

**London Borough of Bexley and Bexley Metropolitan Police Service  
Joint Operational Procedure: MISSING**

**Date of publication:** 6 February 2017  
**Date for review:** Review annually or with revised guidance

**Responsible Manager:**  
Head of Looked After  
Children  
Detective Inspector, Public  
Protection

**Electronic file location:**

**Associated statutory guidance and regulations:**

Department for Education Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, January 2014: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care>  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/271820/Flowchart\\_when\\_a\\_child\\_goes\\_missing\\_from\\_care.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271820/Flowchart_when_a_child_goes_missing_from_care.pdf)

Pan London Child Protection Protocols, available on the Bexley Local Safeguarding Children Board website at: [http://www.bexleylscb.org.uk/page.php?section=section\\_5&id=311](http://www.bexleylscb.org.uk/page.php?section=section_5&id=311)

Working Together to Safeguard Children, a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, Department for Education Statutory Guidance March 2015:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

**Local documents:**

Terms of reference for the Missing Children Operational Group.

Bexley Missing from Home, Education and Care Procedures 2015, available on the Bexley Local Safeguarding Board website at:

[http://www.bexleylscb.org.uk/page.php?section=section\\_5&id=267#Children who go Missing from Home and Care and Education](http://www.bexleylscb.org.uk/page.php?section=section_5&id=267#Children_who_go_Missing_from_Home_and_Care_and_Education)

**Key Objectives (including Signs of Safety principles to apply)**

1. To engage all relevant agencies in enabling and promoting an enhanced service to ensure children and young people, who are or have a history of going missing from home, local authority care or are missing from education, are identified, safeguarded and supported.

**Detailed advice:**

- i. Decide if child is "missing" according to the definition of missing: statutory guidance defines the police definition of missing as:  
"anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another"  
(Refer to pages 6 & 7 of the statutory guidance on missing for specific definitions for missing and absent)
- ii. Social worker completes 87a form (Child abuse investigation to police form) and sends to police
- iii. Police should check with the Children's Social care duty team to understand whether a child is known to social care
- iv. Police complete a missing person report (Merlin) and launch investigation and police risk rating applied<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **High Risk** - The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability; or have been the victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.

**Medium Risk** - The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others

**Low Risk** - There is no apparent threat of danger to either the subject or the public.

All children under the age of 18 years must be classified as at least Medium risk.

- v. Other agency ratings are using the signs of safety scale (0 being immediate risk and 10 being as low risk as possible whilst missing) This may not correlate with the police rating medium or high. A police high risk rating would involve a wider regional response with media coverage etc. Therefore a social care high level of concern may not be matched with a high risk rating from the police. Regardless of rating the police and social care will work together in order to locate the child and plan to reduce missing episodes in the future.
- vi. Social work manager or police and health hold a strategy meeting.
- vii. S47 investigation undertaken jointly with police and social care (if required).
- viii. Reconvene strategy meetings to review and manage risk (if required).
- ix. Family Safety plan developed.
- x. For children missing from home, consider an initial child protection conference.
- xi. For children missing from care, alert Independent Reviewing Officer and consider implications for the placement and care plan.
- xii. For looked after children from other local authorities that are placed in care in Bexley, Bexley MASH will notify the placing authority of the missing incident. If it has come to notice that the child has been subject to four missing episodes or more, a letter from the Director of Children's Services and the Borough Commander will be sent to the Director of Children's Social Care of the placing authority alerting them to the concern.
- xiii. Multi Agency Missing meeting held every Tuesday afternoon, to quality assure progress of actions and monitor all children known to be missing or who have been missing in the last week, including looked after children placed in Bexley by other local authorities. This meeting tracks, discusses and identifies actions and follow up and will escalate if partner agencies cannot agree on particular action
- xiv. If partner agencies are in dispute regarding risk rating follow escalation pathway.
- xv. Missing from Home: Missing notification is sent to family wellbeing service for children under 13 and to targeted youth services for children over 13 for return home interviews to be undertaken within 72 hours.
- xvi. Missing from Care: Allocated social worker makes a referral to National Youth Advisory Service (NYAS) for return home interview within 72 hours. This is at the discretion of the social work team manager if introducing a NYAS worker to the child is in the child's best interests, if it is deemed not to be the social worker will conduct the return home interview.
- xvii. Once located, for all cases face to face debrief with police officer. For high risk cases debrief conducted within 1 hour, all other cases within 3 hours.

**Recording:**

Recording is immediate upon notice of child missing, records are accurate and recording is a fluid process throughout the missing episode. As matters develop the case should be updated, managers oversight, decision making and rationale should be evident throughout.