



Guidance on the Philomena Protocol Missing Person Incident Form

Purpose

- 1) To facilitate a conversation between the carer, social worker and young person to discuss the young person's missing behaviour, the consequences of going missing, what can be done to prevent incidents being reported to the police, and to capture the voice of the child.
- 2) To identify personal and contextual risk factors to assist the carer to assess risk.
- 3) To assist the carer to identify antecedent behaviour, trigger incidents, out of character behaviour, and post-incident behaviour that justifies contacting the police immediately.
- 4) To provide guidance on what reasonable actions the carer is expected to undertake before contacting the police when the level of risk lies within the parental/ carer band of the Levels of Intervention Model.
- 5) To reduce harmful unnecessary police contact when the young person is just late home, testing the boundaries, or has just failed to inform the carer of where they were going.
- 6) To obtain quality information about the young person that will assist in locating the child, before they suffer harm, if the child subsequently goes missing.

Structure of the National Philomena Protocol Form

The Philomena Protocol form has six sections:

Section 1 - Personal Details

This section contains details of the child's identity, description, care status, key workers, and relevant details of agreed plans in any Child Protection Conference or Strategy Meeting. It also contains details of any contingencies in place to collect the child once the child is located after a missing episode, and details of any agreement on who should conduct the prevention interview.

Section 2 - Identified Risk Factors

This section contains details of known personal and contextual risk factors to assist the carer to assess whether the level of risk lies within the parental/ carer intervention band, or the police intervention band, when a child is not where they are expected to be.

Section 3 - Agreement with the Child

The social worker and carer should discuss with the child in what circumstances the child may be reported as missing to the police and how this can be avoided. This section should include the voice of the child.

Expectations around behaviour and restrictions should also be agreed with the child, including maintaining contact with the carer whilst away from home.

Section 4 - Information that may Assist to Locate the Child

This section includes details of relatives, friends, associates, and places frequented that the child may visit whilst missing. It also contains details of mobile phones and social media that may be used to facilitate contact with the child during a missing episode. It also contains details of transport normally used by the child and any financial details.

Section 5 - Parental/ Carer Intervention

This section contains guidance on what reasonable actions the carer is expected to undertake prior to contacting the police, unless there is a real, immediate risk that justifies immediate police intervention. This should not be considered a check list that must be completed in all cases. What are reasonable actions will depend on the level of risk and the urgency of seeking police assistance.

Section 6 - Police Intervention

This section contains useful information that will assist the police to assess the risk and locate the child if the circumstances justify reporting the child as missing to the police. Except in an emergency, this information should be gathered before contacting the police to ensure this information is shared with the police at the earliest opportunity.

Process

- 1) The Philomena Protocol is normally completed by the social worker or carer in consultation with the young person.
- 2) It should be completed during the planning meeting at the point of admission.
- 3) The Philomena Protocol form is a live document.
- 4) The Philomena Protocol form is sometimes described as a Child Passport that should accompany the child if they move to other accommodation. It should then be reviewed and updated to identify which pre-existing risks are still relevant to the new placement and to identify any new contextual risks.
- 5) The latest copy of the Philomena Protocol should wherever possible be saved as a digital version that can be shared with the police if the child goes missing.

Audits

It is important that Philomena Protocol forms are kept up to date, are specific to the child, and do not become tick box exercises. Local Authorities are therefore encouraged to develop an audit process to ensure forms are regularly reviewed, relevant, meaningful, and are of a high standard.