



College of
Policing



Advice for safeguarding children through use of a child abduction warning notice (CAWN)

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1. Introduction

Any report of a child abduction or immediate child protection issue WILL NOT fall under this procedure. Such cases must be considered a crime in action and the relevant force policies and procedures for child protection will apply. A CAWN can be used in cases where a person is suspected of taking a child away from parental control that may lead on to committing an offence of child abduction.

It is important that police personnel are aware of the use and purpose of a child abduction warning notice (CAWN), not just those who may be working in public protection or missing persons. All personnel should know how to check if a CAWN has been issued and determine if it is appropriate for a suspect to be associating with any children they may be found to be with. The advice is aimed at safeguarding young people under the age of 16 years (or under 18 if in local authority care), who through association with others make them vulnerable to potential abductors who are over the criminal age of responsibility, which may lead to harm.

Evidence suggests that children and young persons who go missing are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation including child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) and child criminal exploitation (CCE), including County Lines. It should be noted that episodes of going missing may be an indicator of risk of harm and that a CAWN may be effective in protecting a child who goes missing frequently from an abusive adult. CAWNs can be equally effective in addressing coercive, controlling or grooming behaviour which is not specifically related to episodes of going missing.

The issuing of a CAWN holds no legal force and is intended to inform a person who has associated with children or a child that, should they continue to do so, they may commit an offence. A CAWN may be issued where:

- **no criminal offences are committed**
- the person is associating with children for whom they hold no parental responsibility
- it is a necessary and proportionate response to safeguard children or a child.

2. Aims

- To safeguard the most vulnerable children from abuse and exploitation by adults who take advantage of a child or children being away from the care and control of their parents or carers, whether it is children who are living with families or children who are placed in local authority care.
- To deny access to those who abduct children of commonly used defences that (a) they were not aware of the age of the child, (b) they thought that they would have had the consent of the person responsible for the child (reasonable excuse) and (c) they were providing a place of safety for a child suffering ill treatment. A fundamental principle is that the issuing of a CAWN is a valuable safeguarding and disruption measure.
- To provide a coordinated multi-agency response to improve safeguarding and reduce vulnerability.

3. Relevant legislation

There is no statutory or other legislative provision dealing specifically with the issue of CAWNs. Child abduction is a criminal offence however, non-compliance with a CAWN is NOT a criminal offence.

CAWNs can provide evidence to support the prosecution of other criminal offences and/or provide evidence that allows for the consideration of using links to other statutory provisions for the safeguarding of a child (eg, Sexual Risk Orders).

A CAWN is served on suspects who are believed to present a risk to children of offences being committed against them under the following legislation:

- abduction of child by other persons where the child is under 16 years of age – [section 2 Child Abduction Act 1984](#)
- abduction of children in care where the child is under 18 years AND in local authority care under [section 31\(1\) \(a\) Children Act 1989](#) – [section 49 Children Act 1989](#).

4. Types of CAWNs

There are two types of CAWNs: one for any [child under 16](#), and one for a [child under 18](#) who is in the care of the local authority under section 31 Children Act 1989. It is important that the correct CAWN is issued to maximise their effectiveness, both in evidential terms and as a safeguarding tool.

4.1 Children under 16

To issue a CAWN in these circumstances, a complainant statement from one of the parents (or whoever has full parental responsibility) is required. If parental responsibility is shared, just one statement is needed. In some circumstances where there is a lack of parental support in the process, a 'letter of concern' sent to both the parent and the suspect may be the most appropriate form of early intervention.

4.2 Children under 18 in local authority care under section 31(1) (a) Children Act 1989 (Care Order)

To issue a CAWN in these circumstances, a complainant statement from the local authority most likely to be the child's designated social worker will be required. In cases of shared parental responsibility, such as interim care orders, the statement should be taken from the majority holder as outlined in the order.

Note: This ONLY applies to children under section 31 Children Act 1989. A CAWN cannot be issued in relation to a child aged 16/17 under a voluntary section 20 Children Act 1989 Care Order, as the local authority does not have parental responsibility for them. Parental responsibility will be outlined in the order.

5. Procedure to be adopted

CAWNs are not intended as a substitute for prosecution where the evidential and public interest grounds exist. A public protection supervisory review of the available evidence should be carried out to determine whether there is a realistic prospect of a conviction.

The issuing of a CAWN should be viewed as a safeguarding measure for the child concerned, and as part of active evidence gathering for the first stages of an investigation that could be considered for an offence under the above legislation (and/or any other relevant legislation, such as the Sexual Offences Act 2003 or the Modern Slavery Act 2015), or to support applications such as:

- Sexual Harm Prevention Orders – see sections 103A–103K Sexual Offences Act 2003
- Sexual Risk Orders – see section 122A–122K Sexual Offences Act 2003
- Slavery and Trafficking Risk and Prevention Orders – see Part 2 Modern Slavery Act 2015.

5.1 Authority to issue a CAWN

If a child under the age of 16 years (under 18 years if in local authority care under a section 31 Care Order):

- Is the child subject to reports suggesting a suspect has induced or incited them to run away from the responsible person, or their behaviour and association with a suspect is giving rise to significant safeguarding concerns?
- Is or has the child been in the company of a suspect in circumstances in which it is suspected that the facts amount to an offence of child abduction, but there is insufficient evidence to justify a decision to prosecute, and safeguarding concerns still remain?

Then, the issuing of a CAWN should be considered.

A CAWN could, for example, be considered for a person associating with a child who repeatedly fails to attend school or where there are suspicions that inducements have been given to a child to encourage truancy or to reject parental/carer control. The decision to issue a CAWN should take into consideration the reliability and timeliness of any intelligence/allegations; the suspect must be assessed as posing a current safeguarding risk to the child, but there is insufficient evidence to take more formal action.

A CAWN can be issued to any relevant suspect over the age of criminal responsibility. The considerations of proportionality and necessity will form the basis of a risk assessment process. However, it is also necessary to consider the impact of a CAWN on the suspect. Allegations of suspected child abuse can have very significant impact on some suspects, particularly if they have other vulnerabilities such as mental ill health or addictions. If at any stage it becomes apparent that the issuing of a CAWN might lead to a risk of harm to the suspect (such as indication of suicide ideation), appropriate referrals and support should be sought with the urgency that the situation demands.

For a suspect under 18 years, this will need to be considered carefully to ensure that the issue of a CAWN is appropriate and that safeguarding of the child victim and also the child suspect remains the primary motivation for police action. Consideration should also be given to ensuring an intermediary or appropriate adult is present where there are concerns about capacity to ensure the suspect understands the implications of the CAWN.

The nominated authorising officer or staff member will ensure that an entry is recorded on the relevant system within force to provide provenance and the rationale that has been considered for this tactic. This advice does not intend to prescribe the rank or role of the nominated authorising officer; this is to be left to the discretion of suspect chief constables, giving due consideration to the fact that CAWNs may be required urgently and outside of office hours.

Obtain parental responsibility statement

- Any alias or 'street name' by which the child is known is to be recorded on the CAWN.
- A statement will be taken by police from the person who is responsible for lawful care of the child – this should detail:
 - where parental responsibility lies and the fact that restrictions and wishes of the parent/carer have been made clear to the child
 - the concerns the parent/carer has for the child due to the association (as this is an important factor in justifying the measure) and confirmation of the child's name, age and date of birth.
- A good quality photograph of the child should be exhibited in their statement that confirms, whether named or not, that it is the person intended to be protected by the CAWN.
- OIC to consider obtaining a copy of the birth certificate (if available) as proof of age and to exhibit this in the same way as the photograph.

Serve CAWN on the individual as soon as practicable

- Individual to be informed of parent/person acting in loco parentis wishes.
- CAWN to be read out to individual and any responses recorded.
- Good quality photograph to be shown to individual at the point of the CAWN being served which should be referenced within the statement produced by the person serving the CAWN.
- The individual is asked to confirm they understand what they are being told.
- Officers must consider any vulnerability relating to the suspect and refer for appropriate support.
- It should be emphasised to the individual that it is their responsibility to comply with the CAWN **not the child's**.
- A copy of the photograph is **not** to be left with the individual.
- Leave one copy of the CAWN with the individual and the other is retained by the police.

Person serving CAWN must make a statement detailing the process

- The person serving will provide a statement including the following:
 - that they served a copy of the CAWN (exhibited) on the individual and that they read the CAWN to the individual verbatim
 - that the individual knew the child by the name of (X)
 - that they showed the exhibited photograph of the child to the individual
 - that they told the individual it was his/her responsibility, not the child's, to ensure compliance with the CAWN
 - that the individual confirmed they understood what they were being told.

5.2 Parental responsibility to explain the CAWN to the child

The person who has lawful control of the child (ie, who has parental responsibility) should exercise parental discipline by communicating with the child and explaining that they do not have permission to be in the company of, or to communicate or associate with the suspect in any way and at any time. These restrictions must be made very clear, so the child is in no doubt of their parent/carer's wishes. It is important to explain what the CAWN means to the child and how it protects the child from risk of significant harm. This is not intended to make the child responsible for their own welfare and safety, but to make sure they know why action is being taken so that the child can contribute to their own safety.

5.3 Street names

There may be occasions where a suspect of activities that might make them susceptible to the issue of a CAWN knows the child by a different name or street name. In such cases both the above statement (from the person with parental responsibility) and the CAWN should refer to the name(s) by which the child is known by the suspect.

In some cases, it may be necessary to withhold the 'true' name of the child from the statement and CAWN, for example, if the child has previously used an alias to conceal their identity from the suspect concerned. In these cases, if a prosecution is subsequently undertaken, appropriate statements will be needed to confirm that child X (true name) is the child known to the suspect as child Y (alias) and CPS reviewing prosecutors will need to consider the issue when disclosing evidential statements to the defence.

5.4 Photographs

The photograph should be exhibited in the statement by the person having parental responsibility.

For the purposes of issuing an effective CAWN, the key is that the suspect is clear as to which child is being referred to, whatever name is being used by the child. Therefore, photographs are important. A copy of the photograph is not to be left with the suspect.

The seizure, retention and storage of photographs of the child concerned should follow force policy and national guidance.

5.5 Serving the CAWN

The CAWN will be served on the suspect in two copies. One copy will be left with them and the second will be retained by the police and exhibited to assist with continuity of evidence. The use of body-worn video should be considered, where appropriate, when serving the CAWN. If any issues are later raised as to interpretation or understanding of the CAWN by a suspect, then the use of body-worn video would assist any subsequent evidence assessment.

5.6 Serving the CAWN using an intermediary

If the suspect has a learning disability, is mentally vulnerable, deaf or visually impaired, or cannot read, the person serving the CAWN should invite them to nominate an intermediary or appropriate adult to help check the documentation with their consent. If there is reason to believe that the suspect does not understand English sufficiently, then an interpreter should translate the CAWN into the appropriate language when the notice is served. The interpreter should provide a statement and exhibit the translated copy of the CAWN.

5.7 More than one suspect

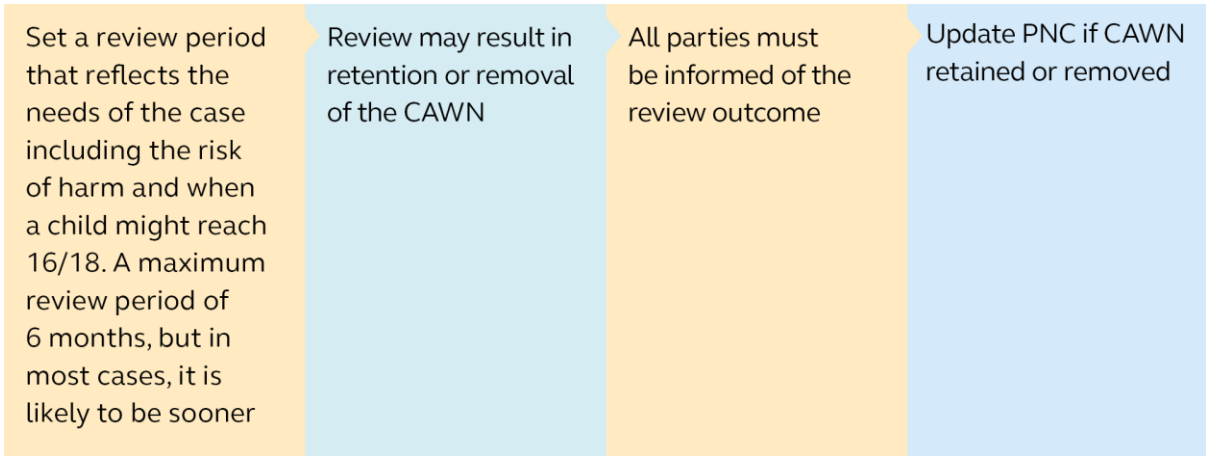
If a child is believed to be associating with more than one suspect, a statement of parental responsibility is required for each. A separate CAWN will need to be served on each suspect for each child concerned.

5.8 Recording of CAWNs

All police personnel should be able to determine if a person has been issued with a CAWN using local procedures. Please see the flow diagram on page 12 for recording of CAWNs.

5.9 Review

Regular review dates should be set by the nominated person in force who manages the CAWNs. At this point, a full review of intelligence concerning the child and the suspect will be conducted. The review should be conducted with the relevant nominated officer **who will authorise its removal or retention in line with the authorised professional practice on management of police information**. In cases of removal, the PNC should be updated and the CAWN removed.



Any period of imprisonment of the suspect during the lifetime of the CAWN should prompt a review and upon release a decision made to retain or remove. Whatever the decision, the above steps should be followed in terms of informing the suspect and recording the service of the CAWN, its retention or removal, and justification for the action being taken.

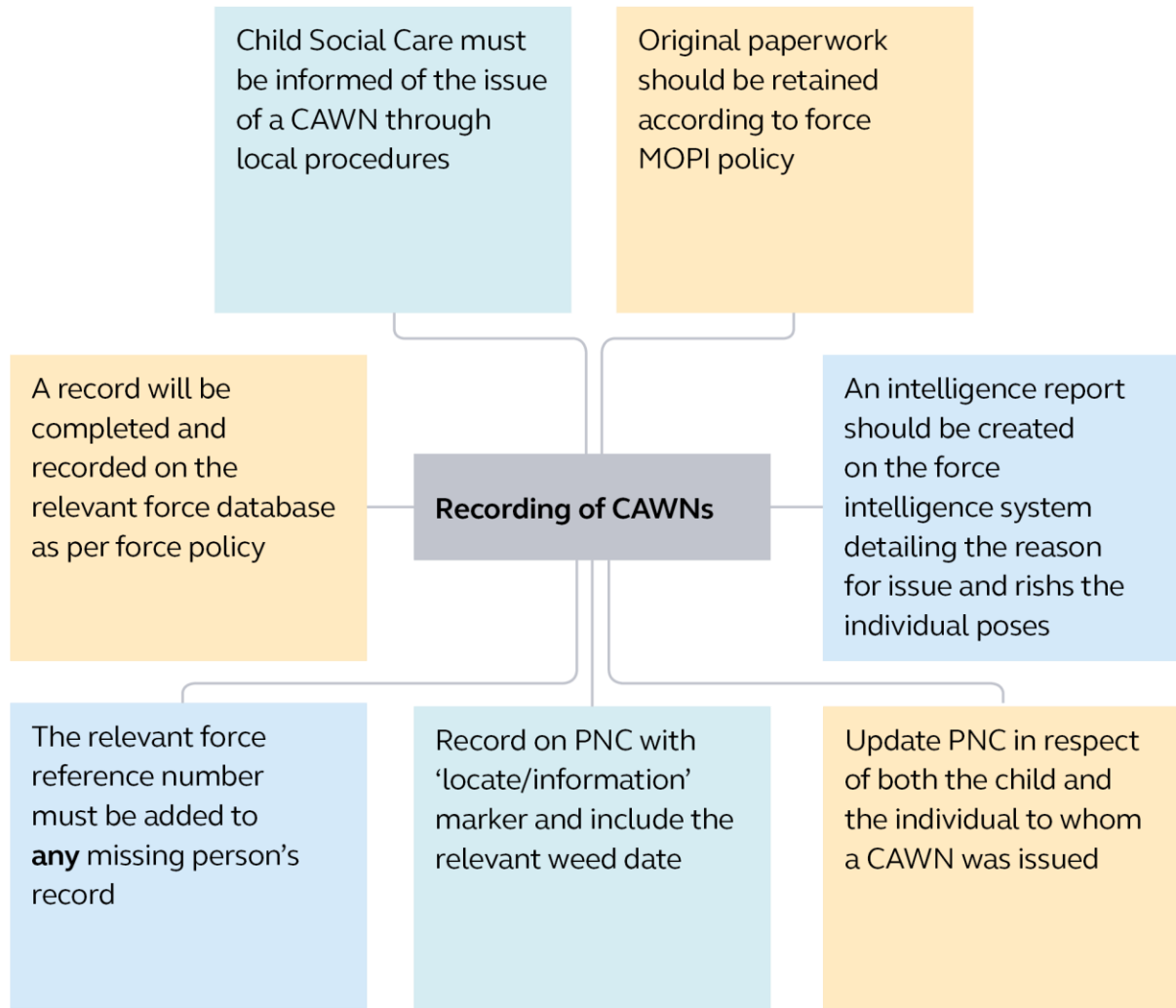
5.10 Retention and disclosure

CAWNs should be recorded on local intelligence systems and the PNC, and retained in accordance with [authorised professional practice on management of police information](#). The retention period for a CAWN should be proportionate to the risk to the child and issues raised by the alleged behaviour. This will not simply be a matter of seriousness, but also the potential for future incidents and escalation.

When a CAWN has been created on an intelligence system, a review process should be scheduled, no later than six months from date of issue. If the behaviour has stopped, it should not be necessary to retain the CAWN record on the PNC. The suspect will be informed accordingly.

Guidance on disclosing information is contained in [authorised professional practice on information management](#). The issue of a CAWN will not appear on a basic Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. Disclosure of a CAWN (as non-conviction information) through an enhanced DBS check will be based on the checks and balances contained within the scheme (at the discretion of the chief officer), with the suspect having the ability to make representations as to why it should not be disclosed. Decisions to share information relating to CAWNs under the Common Law Police Disclosure Scheme will rest with force chief officers.

5.11 Flow diagram for recording of CAWNs



6. Action following non-compliance with a CAWN

Note: The suspect cannot be arrested for non-compliance with the CAWN as there is no such criminal offence. ANY SUBSEQUENT ARREST MUST BE FOR A SUBSTANTIVE OFFENCE.

6.1 Arrest or voluntary attendance

If there is evidence that the terms of the CAWN have not been complied with – for example, the suspect has been seen with the child, or the child is subsequently reported missing and is located with the suspect – then consider arrest of the suspect for a substantive child abduction offence or make arrangements for them to voluntarily attend a police station. Once at the police station an interview should be conducted relating to a suspected offence under the relevant legislation (such as [section 2 Child Abduction Act 1984](#) or [section 49 Children Act 1989](#)) or under any other relevant legislation, if it appears that other offences may have also been committed.

6.2 Interviews

The suspect should be invited to give their account of the circumstances and explain their association with the child. The key evidential points must then be considered to prove that the suspect was aware of the child's age and identity, and that they had been explicitly informed that those with parental responsibility did not want the child to associate with the suspect.

6.3 Follow-up statement from person with lawful authority

At the point of an offence being suspected, a follow-up statement should be taken from the parent/carer to confirm that the circumstances had not changed since they made their original statement, ie, that the same concerns for the child's welfare remained, that the restrictions had not been changed, and that no permission or consent had been given to the suspect regarding contact.

6.4 Decision to prosecute

Any decision to prosecute will be subject to the Statutory Charging Scheme. Early investigative advice may be sought from the CPS at any stage of an investigation and should be considered. It is advisable that a full briefing is conducted with the relevant evidential review officer, prior to CPS submission, due to the complexities of the legislation.

6.5 Alternative options where there is insufficient evidence to prosecute

Where insufficient evidence is available to prosecute a suspect for a substantive offence, consideration should be given to what other legislative provisions may be available to investigators to safeguard the child. Non-compliance with a CAWN could provide evidence for the consideration of using other statutory instruments for the safeguarding of a child (eg, Sexual Risk Orders).

Appendix – CAWN forms

OFFICIAL

Advice for safeguarding children through use of a child abduction warning notice (CAWN)

Child Abduction Warning Notice – Child under 18 in local authority care section 31(1)(a) Children Act 1989 (Care Order)

To:			
Name:			
Address:		Postcode:	
Date of birth:			
Regarding:			
Name of child:			
Age of child:		Name of responsible person:	
Date of birth:		Local authority/police department:	
Photograph of child exhibit reference:			

You are being served with a Child Abduction Warning Notice because there is evidence that you are associating with a child; and the person/people with parental responsibility for this child have instructed the child not to associate with you. If you continue to associate with this child you may be considered as having taken the child out of the parental control of their parent or carer. This may be considered as child abduction in certain circumstances. [You have been shown a photograph of the child and the exhibit number is detailed above.]

You shall be guilty of an offence under section 49 of the Children Act 1989 if, knowingly and without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, you:

- take the child** away from the responsible person;
- keep the child** away from the responsible person; or
- induce, assist or incite the child** to run away or stay away from the responsible person.

This means that you **should not**:

- allow, cause or induce the child to enter or stay at any address at which you are present, including any workplace or business premises;**
- allow, cause or induce the child to enter or travel in any vehicle you own or are travelling in; or**
- meet with the child or allow them to remain in your presence, or cause or induce them to do so.**

These are examples only and not an exhaustive list.

If the child approaches you, you should **immediately refuse** to allow them to enter the premises, property or vehicle you are in, and ask the child to leave. If the child refuses to leave you should contact the police on 101.

A person guilty of an offence under section 49 of the Children Act 1989 shall be liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months, or to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale, or to both.

This Child Abduction Warning Notice will be subject to regular reviews, not later than six months from the date of issue. You will be informed when the notice has been removed from police indices.

Received by:			
Name:		Date:	
Signed:		Time:	
Served by:			
Name:		Date:	
Signed:		Time:	
Authorised by:			
Name:		Date:	
Signed:		Time:	

OFFICIAL

Advice for safeguarding children through use of a child abduction warning notice (CAWN)

Child Abduction Warning Notice – Child under 16

To:			
Name:			
Address:		Postcode:	
Date of birth:			
Regarding:			
Name of child:			
Age of child:		Name of authorising adult:	
Date of birth:		Relationship to child:	
Photograph of child exhibit reference:			

You are being served with a Child Abduction Warning Notice because there is evidence that you are associating with a child; and the person/people with parental responsibility for this child have instructed the child not to associate with you. If you continue to associate with this child you may be considered as having taken the child out of the parental control of their parent or carer. This may be considered as child abduction in certain circumstances. [You have been shown a photograph of the child and the exhibit number is detailed above.]

You may commit an offence under section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984 if you, without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, **take or detain** the child:

- so as to **remove them** from the lawful control of any person having lawful control of the child; or
- so as to **keep them out** of the lawful control of any person entitled to lawful control of the child.

This means that you **should not**:

- allow, cause or induce the child to enter or stay at any address at which you are present, including any workplace or business premises;
- allow, cause or induce the child to enter or travel in any vehicle you own or are travelling in; or
- meet with the child or allow them to remain in your presence, or cause or induce them to do so.

These are examples only and not an exhaustive list.

If the child approaches you, you will **immediately refuse** to allow them to enter the premises, property or vehicle you are in, and ask the child to leave. If the child refuses to leave you should contact the police on 101. If you subsequently fail to comply with any of these conditions, you may be arrested for **Child Abduction**.

If you are found guilty of an offence under section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984 you shall be liable:

- on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, or to both such imprisonment and fine
- on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding seven years.

This Child Abduction Warning Notice will be subject to regular reviews, not later than six months from the date of issue. You will be informed when the notice has been removed from police indices.

Received by:			
Name:		Date:	
Signed:		Time:	
Served by:			
Name:		Date:	
Signed:		Time:	
Authorised by:			
Name:		Date:	
Signed:		Time:	