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BROMLEY
SAFEGUARDING
CHILDREN
BOARD

Bromley's Procedure on Safeguarding Children Missing from Home/Care

Review in 2011

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Acknowledgement

This procedure has been adapted by Bromley Safeguarding Children Board from the London Board's, Supplementary Procedure.

The London Board thanks the London Borough of Croydon, the Metropolitan Police and St Christopher's Fellowship for their contribution to developing this procedure

.This Procedure is based on the Government's Young Runaways Action Plan (DCSF June 2008) and DCSF Revised Statutory Guidance from 2009

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1. Introduction

This Procedure is designed to support an effective collaborative safeguarding response from all agencies involved when a child goes missing. It aims to provide guidance for assessing both the risk of the child going missing and the risk to the child when they are missing. The Procedure describes appropriate staff/agency actions to locate the child, to effect their return and to identify the issues which caused, and may continue to cause, the child to go missing.

This procedure should be used in conjunction with the London Child Protection Procedures, LSCB 2007.

2. Principles

The following principles should be adopted by all agencies in relation to identifying and locating children who go missing:

- The safety and welfare of the child is paramount
- Locating and returning the child to a safe environment is the main objective
- Child Protection Procedures will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child who is missing may be at risk of significant harm
- Notification to the Police will only take place following a Risk Assessment and in clearly defined circumstances as set out in this Procedure
- The Police will act on **any** report of a child missing on the understanding that a Risk Assessment has been completed.
- Every '**missing**' child who returns will be interviewed by someone other than the direct carer.
- Where the child is known to the Children's Social Care or meets the criteria for referral to the Children's Social Care, the Local Authority will ensure that there is a range of service options to address the child's needs when they return.

3. Definitions & Other Procedures

Missing:

For the purpose of this Procedure a child (i.e. a young person under the age of 18 years) is to be considered '**missing**' if their whereabouts are unknown, whatever the circumstances of their disappearance. They will be considered missing until they are located and their well-being or otherwise is established.

The Children's Society *Still Running* survey estimates that around 100,000 young people under the age of 16 run away from home or care each year across the UK. Many stay with friends or family members, but there are some who have no access to these networks of support and end up in harmful situations. Only a quarter of children who run away from home every year are reported as missing (SEU, 2002). The majority of children who run away do so to avoid their home circumstances, they typically see themselves as 'runaways' rather than 'missing' children. In terms of the steps which need to be taken to locate these children and safeguard their welfare, this Procedure includes them as 'missing' children.

Unauthorised Absence:

This category is critical to the clarification of roles of the Police and Children's Social Care. Some children absent themselves from home or care for a short period and then return, often their whereabouts are known or may be quickly established through contact with

family or friends or are unknown but the children are not considered at risk. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed as a boundary testing activity which is well within the range of normal teenage behaviour. These children have taken '*unauthorised absence*', and would not usually come within the definition of '*missing*' for this Procedure. If a child's whereabouts are known then they cannot be 'missing'. Unauthorised absences must be carefully monitored as the child may subsequently go missing.

3.1. The London Child Protection Procedures

The *London Child Protection Procedures* provide information which may help staff to recognise and/or manage circumstances in which children who are missing may be experiencing harm or be at risk of harm (See *London Child Protection Procedures Sections 4 and 9*). This includes: children subject to fabricated or induced illness or female genital mutilation; abuse by children, abduction by family or others, domestic violence, missing children and families, sexually exploited children, trafficked children and asylum seeking children.

For several of these circumstances there are supplementary, detailed London multi-agency procedures:

- Safeguarding Children Missing from School, *London Board 2006*
- Safeguarding Trafficked and Exploited Children, *London Board 2006*
- Safeguarding Children Abused through Sexual Exploitation, *London Board 2006*

These, and the *London Procedures* can be accessed on the website: <http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/procedures/>

3.2. Children Missing from School

Children who are missing from school may also be missing from care or home and at risk. Education staff should follow the *London Guidance on Safeguarding Children Missing from School (London Board 2006)*.

If a member of Education staff becomes aware that a child may be missing, they should try to establish with the parents or carers, what has happened. If this is not possible, or the child is missing, the Designated Safeguarding Children Teacher should, together with the class teacher, assess the child's vulnerability, as per the *Guidance on Safeguarding Children Missing from School, London Board 2006*) or by completing the Risk Assessment (See *Appendix 3 of this Procedure*).

Based on the assessment they may complete the Police Referral Form (See *Appendix 4*) and refer the child to the Police Missing Persons Unit (See *Section 5 below for the definition of missing*).

When it is established that a child is missing education staff must update the S2S website (School to School) containing Common Transfer Files (CTFs) of pupils where the destination (or next) school of the pupil is not known to the school the pupil is leaving.

If it comes to the notice of a member of Education staff that a child who was missing, has returned, that member of staff should establish whether Police or Children's Social Services were involved in returning the child to their home and if not, inform Police and/ or Children's Social Services.

Children who go missing frequently place themselves at risk and the child's safety must be prioritised over any requests to keep information confidential.

3.3. Asylum Seeking Children

There are complex issues facing Asylum Seeking children. Information about some children's whereabouts is not always maintained due to the transient nature of their accommodation arrangements. Agencies must however, be alert to the fact that some children are trafficked into, within and out of the UK for custom related reasons, to be abused and exploited for commercial gain, including through sex, for domestic servitude etc. (*See Safeguarding Trafficked and Exploited Children, London Board 2006 & Safeguarding Children Abused through Sexual Exploitation, London Board 2006*).

The Local Authority, Police and other agency response to an Asylum Seeking child going missing should be exactly the same as for all other children, whether they are Looked After or living in the community.

4. Children at Risk – Prevention & Planning

4.1. Looked After Children

Research shows that children looked after by the Local Authority are over-represented in the cohort of children who go missing.

Prior to each placement of child Children's Social Care staff (placing Social Workers, Residential Workers and Foster Carers), must assess the risks of the child absencing him/herself. The points set out in 4.3 below should be considered and be recorded in the Placement Plan.

4.2. Children who go missing from home

Children living in the community are often well known to Accident & Emergency Services, Schools and other Education Establishments or the Youth Service. Where a parent or staff member has concerns that a child may go missing, the level of concern and support plan for the child should be based on the points set out below.

4.3. Social Care Pre-incident Risk Assessment

Where there is concern that a child may go missing from Care or home, the Social Care Pre-incident Risk Assessment in *Appendix 2* should be used to assess:

- Child's view on current placement/stability of their relationships at home
- Level of supervision/support that care staff propose to provide for the child
- The degree of risk to the child if they go missing – using the Social Care Risk Assessment Record in *Appendix 3*
- The views of parents/carers on their child's needs and the action that needs to be taken if their child is missing
- Consideration of any external influences which may result in a child's removal without consent (*See also Safeguarding Trafficked and Exploited Children, London Board 2006*)

It should be explained to the child what actions will be taken if he/she absents him/herself without permission. Where considered appropriate, the child should be given a copy of this pre-incident assessment. The Social Care Pre-incident Risk Assessment should be recorded on the child's file in all agencies working with the child.

Wherever possible staff should enhance their ability to make a Social Care Pre-incident Risk Assessment by acquainting themselves with the current body of knowledge about children

who go missing (See Appendix 1: Current Research Findings in Relation to Children Going Missing from Care and Home).

It is the responsibility of Bromley's Children's Commissioning team to ensure that the Pre-incident Risk Assessment is completed for children in care, when a placement is approved and with every change of placement.

4.4. Information Sharing Form

Where the Risk Assessment indicates that there is a high risk of a child going missing, it is good practice for residential unit Staff/Foster Carers to prepare an Information Sharing Form containing the information the police and other agencies will need to locate the child if they do go missing (See Appendix 4 for the Looked After Child Information Sharing Form). This form should always be provided to the Police at the time of reporting a Looked After Child missing.

4.5 Significance of Children Missing from Home/ Care

There is an expectation that parents/ guardians will report their child/ young person is missing. Failure to do so may be raised as a child protection issue and the London Child Protection Procedures must be followed.

In responding to and managing an individual child/ young person's absence from home/Care, agencies should be alert to the potential significance of repeat missing episodes by a child. Often children who repeatedly go missing are viewed as 'a problem' and insufficient consideration is given to the reason why they keep absenting themselves (See *Reasons for Going Missing in Appendix 1*).

4.6 Harboursing

In order to safeguard children who repeatedly go missing and are found to be with the same person. The police may issue a written warning (See Appendix 11a 11b) to any persons considered to be harboursing a young person who has run away. Repeated incidents may lead to their arrest and prosecution under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984.

5. Responding to an Incident

Summary of Response Steps:

- 1) Decide whether the child is '*missing*'
- 2) Complete the Social Care Risk Assessment Record
- 3) Notify the Police as soon as possible

5.1 Category of Absence

Proper consideration needs to be given to whether the child's circumstances are an '**unauthorised absence**', or whether he/she is '**missing**'.

The agency first alerted to the child's absence should (together with the child's parents, if the child lives at home), decide whether the child is having an '**unauthorised absence**', or whether he/she is '**missing**'. In order to inform this judgement the agency should (together with the child's parents, as appropriate), attempt to locate the child and encourage him/her to return as quickly and safely as possible, ensuring he/she is treated positively on return.

5.2 The Social Care Risk Assessment Record

The Social Care Risk Assessment Record in Appendix 3 should be completed immediately on every occasion a child is '**missing**' (even if it has previously been completed as part of a Social Care Pre-incident Risk Assessment).

Practitioners should use their professional judgement when carrying out the risk assessment and should take into consideration any factors, which might have a bearing on the level of risk to the child or to others.

The Risk Assessment is an aid to action, and to information sharing and recording:

Aid to action: As an action tool the purpose of the Risk Assessment is to inform single and multi-agency agency decision-making and planning to locate a '**missing**' child. The Risk Assessment provides an indication of:

- The urgency of inquiries
- Areas of inquiry e.g. where drugs are available or locations and networks that certain adults frequent, country of origin or country children are trafficked on to etc
- Type of specialist knowledge that might be needed
- The supervision that may be required
- Agencies who may be first alerted e.g. local Accident & Emergency services

Aid for information sharing and recording: At the time that a child goes '**missing**' the completed Risk Assessment should be shared with all agencies working with the child and kept on the child's file in each agency. In cases where new information becomes available and/or the child remains absent for a protracted period, the risks should be re-assessed led by the agency which has current or most recent responsibility for the child. The new risk assessment should be shared with the agencies and kept on the child's file in each agency. The most recently completed Risk Assessment should remain on the child's file in all agencies working with the child.

5.3 Notifying the Police

The Police should be notified as soon as possible (See section 7.1 below & Appendix 4), together with the information from the completed Risk Assessment. The Police will conduct an investigation into all reports of '**missing**' children.

5.4 Working with the Police

Police are the lead agency for the investigation of missing children. If the child is a Looked After Child then Children's Social Services are responsible for children in their care at all times and this responsibility is not absolved when a child is reported missing to the Police.

Appropriate application of the risk assessment process by other agencies should allow the Police to be confident that all children reported to them as '**missing**' fit the agreed criteria. Referring professionals should supply the Police with a copy of the Social Care Risk Assessment Record.

Relevant agencies must provide sufficient information to the Police to enable all the risk factors to be considered. Following this a full investigation should be conducted by the Police.

Until such time as a child is no longer missing, regular liaison and communication should take place between the Police and referring/involved agencies, including the Social Worker and management of the placing Authority, for a Looked After Child.

5.5 Information to be Made Available

When reporting a missing child to Police (or other agencies, as appropriate), the person making the referral should complete and provide to the Police the Information Sharing Form in *Appendix 4*. The minimum information should be:

- A description of the child (name, date of birth, physical appearance). Recent photograph, if possible
- When the child was last seen and with whom
- Family addresses
- Known acquaintances
- The basis of the risk assessment and classification of High Risk
- The name and address of the child's GP and Dentist

The Police will want to search the address at which the missing child was last seen, this should be negotiated so as to cause minimum disruption to the child's family home/residential unit/foster carer's home.

If the Police or other referring agency additionally believe that the circumstances surrounding the child's going missing put the child at risk of significant harm, then they should discuss these concerns with Children's Social Care. Such situations might include:

- If the parents appear to show a lack of concern or inappropriately failed to report their child missing.
- Where a child under five years has a missing from home episode, Police and other practitioners should consider whether the level of supervision afforded to the child is adequate.
- Where a child under ten years has a missing from home episode and it is suspected that parental issues (eg substance abuse, domestic violence) may have been a factor
- Repeated (more than three within 28 days) missing from home episodes, especially where there appears to be a lack of appropriate parental response
- Where a child or young person is vulnerable (e.g. has a learning disability, physical disability, history of self-harm, has a medical condition that makes them vulnerable)
- Where a child runs away to be at an address or with adults who give cause for concern
- Where there are concerns around possible sexual exploitation

In these cases, Children's Social Care should call a strategy discussion as soon as possible and within no more than seven days, involving representatives from all relevant agencies including the Police Missing Persons Unit and Child Abuse Investigation Team. In cases, where a child is not known to social care and there are repeated missing incidents (three times in 28 days) Children's Social Care will initiate an Initial Assessment.

If the child is returned within 24 hours but the Police believe any of these or other concerning circumstances might be an issue, they should complete a Common Assessment Framework Form or make a referral to Children's Social Care even after the child is returned home.

5.6 Children for whom there is a Child Protection Plan¹ who go Missing

Children who have a Child Protection Plan or who are subject to a Section 47 enquiry, need additional action to that required for other children. This includes:

- Informing the Local Authority Custodian of the Child Protection Register or equivalent, and the local Primary Care Trust's Designated Nurse
- Ensuring that a Strategy discussion is arranged – as soon as practicable and in any event within 7 days, the social worker should arrange a strategy discussion if the child is still missing. Representatives from both the Police Missing Persons Unit and Child Abuse Investigation Team should attend the strategy discussion, as well as other practitioners involved with the child. (See Sections 5 to 8 of the London Child Protection Procedures)
- Where a child with a Protection Plan has gone missing with/without their family, Children's Social Care must implement the London Notification of Missing Children/Persons Procedure attached as *Appendix 8*

5.7 Looked After Children going Missing

Whoever discovers that a child is absent without permission from a residential unit or foster home should immediately inform the Residential Unit Manager/Shift Leader/Supervising Social Worker on duty.

The residential unit Manager/Shift Leader/Foster Carer should conduct the Risk Assessment. Where, initially, the assessment indicates that the child's circumstances are an '**unauthorised absence**', they should take all reasonable and practical steps, which a good parent would take, to secure the safe and speedy return of the child e.g. visiting addresses where the child may be or telephoning around known friends.

Children who fall within the category of '**unauthorised absence**' must be the subject of continuous risk assessment whilst they remain absent. During their absence circumstances may change and the Social Worker/Emergency Duty Team and the Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer need to be in a position to respond accordingly. The child's parents must be kept informed.

Any unauthorised absence in excess of 48 hours should be reported to the Group Manager/Service Manager/placing Authority by the Residential Unit Manager or Supervising Social Worker.

Joint consideration should be given to adopting a finite time limit within which any child may stay in the '**unauthorised absence**' category, after which they would be deemed '**missing**'. Initial completion or updating of the Social Care Risk Assessment Record in *Appendix 3* should inform this decision.

If there are thought to be specific issues of safety or public order difficulties involved in returning the child, then action should be agreed between the Police, the Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer and the Social Worker/Emergency Duty Team. (If the Local Authority think they know where a looked after child is, they should actively consider approaching the courts for a Recovery Order). These circumstances would not necessarily mean the child should be categorised as '**missing**'.

¹ Children who, prior to 2006, would have on the Child Protection Register

5.8 Further Action

In addition to the notification of absence specified above, the following action should be taken:

- In all cases where a child is '**missing**' , the child's parents should be informed
- In all cases where a child is '**missing**', a Police investigation will be initiated. Children's Social Care must convene a Strategy discussion on the first available working day
- In high risk cases the Manager of the Residential Unit should notify the registration authority (DCSF) and Social Workers should inform the Local Authority Child Protection Lead.

5.9 Assessment of Need

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is a helpful tool for assessing children's needs. There is no need to assess every child using the CAF format. However a CAF is particularly useful if the child's needs are not immediately obvious or if the child has multiple needs. In these cases a CAF can help to identify other services that should be involved.

5.10 National Missing Person's Helpline

Local Authorities in England and Scotland together fund the Helpline's Missing from Care Team which provides a specialist service to Children's Social Care when any of their 'looked after' children go missing, including asylum seeking children. This working arrangement with local authorities forms the basis of an information sharing agreement with Social Care. [The Missing from Care Team can be contacted on 020 8392 4527.](#)

The National Missing Persons Helpline (NMPH) is dedicated to helping missing people, their families and those who care for them. It has information sharing agreements with the police.

- The NMPH [24-hour Freephone confidential Helpline 0500 700 700](#) takes calls from families and police reporting missing people.
- NMPH's [Runaway Helpline 0808 800 70 70](#) is a national 24 hour freefone Helpline for anyone aged 17 or under who has run away or been forced to leave home. Confidential advice is given, referrals made to other organisations and it can help a child or young person get to a place of safety or pass on a message.

5.11 Monitoring

Managers of children's residential units are expected to maintain records of each occasion when a Looked After Child is identified as '**missing**' or having taken '**unauthorised absence**'. These records should be made available for inspection under the Children Act 1989. Foster Carers should record similar information. The records should include:

- The child's name and date of birth
- If possible, a recent photograph of the child
- Date and time the child was reported missing or absent
- A completed Social Care Risk Assessment Record (*Appendix 3*)
- Category of absence ('**missing**' or '**unauthorised**')
- Whether the Police were informed and the concerns conveyed to the Police/reasons for not informing the Police
- Whether the Social Worker was informed
- Action taken by Social Worker
- The date and time the child returned

- The outcome of the independent interview with the child on their return (*See section 9.2 below*)

(*See Appendix 6 for the Children Missing Monitoring Form*).

6. Children who go Missing during External Activities

Children living in the community and Looked After Children participate in external activities. If a child goes missing whilst involved in an external activity, the person in charge of the activity will:

- Notify the local Police in that area (the investigation will be conducted by the missing persons unit where the child normally resides with the assistance of the unit where the child went missing)
- Notify their Manager
- Notify the child's parents and If the child is a Looked After Child, those who care for/have responsibility for the child – Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer/
- If the child is a Looked After Child, notify the Social Worker with case work responsibility for the child, if there is one
- If the child is a Looked After Child, notify the Social Services Emergency Duty Team for any Local Authority which holds case responsibility for the child
- Look around the local area, known favourite locations as staffing levels permit

If the child is a Looked After Child the Manager of the Residential Unit and Supervising Social Worker for the Foster Carer will be responsible for ensuring the general procedures in relation to a child going missing are followed.

The person in charge of the party of children and the child's parents (or if he/she is a Looked After Child, the Manager of the Residential Unit and Supervising Social Worker), must decide within 24 hours of the child's absence whether to return the party of children to their parents/residential unit/foster carers. For Looked After Children, where possible, this should be done in consultation with the missing child's social worker.

Communication regarding the missing child must be maintained between all those who have been notified and the Police (where the child normally resides) (*See Appendix 7*).

7. Communication

Should a child's absence continue, the Residential Unit Manager should make arrangements to inform all children and staff within the unit. Foster carers should talk to any other foster children they may have placed with them. For children in the community and known to local services, the agencies involved will need to decide who should be told.

The child's school should always be informed, they may have valuable information which would assist in establishing his/her whereabouts. Any such information should be passed immediately to the Police.

7.1 Informing the Press

For a child who is missing from home, the parents and the police will liaise with the child's parents about informing the press. For a Looked After Child who is missing a decision to publicise by press and/or television will be made by the Police in consultation with the Social Worker/Team manager/Residential Unit/Foster Carer's Agency Manager, and with prior warning in order to allow the child's parents to be informed. This may be arranged at a local level, by the Borough Commander (or nominee).

7.2 Recording

If a child's absence continues beyond a few hours and falls within this Procedure, all agencies should note their discussions, decisions, actions taken and messages received/given; and the child's Social Worker (or other agreed key worker/lead professional) should keep a single agreed record on the child's file. Residential Unit Staff and Foster Carers should record the information in the daily log/diary, with a duplicate entry for the child's file (e.g. photocopies).

8. Locating the Child and their Return

8.1 Planning for when the Child is Located and their Return

If a child is '*missing*' the Police and parents, Social Worker, Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer and Police should commence contingency planning for when the child is located. Plans should include:

- Will the child return to the placement/home address or are they safe in the location where they are found?
- If the child is to return, how will s/he be conveyed to their placement/home address?
- Do the Police wish to interview the child where they are located or after they have returned their placement/home address?
- Who will be an appropriate 'independent person' to talk to the child when s/he is located/returned?
- Children who have repeated '*unauthorised*' absences should also be offered an independent person to talk to. Consider activating this when a set number of absconsions are exceeded in a given period such as three occasions in 28 days.

Normally the Residential Unit Staff/Foster Carer or Social Worker/Emergency Duty Team out of hours will make arrangements for the transportation of a child to his/her placement/home address.

The police are however not given the power to use force to take children into Police Protection. There will be occasions when a child is found in a location that may be considered unsuitable, but where there would be no legal grounds for taking them into police protection or where to do so would be unsustainable because of the child unwillingness to co-operate. In these cases police and the accountable manager from Children's Social Services will need to liaise to discuss what steps may be necessary in order to safeguard the child's welfare.

Until the child is returned home, further reviews of the missing episode should take place every seven days. Within a maximum of 28 days, the case should be jointly reviewed by the Police and Children's Social Care. The Divisional Chief Inspector and the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care must be kept informed of progress.

8.2 Interviews

Police interview: the Police will interview all children when they return. The interview consists of a simple series of questions about where the child was whilst missing, where they went, what they did, who they were with etc. If the child makes an allegation of crime that occurred whilst they were missing or that contributed to him/her running away, the Police will record this allegation and take appropriate action.

Independent interview: children should be informed that they would be expected to talk about their absence to someone independent of their parents/carers on their return. Providing children with an opportunity to talk is key to safeguarding them. The interview and the actions that following from it must:

- Identify and deal with any harm the child has incurred (his/her medical condition should be discussed immediately and any need for medical attention assessed)
- Understand and address the reasons the child ran away (the child's living arrangements/placement might need to be reviewed, a CAF may need to be completed)
- Try to avoid it happening again

The child must receive the interview with the independent person within 72 hours of being located or returning from absence:

- For Looked After Children, it is the responsibility of the residential unit Manager/Supervising Social Worker and placing Authority to ensure that this happens
- For children living in the community, the Police and Children's Social Services have responsibility for ensuring that opportunity for an independent interview is provided

The independent person could be a social worker other than the child's social worker, if they have one, or a teacher, school nurse, Connexions, Youth or YOT Worker, a voluntary sector practitioner or a police officer whom the child knows and trusts. The independent interview should be with someone the child trusts and who is separate from the police and children's social services interview. The child should be asked who they wish to speak to.

8.3 Communication & Further Action

The child's parents/carers and all agencies informed of the absence should be advised of the child's return without delay.

Involved agencies should decide whether a Strategy discussion is required or should be requested (*See the London Child Protection Procedures, Sections 5 to 8*).

9. Longer Absences

9.1 Strategy discussions and keeping Cases Open

Whenever a child is missing for more than 28 days, a Strategy discussion should be held, arranged by Children's Social Care and the Police invited (if the child has a Child Protection Plan, then officers from the Missing Persons Unit and the Child Abuse Investigation Unit or if not then the Missing Persons Unit only) (*See the London Child Protection Procedures, Sections 5 to 8*). All agencies who attend/are invited to this meeting are responsible for ensuring that there is a clear statement of the actions being taken in respect of the child's absence and should satisfy themselves that all that should be done is being done.

For Looked After Children or those known to Children's Social Care, whilst the child remains absent, his/her case should be identified as 'open' on the Children's Social care client database. It is recommended that a senior manager in Children's Social care or equivalent in responsible partner agencies, should formally review all cases where children have been absent for six months or more and should satisfy him/herself on the actions taken to recover the child.

All Police missing person's files will remain 'live' until the child is located and returned to their home, or whose circumstances are considered to be appropriate.

10. Information Sharing

Each Local Authority should have a Named Person with responsibility for Missing Children. The named person must be informed of all children who go missing and will record the details on the Children's Social Care client database.

Children's residential units should supply monthly information to the LB Bromley and Ofsted, HM Inspectorate about children who have gone missing.

Partner agencies should receive information from each other on the basis of their need to know and take action to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.

There should be regular inter-agency meetings to monitor the implementation of this Procedure and exchange information. There should be regular reports on children who go missing to the senior management, elected members, trustees and/or governors of all partner agencies.

Approved BSCB March 2009.

Appendix 1

Current Research Findings in Relation to Children Going Missing from Care and Home

The majority of children under the age of 16 who go missing are runaways.

1. Prevalence:

- Research has shown that every year approximately 100,000 under 16s run away.
- 52% of young runaways returned to their home or care placement after one night away.
- One in six young runaways sleep rough and one in 12 are hurt or harmed while they are away.

2. Profiles of the children:

- Peak ages for running away are between 13 and 16 years old and a quarter are under 11 years old. The risk of harm to a child is increased the younger the child is, and the more frequently they run away
- The main causes of running away are family conflicts and personal problems such as relationships, substance misuse, bullying and truancy. Children who run away from care are often unhappy with their placement or are influenced by others and do so to 'fit in' with the group
- Girls are more likely to run away from home than boys, but boys are likely to first run away at an earlier age and to run away more often
- Among children who go missing from care, those assessed as having emotional and behavioural difficulties are a high risk group often. They go missing at a younger age, more often and to stay away longer. They are far more likely to have been excluded from school and to have past convictions for offending than others who go missing

3. Patterns of going missing:

- Four out of five children who run away do so only once or twice
- Twenty percent of children going missing under the age of 16 are pushed away or forced to leave home
- Very few children go outside their local area while away
- Children under 16 are most likely to run away because of abuse and neglect. Whilst those who first run away or are forced to leave at the age of 16 or 17 are more likely to do so for reasons of family conflict and breakdown
- Children in residential placements were likely to have gone missing more often in the past than those going missing from foster placements. Children aged 14 and 15 tended to stay away longer
- For children who go missing often, there is a progressive risk of detachment from family, carers and school (exclusion or non-attendance)
- Evidence would suggest that once patterns of school non-attendance and running away become established they are mutually reinforcing
- Children who go missing often are also more likely to have problems with depression, drugs and alcohol and to have involvement in offending
- Children with previous convictions were far more likely to run away than those who had none

4. Reasons for going missing:

Push Factors

- Problems at home - for those who ran away repeatedly, particularly high levels of family problems and disruption were identified.
- Family Break-up - conflict with parents or step-parents is the most common reason by children for running away. The need to escape difficulties between parents – including domestic violence, drug and alcohol problems and persistent arguments – were a major influence for some young people; as were boundary and control issues and feelings of unfair treatment for others. Running away was rarely motivated by the need for excitement
- Over a quarter of the children in the *Safe on the Streets* survey were attempting to escape physical and emotional abuse, rejection or neglect. British and American studies support the finding that abuse and neglect are important factors underlying the decision to run away, especially for children who first run away from home before the age of 11; and even among those who have run away only once or twice
- Mental Health problems - a disproportionate number of young people that runaway from home have some sort of mental health problems
- Bullying – children who are severely bullied are more likely to run away from school, home and care. Problems at school are only likely to be a direct trigger for running away for a relatively small minority of children.

Pull Factor

- Running to be near friends or family – especially when a young person is in care and there are problems in contact arrangements with family and friends.
- Grooming for potential sexual exploitation or child trafficking – young people may run away or go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them,

5. Follow-up Schemes

- Follow-up schemes which:
 - i. Provide children who run away with an opportunity to talk about their reasons for running away, and
 - ii. Link children who run away and their families into longer-term help if they need it,have been successful in reducing the numbers of young people who run away repeatedly by up to two-thirds and have also achieved a reduction of one-fifth in the number of runaways arrested
-

Appendix 2

Social Care Pre-incident Risk Assessment

The Social Care Pre-incident Risk Assessment should be recorded on the child's file in all agencies working with the child.

Wherever possible staff should enhance their ability to make a Social Care Pre-incident Risk Assessment by acquainting themselves with the current body of knowledge about children who go missing (*See Appendix 1: Current Research Findings in Relation to Children Going Missing from Care and Home*).

Factor impacting on the likelihood of a child going missing	Details and Explanation
Child's view on current placement/ stability of their relationships at home	
Level of supervision/support that care staff propose to provide for the child	
The degree of risk to the child if they do go missing – using the Social Care Risk Assessment Record at <i>Appendix 3</i>	
The views of parents/carers on their child's needs and the action that needs to be taken if their child is missing	
Consideration of any external influences which may result in a child's removal without consent (<i>See also Safeguarding Trafficked and Exploited Children, LONDON BOARD 2006</i>)	

Appendix 3 Missing Child Risk Assessment Record

Date _____

Name of Child Missing _____

Address from which missing _____

Factor	Details and Explanation
10 years old or under	
11 to 14 years of age	
15 up to 18 years of age	
Has a Child Protection Plan	
Needs essential medication or treatment not readily available to them e.g. asthma inhaler, insulin	
May not have the physical ability to interact safely with others or in an unknown environment, e.g. visually impaired, history of abuse or inappropriate adult/stranger relationships, Downs Syndrome etc.	
Lacks reasonable awareness of the risks associated with running away, incl. learning disabled	
Known to associate with adults or children who present a risk of harm e.g. Sexual Offenders, Offenders against children	
Mental illness or psychological disorder that may increase risk of harm to themselves or others	

Appendix 3 cont

Drugs and/or alcohol dependency	
Suspicion of abduction	
Suspected suicide or self harm	
Involved in violent and/or racial incident or confrontation immediately prior to disappearance	
Concerns about state of mind e.g. unusual behaviour prior to disappearance or disappeared with no prior indication, or seemed troubled etc.	
Inclement weather conditions where exposure would seriously increase risk to health	
Family/relationship problems or recent history of family conflict/abuse	
Employment problems	
Financial problems	
School or college problems	
Ongoing victim of bullying, harassment, or exploitation e.g. racial, sexual etc.	
Previously disappeared and suffered or was exposed to harm whilst missing	

Appendix 3 cont

Victim or potential victim, of forced marriage, fgm or trafficking, incl. for sexual exploitation	
---	--

Summary of Risk

(Summarise the risks in a couple of sentences)

Summary of Actions Taken

Include attempts to talk to child on mobile phone and attempts to contact friends & family

Review Date for Actions Decided

Completed by, full name	Signature
--------------------------------	------------------

This Risk Assessment is an aid to action and for information sharing and recording.

Aid to action: As an action tool the purpose of the Risk Assessment is to inform single and multi-agency agency decision-making and planning to locate a **'missing'** child. The Risk Assessment provides an indication of:

- The urgency of inquiries
- Areas of inquiry e.g. where drugs are available or that certain adults frequent, country of origin or country children are trafficked on to etc
- Type of specialist knowledge that might be needed
- The supervision that may be required
- Agencies who may be first alerted e.g. local Accident & Emergency services

Aid for information sharing and recording: At the time that a child goes **'missing'** the completed Risk Assessment should be shared with all agencies working with the child and kept on the child's file in each agency. In cases where new information becomes available and/or the child remains absent for a protracted period, the risks should be re-assessed, shared with the agencies and kept on the child's file in each agency.. The most recently completed Risk Assessment should remain on the child's file in all agencies working with the child.

Appendix 4
Information Sharing Form
Police Missing Persons Unit:

Please use this form to update information on children in your care, or for whom you are responsible

Contact Details for the Child			
Address where child currently resides (family home, Residential Unit, Foster Carer):			
Residential Unit/Foster Carer contact tel. nos:		Contact name:	
Child's full name:		Next of Kin relationship, name & address:	
Placing Authority: (if appropriate)		Social Worker & contact number:	
Doctor:		Child's mobile no:	
Dentist:		Child's N.I.Number:	
Occupation /School/ College:		Occupation /School/ College contact no:	

Appendix 4 cont

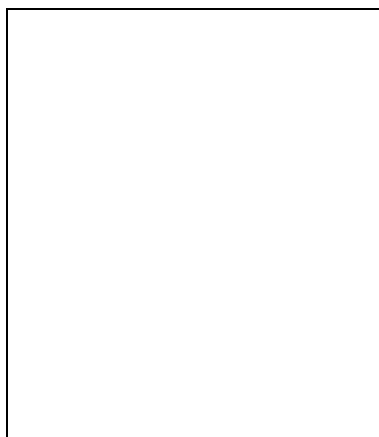
Description of the Child		
Ethnic Origin & Ethnic Appearance:	Dob: Age:	
Height & build:	Gender:	
Physical/psychological disabilities:	Recent behaviour:	
Medical conditions & medication required e.g. asthma inhaler, insulin:		
Appearance incl. clothing, eye colour, hair, glasses, tattoos, piercings, facial hair:		
Family history (brief details):		

Appendix 4 cont

Information about friends and relatives etc, visited:			
Date	Time	Name / Phone number & address	Result of enquiries

Details of going Missing	
Time child was last seen:	
With whom:	
The basis for the Risk Assessment classification:	

A recent photograph:



Appendix 5

Children Missing from Care And Home: Return Questionnaire

Introduction

Children who go missing may sometimes be running from something which places them at risk and may run into or to, situations which also place them at risk.

Children may be to talk about these issues, however professionals need to find out why the child goes missing in order to safeguard them.

Who Interviews the Child

Professionals must liaise to ensure that children are not interviewed more than is absolutely necessary about the same thing. The Police will interview all children when they return. In addition all children should be offered the opportunity to talk to an independent person whom they trust.

According to the *Young Runaways Report (SEU, 2002)* the professionals most closely involved with the child are often frustrated by the child's behaviour which means that children are likely to receive a negative response when they return. This response can stop the child talking about their experience and exacerbate the situation rather than resolve it for the child.

The independent person could be a social worker other than the child's social worker, if they have one, or a teacher, school nurse, Connexions, Youth or Youth Offending Team Worker, a voluntary sector practitioner or a police officer whom the child knows and trusts. The child should be asked who they wish to speak to.

The following points need to be considered when interviewing a missing person:

- Try to determine the reason why the person went missing and in particular, if they have been subject to violence, abuse or bullying.
- Establish whether they have been a victim of crime before or while missing.
- Establish if they have been committing Crime whilst missing
- Discover where and by whom they have been harboured (obtain pars if possible)
- Obtain information which may lead to their early discovery should they go missing again.
- Put in place any support and preventative measures to avoid such a recurrence. (consider CAMHS, YOT, Children's Social Care, Bromley Y, YISP).

Areas to be Covered

The fullness of the interview will depend on the circumstances and the degree of risk to the child.

1. Is the child happy where they are living, or are they worried/upset about anything?
2. Where was the child and who were they with?

<p>3. What did the child do whilst they were missing?</p>
<p>4. Did the child feel safe and looked after?</p>
<p>5. What happened when the child got home?</p>
<p>6. What does the child want to have happen now – short term/long term?</p>
<p>7. Parents/carers view of the incident?</p>
<p>8. The interviewer should provide the child with information about how they can access further or ongoing support services. Record the information here:</p>

Interviewer Name	Designation	Date

NB: The interviewer must ensure that other professionals who are involved with the child/ young person are copied into this information.

Appendix 6

Children Missing Monitoring Form

(For LAC children, to be completed on a monthly basis and a copy sent to CSCI – photocopy if additional sheets needed.)

Name of Home:

	CHILD DETAILS:		LEVEL OF RISK: L = low M = medium H = high	CHILD ABSENT FROM:		CATEGORY OF ABSENCE: U = unauthorised M = missing A = abscond	IF POLICE INFORMED STATE:		POLICE RESPONSE:		CHILD RETURNED AT:	
	NAME	D.O.B		DATE	TIME		DATE	TIME	DATE	TIME	DATE	TIME
1												
2												
3												
4												
5												
6												
7												
8												
9												
10												
11												
12												
13												
14												
15												

Appendix 7

London Notification of Children with Child Protection Plans and Vulnerable Persons going Missing

This note clarifies the London arrangements, in line with the *London Child Protection Procedures, LONDON BOARD, 2006**, for notification of missing children and vulnerable persons.

* Sections 9.7.3 & 4 and 9.7.20 * 21 (See reverse of this sheet for extracts)

The arrangements address four areas:

- Communication medium & arrangements
- Contact person & address
- Format of notifications
- Removal of notifications

1. Communication medium & arrangements

1.1 Notification of missing children and persons should be made via email².

1.2 Every London Children's Services has a missing children/persons email address, which reads: missing@boroughname.gov.uk

2. Contact person & address

2.2 The London Child Protection Co-ordinators maintain an up-to-date list of their contact names and details (formerly the list of the custodians of the child protection register). The list can be accessed at: www.londoncpc.gov.uk

3. Format of notifications

3.1 All notifications of missing children/persons will be recorded and transmitted on the form attached as Appendix 1.

3.2 Originating authorities who want confirmation that the notification has arrived should set their email system to alert them when mail is read.

4. Removal of notifications

4.1 The details of missing children/persons should be removed from the list by the receiving authority after six months.

4.2 To assist with 4.1, administrators can use the missing children/persons email inbox to check when the notification was received.

4.3 If a child/person is still missing after six months then the notifying authority should re-notify other agencies/authorities this process 1 - 4.

² Although the email system is not totally secure, the professional judgement of the London Child Protection Co-ordinators is that in this context the need to share information quickly to protect children and vulnerable persons outweighs the need to protect sensitive data.

Circumstances for Implementing Procedure

These procedures apply if a child likely to suffer significant harm goes missing or cannot be traced. Some examples would be:

- A child who is the subject of a child protection referral or s.47 enquiry
- A child subject to a child protection plan who goes missing or is removed from her/his address outside the terms of the child protection plan
- A looked after child who leaves or is removed from placement, without this being part of the care plan
- Any child who goes missing in suspicious circumstances or about whom there are concerns – e.g. one who is subject to initial / core assessment where there are developing concerns about their safety or where there is reason to believe that the child may have fled abuse or be at acute risk of abuse or exploitation whilst away from home

These procedures also apply to adults whose whereabouts become unknown in the following circumstances:

- A pregnant woman when there are concerns about the welfare of the child following birth
- A family where there are concerns about the welfare of the child because of the presence of a person with previous convictions for an offence against children (Schedule 1 offender, Children and Young Persons Act 1933) or other person suspected of previously harming a child
- A family which goes missing in response to child protection enquiries being made or about to be made

Follow up Children's Services Action

If the strategy discussion agreed that the details of the child or family are to be circulated to other local authorities, the key worker should draft a short letter giving details of:

- The children in the family
- Other family members or significant adults
- The circumstances causing concern
- Action required if a child is found
- Details of contact arrangements for the key worker / social worker – including out of office contact
- Where possible physical descriptions of the key people and photographs, if available

The letter should be sent to the child protection manager for distribution to her/his peers nationally, who in turn should circulate within the council and local agencies.

Appendix 8

Referral to Register of Children with Child Protection Plans and Vulnerable Persons going Missing

1. Family Constellation

Relationship	Name	D.O.B.	Ethnic Origin Preferred Language

2. Reasons for Concern

(Include registration categories and legal orders)

Registration categories	Legal orders

3. Circumstances of Absence

Date Missing	Address Left	Any Comment

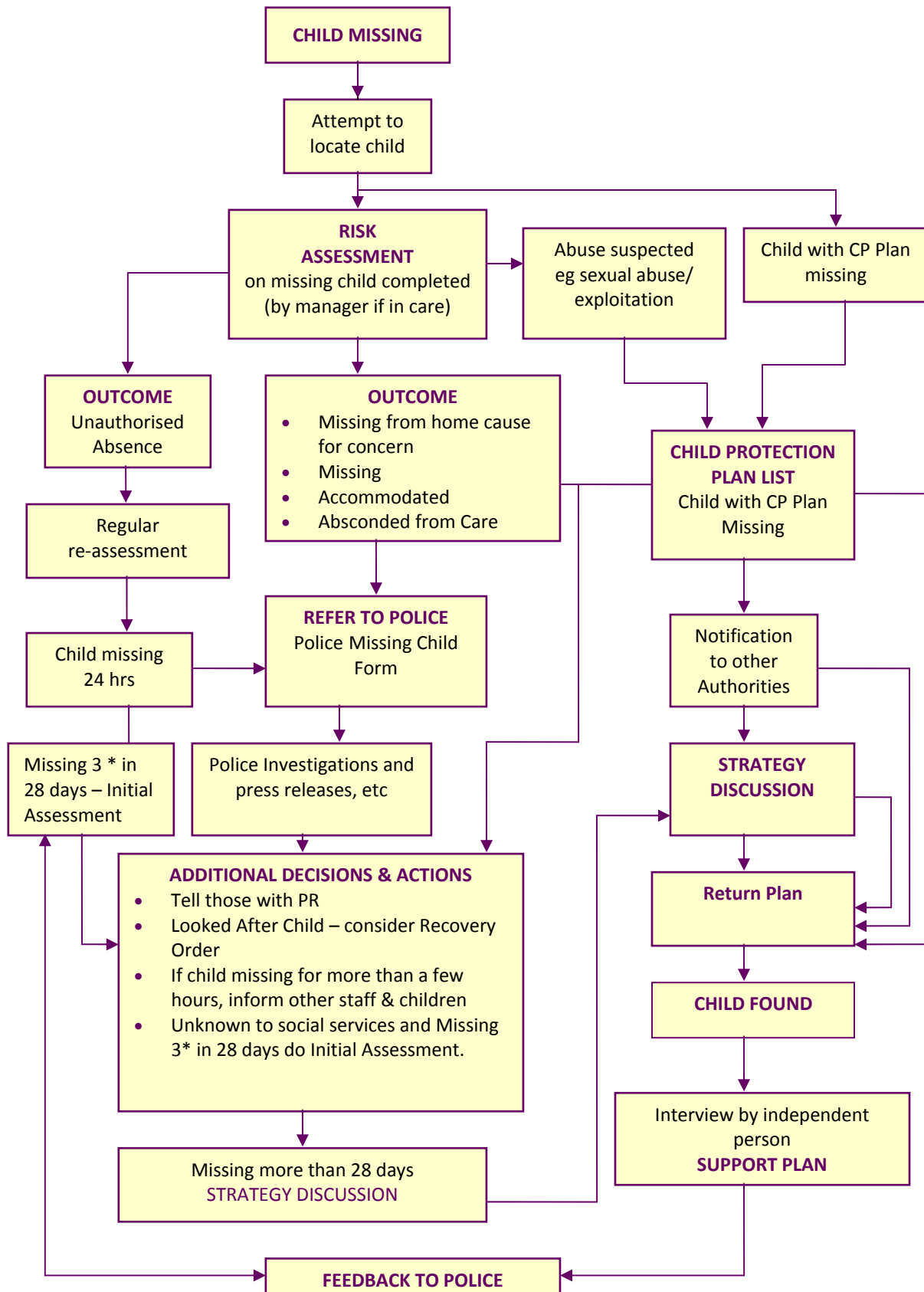
4. Description of Missing Child / Family Members

--

5. Who to Contact if Child / Family Found

1)	2)
----	----

Appendix 9 Children Missing from Home & Care Social Care Flow Chart



Appendix 10

BROMLEY CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME TIMELINE

Timescale	Action
<i>Before a child or young person goes missing</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any agency with concerns that a particular child or young person may go missing should carry out the <i>Pre-Incident Risk Assessment</i> in Appendix 2 of Bromley's missing from home procedure. • The concerned agency should give a copy of the completed Pre-Incident Risk Assessment to every agency working with the child or young person. • The concerned agency should explain to the child or young person what actions will be taken if he or she goes missing. If appropriate, the agency should give the child or young person a copy of the completed Pre-Incident Risk Assessment. 	
<i>After a child or young person goes missing</i>	
Immediately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whichever agency first becomes aware that the child is missing (the "referring agency") should, along with the parents, try to decide whether the child is "missing" or having an "unauthorised absence". As part of this process, the parents and referring agency should attempt to locate the child and encourage him or her to return as quickly and safely as possible.
As soon as the child is deemed "missing"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The referring agency should notify the Police ASAP; if possible, they should liaise with the parents around this. The Police are the lead agency for the investigation of missing children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ The referring agency should complete the <i>Police Missing Persons Unit Referral Form</i> in Appendix 4 of Bromley's missing from home procedure and give a copy to the Police ➢ The referring agency should complete the <i>Missing Child Risk Assessment</i> in Appendix 3 of Bromley's missing from home procedure and give a copy to the Police ➢ The Police will want to search the address at which the missing child was last seen. ➢ All information communicated by other agencies should be passed to the Police. • The referring agency should give a copy of the completed Missing Child Risk Assessment to every agency working with the child or young person.
Within 12hrs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Police may liaise with the child's parents about seeking the assistance of local and/or national media. It is for the Police to advise the media regarding the missing child.
If the child goes missing during an external activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The person in charge of the activity will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Notify the local Police ➢ Notify their manager ➢ Notify the child's parents ➢ Look around the local area and known favourite locations as staffing levels permit.

If the child is already subject to a child protection plan or enquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The referring agency should inform the Local Authority Custodian of the Child Protection Register or equivalent, and the local Primary Care Trust's Designated Nurse. • Children's Social Care should arrange a strategy discussion ASAP and within no more than 7 days. CSC should invite representatives from both the Police Missing Persons Unit and Child Abuse Investigation Team, as well as other practitioners involved with the child. (See Sections 5 to 8 of the London Child Protection Procedures). • Whether the child has gone missing either with or without their family, Children's Social Care must implement the London Notification of Missing Children/Persons Procedure (in Appendix 7 of Bromley's missing from home or care procedure).
After 24 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Police should notify Children's Social Care if they are not already involved. • The Police and Children's Social Care should have a strategy discussion at or before the first 24 hours missing. A planning meeting should then be arranged, involving the designated police officer and the allocated social worker, the parents (where appropriate) and any other involved agencies, such as schools, as soon as is deemed reasonable following the initial discussion. Please see Section 8.1 of Bromley's missing from home or care procedure for guidelines around what this meeting should achieve. • If the child's possible circumstances fall into any of the categories in Section 5.8 of Bromley's missing from home procedure, Children's Social Care should arrange a strategy discussion ASAP and within no more than 7 days, inviting representatives from the Police MPU and CAIT Teams and from other agencies involved with the child. Where a strategy discussion is required, it may be possible to combine it with the planning meeting.
Every seven days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Police and Children's Social Care should arrange review planning meetings every seven days until the child is returned home.
Within 28 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The case should be jointly reviewed by the Police and Children's Social Care. The Divisional Chief Inspector and the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care should be kept informed of progress. • Children's Social Care should update the Missing Child Risk Assessment every 28 days and whenever new information becomes available, and share the updated assessment with all relevant agencies.
After 28 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's Social Care should arrange a strategy meeting involving all relevant agencies if one has not already been called. They should invite officers from the Police Missing Persons Unit. If the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, they should also invite officers from the Child Abuse Investigation Team.
After 6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A senior manager in Children's Social Care should formally review the case.
<i>After a child or young person returns home</i>	
Immediately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Police, or a relevant professional agreed by the police, should interview the child. If the child makes an allegation of a crime that occurred whilst they were missing or that contributed to his or her running away, the Police should record this allegation and take appropriate action.
Within 72 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child should be asked which person independent of their parents they wish to speak to. The practitioner may find helpful the questions in Appendix 5 of Bromley's missing from home and care procedure, "Children Missing from Home & Care: Return Questionnaire". • The Police and/or Children's Social Care if already involved should make a decision as to whether to refer to CSC/keep the case open on welfare grounds. Section 5.8 of Bromley's missing from home and care procedure gives guidance on when to consider such a referral.

Appendix 11

HARBOURER'S WARNING LETTER CHILD IN CARE

x

Address of Sender

Tel:
Fax:
Email:

Headquarters

Our ref: *

*Date

*Address

Dear *Name of defendant,

I have been advised that the following young person (*free text e.g. has recently stayed at your home, been present in the same room as yourself, travelled in the same vehicle, or otherwise been in your company*).

Name	Age	Date person is 18 years if currently 17.

This young person is in the care ofLocal Authority.

I wish to make it clear on behalf of this Authority that you have no permission or authority to allow this young person, or any other young person in their care, to enter or stay in your home, vehicle or be in your company at any time of day or night before they reach the age of **18 years**.

YOU MUST NOT AT ANY TIME OF DAY OF NIGHT:

- allow this young person to enter or stay in your house, flat or place of work;
- allow this young person to enter or stay in any other property you are present in;
- allow this young person to enter or travel in any vehicle or caravan you own or are travelling in;
- meet with this young person or allow them to remain in your presence;
- telephone, text, e-mail or communicate with this young person in any way;
- provide this young person with any food, drink, gift or any other item.

If this young person approaches you, you must immediately:

- refuse to allow them to enter the property or vehicle you are in;
- ask them to leave;
- contact Social Services or the Police (0845 6060606) if they refuse to leave.

If you do not co-operate with this request and this young person, or any other young person in the care of the Local Authority, is traced to your home or is found in your presence, **then you are liable to arrest and prosecution** under S49 Children Act 1989 or S2 Child Abduction Act 1984 which carries a maximum sentence of **7 years imprisonment**. Alternatively, the Local Authority may seek an injunction against you and any breach of this could lead to your committal to prison.

May I also make it clear that any suggestion that you are offering this young person, or other young people in the care of the Local Authority, necessary shelter or hospitality is no defence. The Authority has parental responsibility for the young people in its care and wishes to make it clear that no such services from you are required and are indeed unwelcome.

Yours faithfully,

Divisional Missing Person Co-ordinator

Appendix 11a

HARBOURER'S FINAL WARNING LETTER

Harbourer's Final Warning

I have been advised that the following young person (*free text. e.g. has recently stayed at your home, been present in the same room as yourself, travelled in the same vehicle, or otherwise been in your company*).

Name	Age	Date person is 16 years if currently 15.

I wish to make it clear on behalf of the parents, carer or guardian that you have no permission or authority to allow this young person to enter or stay in your home, vehicle or be in your company at any time of day or night before they reach the age of **16 years**.

YOU MUST NOT AT ANY TIME OF DAY OR NIGHT:

- allow this young person to enter or stay in your house, flat or place of work;
- allow this young person to enter or stay in any other property you are present in;
- allow this young person to enter or travel in any vehicle or caravan you own or are travelling in;
- meet with this young person or allow them to remain in your presence;
- telephone, text, e-mail or communicate with this young person in any way;
- provide this young person with any food, drink, gift or any other item.

If this young person approaches you, you must immediately:

- refuse to allow them to enter the property or vehicle you are in;
- ask them to leave;
- contact the Police (0845 6060606) if they refuse to leave.

If you do not co-operate with this request and this young person is traced to your home or is found in your presence, **then you are liable to arrest and prosecution** under S2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984 which carries a maximum sentence of **7 years imprisonment**.

May I also make it clear that any suggestion that you are offering this young person necessary shelter or hospitality is no defence. The parent, carer or guardian for this young person wishes to make it clear that no such services from you are required and are indeed unwelcome.

Person Receiving Warning

Name			
Date of Birth			
Address			
I confirm that:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the officer has read and explained the contents of this letter to me; • I am clear as to which young person is being referred to; • the officer has handed me a copy of this warning notice; and • I agree to comply with its demands. 			
Signature			
Time		Date	
Reason given if person refuses to sign			

Officer Issuing Warning

Collar Number & Name			
Station			
I confirm that:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have read and explained the contents of this letter to the person named above; • I have / have not shown the person a photograph of the young person; • If a photograph has not been shown, explain how you have verified that the above person knows which young person you are referring to: <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>			

.....			
• I have handed them a copy of this warning notice.			
Signature			
Time		Date	

Appendix 11: Useful Contacts

Bromley Children's Social Care Referral & Assessment Team

(East) 0208 461 7379
(West) 0208 461 7050
Out of Hours duty 0208 464 4848

Bromley Y

17 Ethelbert Road
Bromley
BR1 1JA

0208 4649033

Bromley Youth Offending Team,

8 Masons Hill,
Bromley
BR2 9EY

020 8466 3080

e-mail: youthoffendingteam@bromley.gov.uk

Bromley Police Missing Persons Unit

☎0208 284 (2)8766

Missing person answer phone : 0208 284 8836

CAMHS

2 Newman Rd
Bromley, BR1 1RJ

020 83154430

Education Welfare Service

Civic Centre
Stockwell Close
Bromley
BR1 3UH

0208 313 4151