

## GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE FOR RETURN HOME INTERVIEWS DELIVERED REMOTELY DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Best practice is always to see a child face-to-face after they have been missing if you possibly can. If it is not possible to deliver a Return Home Interview (RHI) in person, there are a number of methods and platforms that can be used.

The most obvious method is by phone, either to a young person's number or a parent's number.

Increasingly, social media can offer creative ways of connecting too. However, all apps have different terms and conditions which should be checked out first to ensure you use a safe and age-appropriate means of connecting with the young person. You

might be able to use a parent's app or account, provided the parent/carer gives permission and the child still feels able to speak freely and confidentially.

Further information and details at <https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/apps-guide/> or <https://www.net-aware.org.uk/> or <https://nationalonlinesafety.com/>  
You should gain specific consent from a parent/carer to connect via a social media video app. You should also check your organisation's policies carefully and gain authorisation for the use of any new platform.

## TOP TIPS FOR DELIVERY OF RHI BY PHONE OR VIDEO CALLS



### FIRST TIME MISSING

Where you can, speak to Social Care or Police to get some contextual information before calling the numbers provided. Be aware that sometimes the number recorded is actually for the child or another adult, not the parent, so be prepared to respond to the unexpected. If you do get through to the child themselves, ask to speak to a parent or carer before launching into the RHI.

### CHILD KNOWN TO THE SERVICE

If you have spoken to the child on several occasions and know them well, continue to connect as you usually do. Routine and familiarity are reassuring and aid engagement.

### CONSENT

If the return interview form from the Police suggests there may be reasons why you would not contact a parent/carer to gain consent, follow your organisation's usual policy to deal with this. However, unless you have the child's personal contact number, alternative means of contact will be difficult.

## INITIAL CONTACT WITH PARENT/CARER

Speak to the parent/carer first to gain consent and explain the purpose of the RHI. Before the RHI takes place, ask them to explain to their child who you are, what you do and why you'd like to speak to them. If they have an email account, email out your service information, contact details and consent documents for information.

You don't then need to speak to the child straight away afterwards. Ask what would be the best time to ensure that you won't disrupt other activities and that a comfortable and private space is available for the child.

## THE RHI ITSELF

Call the child at the arranged time. Be reliable. If it isn't convenient anymore, reassure them that it's fine and arrange to call back later.

When you do speak to them, check they feel safe and able to talk freely. Spend some time just generally chatting first. It's difficult to establish a rapport when you can't see someone face-to-face, so you may need to spend longer on this than usual.

### Are you missing school?

#### Are you finding it boring to have to stay in?

#### How are you spending your time?

You may have to be creative and innovative here. Respond to what they say to show you're genuinely interested, don't just move on. If you know the child, it really pays to have some particular topics prepared in advance.

Our young people also tell us that they like you to give a bit of information about yourself, too, otherwise they feel you are expecting them to tell you everything – even potentially sensitive things- without them knowing anything about you. Think of what you can say that is personal but doesn't breach professional boundaries: likes and dislikes, how you felt about school as a child etc.

When the child seems more comfortable and relaxed, move gently into the RHI questions about the missing episode.

Don't push the questions too hard- you could end up alienating the child. Pay especial attention to the tone of voice, pauses, contradictions and specific words used. These can give additional information in the absence of body language and other visual clues.

Ask if there's anything else you can do to make sure the child doesn't go missing again.

After the conversation, check out your understanding of what the child is saying to make sure you have got the details right. Ask whether they would like to tell you about anything else. Tell them what they can expect next. Give them your contact details in case they want to tell you anything more at a later date.

## **FOLLOW-UP**

Speak to the parent/carer to give them a rough outline of what was discussed without compromising the child's trust. In the present circumstances, there may be very few sources of support available for families. Offer further resources and support to the parent/carer if you can. This might enable them to prevent future missing episodes.

## **PERSISTENCE**

If you don't succeed the first time, it pays to be persistent. Talking by phone isn't easy for some people. It's hard to get the right balance between persistence and pressure so don't overdo it, but sometimes young people need to know that you really do care.

# **VIDEO CALL SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- All messages and calls must be logged on the relevant case recording system.
- Only work devices and specially created work social media accounts can be used.
- You should be in a safe and confidential location. If at home, this should be in an area that is completely unidentifiable e.g. a blank wall
- You must not turn on their location settings as this can allow others to see where you are.
- Privacy settings must be at the highest setting.
- Ask the young person (and parent/carer where appropriate) if they consent to using the messaging/call service
- Ensure the young person understands boundaries between the two of you and that these messages will be shared with your line manager and uploaded on the case recording system.
- When on a 1-to-1 call, ensure the young person is in a safe space where they can talk freely.
- Explain to the child that messages won't be replied to out of office hours and you can't reply to messages instantly.
- You should not view a young person's social media story as this is personal.