

1. If a child in care absconds or commits an offence, the Area Director responsible for the overall care of the child must be informed within 24 hours, i.e. the Community Home, foster parents or other primary care agent must ensure that this information is in the possession of the Area Director or his Standby Duty Officer within 24 hours. A telephone call, preferably immediately, is indicated.
2. It is the responsibility of the Officer-in-Charge to notify the Police immediately he is satisfied that absconding has taken place, unless the Officer-in-Charge and Area Director have agreed beforehand on a different course of action. The distinction between over-staying leave, day out, etc.; and absconding, is sometimes unclear. Assumption of absconding must be based on knowledge of the child's previous behaviour; although nightfall and, in the case of those expected to return during the evening, bedtime; are the usual points beyond which notification of suspected abscondings should occur. Upon informing the Area Director or Duty Officer, it should be established whether the residential worker intends to notify the Police of the missing person or has done so.
3. Whilst there are difficulties in retaining some absconders and consideration should be given to the variety of sanctions or consequences most likely to influence each child - these sanctions must not include the use of distinctive clothing.
4. When the child has offended, or returns after absconding, to a Community Home or foster home (and even if this is not the place they left when absconding) a note should be made on the child's file of what action was considered and what action was taken. This should include all the possibilities that were considered and rejected and the reason for the final action, even if this was in effect no action. I will expect Heads to do this for children in residential care, and Area Directors for foster children. As this is required whether the child is in a Community Home or foster home, I would be grateful if Area Directors would draw this to the attention of Social Workers visiting foster parents.
5. The Area responsible for the child has the final responsibility for collecting a child who has absconded. When the child resides in a Community Home, collection is a task usually shared between Homes and Areas and should be decided upon with the Area or its Duty Officer according to who is most appropriate. Familiarity with the child, precipitating incidents, staffing of the home and ensuring immediacy of return, should be uppermost considerations.