

Advice relating to minors returning from Syria

This document has been produced in order to supplement the original advice for local authorities, “Safeguarding Children returning to the UK from Syria”, that was produced in 2017. Since this was published, a small number of British children have left Syria and returned to the UK via third countries. This advice has been created in light of the experiences practitioners have had in supporting minors returning from Syria. Views of practitioners at a local level have been intrinsic in the creation of this document.¹

Children returning from Syria are likely to have been exposed to the conflict, may have experienced severe trauma, and in some circumstances pose national security concerns that need to be carefully managed. A range of voluntary specialised support, an element of which is directly funded by the Home Office, can be offered to address the range of related wellbeing concerns.

The intention of this advice is to act as a collection of practical considerations to help local authorities prepare for the arrival of a minor returning from Syria, and assist the practitioner in identifying how best the minor could be supported in the immediate and longer term.

This document is not statutory guidance and is not intended to replace or take precedence over any existing legal framework.

When considering how a minor is assessed and supported on their return, practitioners should always be aware of their responsibilities and the need to take action if the child’s circumstances meet the tests in the relevant Acts as listed below.

The practitioner’s responsibilities under the relevant legislation must **always** take precedence over this advice document, for example there are relevant provisions in The Children Act 1989, The Children Act 2004, The Children and Young Persons Act 2008, The Care Standards Act 2000 and The Mental Health Act 2007 and Regulations made under those Acts. You should also refer to the existing advice for local authorities on safeguarding children returning to the UK from Syria,² as well as the statutory

¹ This includes; Social workers, legal advisors, Prevent leads, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Home Office, Refugee resettlement leads, MASH practitioners, Prevent Education Officers, practitioners experienced in unaccompanied minors and the Association of Directors of Children’s services.

² https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/DfE_safeguarding_children_returning_UK_from_Syria_advice_to_LAs.pdf

guidance “Working Together to Keep Children Safe”, when considering the following advice.³

It is advised that if there are known families in the Syria conflict area who previously resided in your Local Authority, consideration should be given to planning and preparing for their potential arrival, even if you have not been notified of their impending return.

Practical considerations to make when notified of a minor returning from Syria

When notified of a returning minor, who may or may not be accompanied by family members, it is suggested that the management process is divided into two strands;

(1) steps to take when notified of a returning minor,

(2) actions to be considered when the minor(s) arrive and steps to be considered for the long term support of the minor.

The information below is not intended as a checklist, but rather a list of considerations that a practitioner may wish to make when supporting a minor(s) and their family on their return.

(1) Steps to be considered when first notified of returning minor(s)

A. Representatives to be considered for the planning meeting.

The first step is to consider convening a planning meeting at the point of notification, perhaps utilising and/or expanding on local existing safeguarding practices. This will enable a multi-agency plan to be generated in order to support the minor(s) upon their return, ensuring all relevant partners are aware and informed. The following, although not exhaustive, is a list of suggested attendees who could provide useful input to the meeting. There may also be local services that could be of benefit;

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779401/Working_Together_to_Safeguard-Children.pdf

- (i) Children's services representative.
- (ii) Health representative.
- (iii) Community Safety representative / Local authority (LA) Prevent lead.
- (iv) Education Services representative, and representatives from the sector if appropriate.
- (v) Tavistock⁴ returning families unit - early engagement with Tavistock is considered essential.
- (vi) Local authority legal representative.
- (vii) Counter terrorism policing representative.
- (viii) Local policing representative.
- (ix) Other local bespoke services that the practitioner may feel will be of benefit.
- (x) Third sector organisations, for example Barnardo's.

At the planning meeting, it is suggested that the points below, again not an exhaustive list, are considered in order to prepare for the arrival of the minor(s) and accompanying family/adults;

Points to be considered at the planning meeting;

A. Individual Details;

- (a.i) **Full biographical details** of the minor, e.g. age, sex, family make-up.
- (a.ii) **Legal Status.** For example, who currently holds parental responsibility?
- (a.iii) **Existing LA knowledge.** Is there a previous family footprint with local services?
- (a.iv) **Previous address** (if applicable) in the UK.

⁴ Tavistock Returning families Unit provides support to Local Authorities with families and minors returning from Syria. This is centrally funded.

(a.v) **Official documentation.** What official documentation does the minor have? (E.g. identity documents, such as passports and birth certificates).

B. Logistical considerations for arrival;

(b.i) **Where** is the expected port of entry? Who are the contacts within the port LA (if different to the onward destination)?

(b.ii) **Who will meet the minor on arrival?** The onward destination LA could consider deploying a social worker to the port of arrival, in order to assist in building a rapport with the minor(s)/family.

(b.iii) **Safeguarding and supervision.** Be aware that on arrival the child may be separated from accompanying family members by counter terrorism police officers. The minor(s) may also be detained by counter terrorism police who may conduct a schedule 7 examination⁵. If the minor is detained there may be a request for a social worker to be present during the examination.

(b.iv) **Emergency housing.** Is emergency accommodation needed for the minor(s) and / or family members?

C. Health and Wellbeing Needs (Consider in line with existing legislation and guidance in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children')⁶

(c.i) **Current known physical and mental health** of the minor.

(c.ii) **National Security concerns.** Does the minor, or the individual(s) accompanying them pose any known national security risk? Question to be posed to counter terrorism policing. What are the implications for arrival?

⁵ <https://www.npcc.police.uk/schedule7.aspx>

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779401/Working_Together_to_Safeguard-Children.pdf

(c.iii) **Statutory child protection action.** Following the initial assessment, consider if there is a need to take statutory child protection action to ensure minor(s) are best supported or protected.

(c.iv) **Language requirements,** including the potential need for interpreting and translation services.

(c.v) **Social and community networks:** What is the degree of the minor's previous experience in the UK? If it is limited, what are the potential implications?

D. Services Implications;

(d.i) **Physical and mental health.** How will a physical and mental health assessment be commissioned? What existing medical records are available from the process of repatriation?

(d.ii) **Housing and education needs.** What is the anticipated impact on local services such as housing and schools? How will this be managed?

(d.iii) **Coordination and ownership.** Who will be responsible for the individual risk and need strands, and who will be the senior responsible officer responsible for governance? How often will the group meet to discuss progress?

(d.iv) **Legal considerations.** Existing legal framework to be at the forefront when considering how the minor(s) will be supported, for example, The Children Act 1989, The Children Act 2004, The Children and Young Persons Act 2008, The Care Standards Act 2000 and The Mental Health Act 2007. Further information on this can be accessed [here](#).⁷

E. Strategic considerations;

(e.i) **Councillors.** Have the relevant elected representatives in the Local Authority/Council been informed/updated?

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/722307/Working_Together_to_Safeguard_Children_Statutory_framework.pdf

(e.ii) **Communications/media handling.** Have the Local Authority/ Council communications team been briefed in order that a communications strategy can be considered, given that these cases can attract media attention?

(e.iii) **Community impact.** Consider the impact on the local community where the minor was prior to going to Syria and the community where they are likely to be placed. Consider a community impact assessment.

(2) Steps to be considered when the minor(s) have arrived in the UK, including long-term management.

F. Health and Wellbeing following arrival;

The individual responsible for managing and supporting the minor(s) and their family should consider regularly revisiting the risk/needs assessment that was developed at the initial planning meeting, particularly in light of the full assessment conducted following arrival.

Ensure that those who are responsible for elements of the management plan are fully aware of any changes in circumstances, and that information is being shared effectively between agencies.

(f.i) **Arrests and potential custodial sentences.** Consider the longer term implications of parents or guardians taken into custody, and how parental responsibility will be managed upon anticipated release.

(f.ii) **Physical and mental health assessment outcomes.** Have any new additional needs arisen? Consider the long-term impact of physical or mental trauma, which may not be immediately visible upon arrival. Consider how services in the future will be able to access relevant information regarding the minor's background and assessed vulnerabilities, and how this information is managed and shared in a sensitive and compliant manner.

(f.ii) **Education requirements.** Consider a full assessment of the minor's educational needs, including the potential for English as an additional language support or an education, health and care plan. Consider what

information can and should be shared with the education institution's safeguarding lead.

(f.iii) **Wider vulnerability assessments.** Consider other safeguarding concerns, such as vulnerability to child criminal and sexual exploitation, as well as any ongoing concerns regarding vulnerability of the minor to being drawn into terrorism and whether any action needs to be taken under the Children Act 1989. Consider if there are ways to ensure relevant information should or will be available to practitioners if these concerns are relevant or arise in the future.

(f.iv) **Access to official documentation.** Confirm with the Tavistock Returning Families unit that steps are being taken to obtain identification documents, as it is likely that the minor(s) and family members will have no identification documents. These documents will be vital in obtaining access to services such as housing, schooling and GP services.

Useful contacts

Home Office Syria Team	DDCED.SPOE@education.gov.uk
Department for Education	DDCED.SPOE@education.gov.uk
FCO	consular.childrenspolicyofficer@fco.gov.uk
National CT Policing	xt.thematicdesk@westyorkshire.pnn.police.uk