or Deputy Guardianship Manager *immediately*. They will then consider:

- Contacting the police
- How best to contact the parents (agent if relevant)
- Other parties who should be informed – i.e. school

It's important that all parties work closely with the authorities to determine the exact circumstances surrounding the disappearance.

Contacting Parents

The Guardianship Manager will discuss with the relevant staff the timing of this contact – it is vital that this is handled with extreme sensitivity as parents will understandably be very concerned.

Pupils who run away

In making a balanced risk assessment of the likelihood of a student having run away, it is useful to consider:

- The young person's previous history of running away
- Previous history of stress related symptoms – e.g. self harm/neglect
- Recent family breakdown
- Other significant life changes
- If the student has talked about running away
- Cultural issues and pressures

Identifying potential runaways

This is difficult, but look out for:

- Marked variations in mood
- Repeated absenteeism
- Depression: tearfulness or detachment, lack of motivation
- Difficulties concentrating – extreme tiredness
- Change in confidence levels
- Self neglect – e.g. appearing unwashed or unusually unkempt
- Social changes: e.g disassociation from old friends, withdrawal, or becoming a loner