



Think!
Before You
Leave Home



A Guide for Young People

A guide for young people in South East London, produced by the South East London Housing Partnership.

www.selondonhousing.org

(where an online version of this booklet can be found)

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Christine, 17



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Leaving Home

Leaving home is one of the most important decisions you will ever make.



“It’s not as easy as you think.” Jo, 18

It’s not a good idea to rush into it or just leave on the spur of the moment. Ideally you should stay with your family until you can move out in a planned way.

You may decide to leave home because you think that it will be exciting – no parents telling

you what to do, your own private space. The reality can be very different.

It can be difficult to find somewhere to live and it can be hard to pay your bills. You could end up in difficulty, even homeless.

The best time to leave home is when you:

- ⦿ feel ready
- ⦿ have support to move out
- ⦿ have made a plan

Things to Think About

- ⦿ Will you get lonely?
- ⦿ Can you really afford to leave home?
- ⦿ Are you really ready to live on your own?
(financially and emotionally)

Advantages

- ⦿ You will be able to do what you want when you want
- ⦿ You will be independent
- ⦿ You will have your own space

Take your time, plan carefully, only move out when you are ready.

Disadvantages

- ⊙ You will have to **pay your own bills**, e.g. gas, electricity, water rates etc...
- ⊙ You may have to live on benefits which means you will have to **budget very carefully**. You will need to pay your bills before buying things like clothes or CDs and other things you want.
- ⊙ You may not be able to finish your education
- ⊙ You may not be able to afford to go out with your friends as often
- ⊙ You may not be able to live where you want – close to friends and family
- ⊙ You will have to **do your own** washing and ironing, shopping and cooking



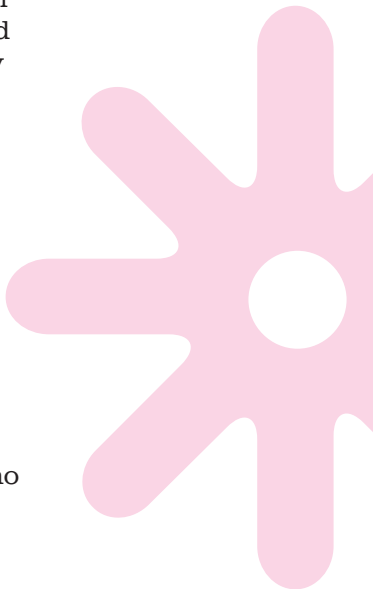
Different Housing for Different Needs

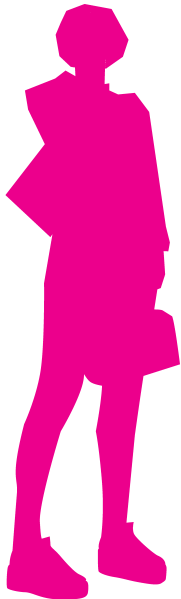
Think carefully about where you want to live – near family, friends or work? If you have a disability, what are your specific needs? Moving out is a big decision and it is really vital that you move somewhere that meets your needs.

Flat-share – this is when you have your own bedroom but you share the kitchen, bathroom and lounge. You will need to pay a deposit and a months rent in advance. Some councils may help with deposits if you have a serious housing problem.

Foyers – these are hostels which support you to move towards living independently. They can help with finding employment, training or education. To find out more contact The Foyer Federation on Tel: 020 7430 2212 or www.foyer.net

Supported Accommodation – supported accommodation is used to support single parents, care leavers, ex-offenders, those who have or have had drug or alcohol problems, learning difficulties or mental health issues. For more information contact one of the agencies listed in “Where to go for Advice”





Voluntary Work – if you do voluntary work with an organisation like Community Service Volunteers (CSV) you may get accommodation provided. This can be a good way to see how you cope with being away from home. For more information call CSV on Tel 0800 374 991.

Councils and Housing Associations – provide housing at affordable rents. Once accepted on the list every council has their own way of deciding who should be offered a council or Housing Association property.

For young people it is **extremely unlikely you will be offered a property** and it is better to look for alternatives such as those mentioned above.

**Most young people who
were asked said...**

**“If you can
stay at home then
you should”**

(The Scottish Youth Network)



Did You Know?

The best places to find a new home are in your local papers, small ads in newsagents and shops, estate agents and on the internet. You could also ask your friends and family.



**For more information check out
“Where to go for Advice”**

“Whatever is going on at home think twice before you leave and only go if you really have to. Leaving home before you are properly prepared is a real eye-opener and makes you grow up really quickly.

I applied to the council for housing and ended up living in a hostel. This was not a good time for me and my life went down hill.

I had no real support or discipline and I went off the rails. People who I thought were my friends just wanted to use me and take advantage of me. I got really depressed.

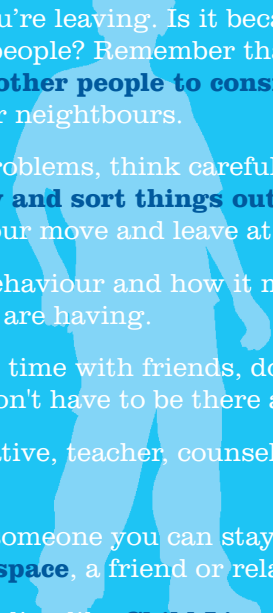
I thought that by leaving home all my problems would be over but they actually got worse. **I can honestly say that you should do everything you can to stay at home until you're really ready.”**



Jade, 20

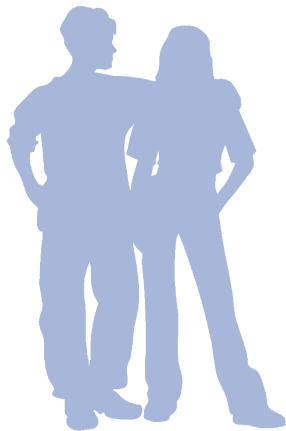
Leaving Home in an Emergency

Unless you are in **danger** it is better to stay where you are until you can plan your move with help and support

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- © Think about why you're leaving. Is it because you're feeling restricted by other people? Remember that wherever you live, **you'll always have other people to consider**; whether it's parents, flatmates or neighbours.
 - © If you have family problems, think carefully before you go as it may be **better to try and sort things out if you can**. That way, you can plan your move and leave at a time that suits you.
 - © Look at your own behaviour and how it may be contributing to the problems you are having.
 - © Get out more, spend time with friends, do more things away from home so you don't have to be there as much.
 - © Talk to a friend, relative, teacher, counsellor, doctor or anyone you trust.
 - © Find out if there is someone you can stay with for a couple of nights to **get some space**, a friend or relative.
 - © For advice call a helpline like **Child Line on 0800 1111** (for under 18s) or **The Samaritans on 08457 909090** (any age.)

Mediation

Problems at home can sometimes be helped by talking to someone outside the family. Mediation is one way of trying



to sort out problems and arguments that make you feel like you have to leave home. Mediation is a **confidential and informal process** with a third person called a “mediator.” The mediator does not take sides but helps everyone involved to talk about how they are feeling and find solutions to their problems. You can get this sort of help by contacting your local council or an advice agency.

Media

“ I was arguing with my parents all the time about money and going out. I thought it would be easier to leave home and live on my own. Someone told me to speak to the council about getting my own flat. They suggested I talk to someone about the problems I was having. I did. Then they spoke to my mum and dad and we had a meeting all together. We still argue sometimes but not as bad.”

Pete, 16

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Unsafe at Home?



If you have absolutely no choice and feel that you have to leave home immediately, for example if someone is being violent or abusive towards you, you must get help straight away.

You can try the following:

- ⊙ **Ask friends or family.** They might give you a bed while you sort yourself out which will give you time to get advice about what to do next.
- ⊙ **Call your local council.** If you contact the council they will arrange a homeless interview with you and may get you somewhere to stay until this happens.
- ⊙ **Call Shelterline on 0808 800 4444.** They should be able to provide you with advice and if needed give you details of a local hostel. The police should also be able to help you with this information.
- ⊙ **If you are experiencing domestic violence** call Women's Aid on their 24 hour free phone number 0808 2000 247
- ⊙ **If you were in care,** contact your local Social Work Department.
- ⊙ Get in touch with the agencies listed in 'Where to go for Advice'.
- ⊙ Make sure you take any necessities with you if you can such as: medication, money or cash cards, ID (eg. passport or driving licence) mobile phone, other important personal items and a change of clothing.

Jenny was 14 when she ran away because her father had started hitting her and she couldn't take any more.

“My mum didn't care and said it was my own fault. I was advised to tell my auntie. She did think it was wrong and let me stay with her until I found somewhere else to live.”

Jenny, 14



Homelessness

If you don't plan leaving home properly you could **end up in difficulty and possibly homeless** – with no regular place to stay, perhaps sleeping on friends sofas, in hostels or even on the street.



Despite what you may hear, making an application to your local council as being homeless **does not** guarantee you housing.



You can ask your local council for help **if you have nowhere to stay** or are likely to lose your home in the next 28 days.



The law says the council must give you **help and advice** to find a place to live. This does not mean that you will automatically be given a council home.



Whether the council has to provide you with somewhere to live, either temporary or permanent will **depend on your circumstances**.

You will have to answer lots of questions and fill out lots of forms

- 1** You will need to prove that you are, or are about to become, homeless.
- 2** You will need to prove that it was not your own deliberate actions that have caused your homelessness.
- 3** You will need to prove that you are a UK citizen. If you are not the rules are very complicated and your rights will depend on your immigration status.
- 4** You will need to show that you are in priority need:
 - you are pregnant **or**
 - you are 16 /17 years old **or**
 - vulnerable as a result of a physical or mental disability **or**
 - homeless due to a fire, flood or similar disaster **or**
 - forced to leave home because of violence or abuse, and more at risk than most people.

- 5 You will need to show proof of your identity and immigration status (e.g. passport/home office documents/birth cert.)

Proof of income (e.g. benefit book or bank statement.)

Proof of address – where you normally live (e.g. medical card or letter from an organisation with your name and address on it.)



“Filling out the forms and answering all the questions is a pain. It takes forever and is really intense. Living in a hostel was really bad and sometimes, if I am honest, scary too. There are all types of people with different problems. If someone had spoken to me and told me how it is I would have stayed at home.”

Tim, 17

- ⊙ The council may arrange temporary accommodation for you while they carry out a more in-depth investigation.
- ⊙ They will want to **talk to other people who know about your situation**, including your parent(s) or guardian(s). If there are people who you don't want the council to contact because, for example, they are violent or threatening to you, you should tell them.
- ⊙ If the council accepts your homeless application they will make sure that you have somewhere to live (usually a hostel or B&B) until you receive an offer of suitable housing.
- ⊙ The council may offer you private rented accommodation. Some councils operate a "Choice Based Lettings" scheme which means you can bid for a property that you like. However, there are more people than properties and you are **highly unlikely to get offered the exact property you want**. Other councils will make you one offer of a property and you will not have a choice where you live.
- ⊙ If the council rejects your application they will give you a letter explaining the reasons why. You will have the opportunity to ask for a review within 21 days. The council will ask you to leave your temporary accommodation within a reasonable time.

“Talk to someone is the best thing to do. Find someone you can talk to and tell them what’s happening. Find help. Basically, don’t just decide to leave home because your friends are doing it.”

Angel, 19



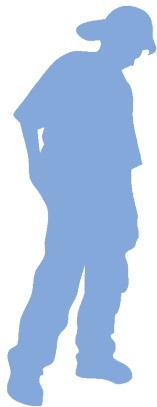
Under 18?

Some important facts
you should know



- ③ You will still have to go through the homelessness assessment procedure, their checks and questions.
- ③ You will **not be thought of as homeless** if you choose to leave accommodation that is suitable for you and which you can to return to.
- ③ If you're under 16 the law says you **must have an adult responsible for you** and that you cannot live alone, claim benefits or work full time.
- ③ If you're under 16 you can't normally leave home unless there are **serious problems such as violence**. If this is the case **immediately** get in touch with Social Services or another advice agency for help and support.
- ③ If you are 16 or 17 it is unlikely that you will be able to claim benefits, unless you have special circumstances. It is best to get specialist advice on this.
- ③ For legal reasons landlords may be unwilling to offer you a tenancy agreement.

If you do have to leave in an emergency...



- ⊙ Your first priority is to get yourself to a place of safety (friend/relative/Police.)
- ⊙ You may need to have an assessment by social services. They will try to make it possible for you to return home, if necessary with support.
- ⊙ If you really cannot return home and you are unable to look after yourself you may be placed in foster care or supported accommodation. You may be advised to make a homelessness application either via social services or your local housing department, depending on your local authority procedure.

If you are pregnant...

- ⦿ Being pregnant does not equal homelessness.
- ⦿ Being pregnant does not make your application any quicker or easier. The homeless process is the same for everyone. You will be asked the same questions and to provide the same documents.

“When the time is right living independently is great, if you do it too soon, without support it is really, really hard and can be worse than what you have left behind. I know, I did it and I would always advise someone to wait.”

Tracy, 21



Financial Support

Your local Jobcentre Plus will help you with:

- ⦿ employment
- ⦿ training, and
- ⦿ financial matters



www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

If you cannot find work you may be given:

- ⊙ **Jobseekers Allowance (JSA)** – If you are over 18 and unemployed you can get a weekly allowance from the Government whilst you look for full-time employment.

OR

- ⊙ **Income Support (IS)** – If you are 16 years or older on no or a low income and can't work

OR

- ⊙ **New Deal** – If you have been on Jobseekers Allowance for any length of time you will have to take part in the New Deal scheme. You will either get

a training allowance or a wage if an employer takes you on as a trainee.

- ⊙ **Housing Benefit** – You can claim housing benefit to pay some or all of your rent if you are working on a low income, or you are claiming Income Support or JSA. It does not cover water charges, gas and electricity; you will have to pay for these out of your earnings or benefit. This could help you decide what you can afford when you are looking for a place to live.

Facts about Housing Benefit

Even if you are unemployed and get full housing benefit it does not necessarily mean you will get enough to cover the full rent. You must make sure that you will be able to afford the rent before you agree to take a tenancy.

The Housing Benefit Service can let you know how much benefit you will get before you agree to take a tenancy. Contact an advice service or your local Housing Benefit Service for more information.

Remember that:



Single people under 25 (without children) are expected to find a single room in a shared house and **will not get enough housing benefit** to cover the costs of a self-contained flat.



Housing Benefit will only cover the amount of rent they think is right for properties of the same size and location. **This may be less than the landlord is charging.**



If you sign a tenancy agreement and then only get part of the cost of the rent in housing benefit you may **build up rent arrears and debt.**

Education Maintenance Allowance

If you continue to learn and develop your skills after 16, you **could receive up to £30 a week** to help you out with things like books, travel and equipment. It's called the Education Maintenance Allowance or EMA for short. The money the EMA could give you means **you'll be able to concentrate on enjoying your course or programme** without worrying so much about money. You will also get a cash bonus if you stick at it and do well.

Did You Know?

- ⊙ The main reason young people drop out of education and training at 16 is money.
- ⊙ Staying in learning at 16 is a springboard to getting good training, better qualifications and a decent job.
- ⊙ The more qualifications you have, the more choice and earning potential you will have when you're looking for a job.

EMA Checklist

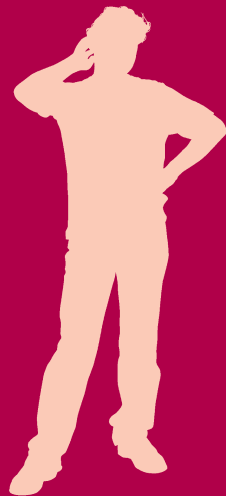
You are 16, 17 or 18 and about to leave, or have already left, compulsory education.

You are thinking of:

- ⊙ joining an LSC-funded e2e programme
- ⊙ starting a full-time further education course at a college or school, or
- ⊙ becoming a Programme Led Apprentice.
(The learning must take place in England.)
- ⊙ your annual household income is below the relevant EMA threshold (for tax year 07/08 – £30,810).

For more information visit the EMA website www.direct.gov.uk/ema or call the EMA helpline on 0808 10 16219.

Where to go for Advice



askTheSite

is for all young people (16-24) across the UK. It offers free, confidential answers to your questions within three working days (that's Mondays-Fridays 9:30am-5:30pm.) They are currently answering queries to do with general health, drink and drugs, housing, your legal rights, mental and emotional health, money, relationships, and sexual health. The service is all based online, you can submit a question at any time through their ask a question form and when it's been answered you can come back and pick it up. It's as simple as that. www.thesite.org

Youthnet

is a web-based charity dedicated to providing frank and unbiased information to enable young people to make informed decisions.

www.youthnet.org

There4me

is for 12-16 year olds who are worried about something and need some advice. They can help with loads of issues like abuse, bullying, exams, drugs and self harm.

www.there4me.com

Youth2Youth

is a unique helpline service. It is run by young people for young people. You can chat on-line, send an e-mail or ring them and they will call you back. Tel: 020 8896 3675.

www.youth2youth.co.uk

Al-Anon

Is for young people (12-20) who have been affected by someone else's drinking. For details of meetings and support groups throughout the UK please call the helpline which is a confidential service.

Tel: 020 7403 0888
(10am-10pm)
www.al-anonuk.org.uk

Brook Centre

Is a free and confidential sexual health service for young people. The service provides emergency contraception and condoms, pregnancy testing, referral for termination of pregnancy, screening for some sexually transmitted diseases and other advice on sexual health.

Helpline Tel: 0800 0185023
Mon-Fri 9am-5pm
(Free Phone)
24 Hour Recorded
Information
Tel: 020 7950 7700
www.brook.org.uk

Centrepoint is a national charity working to improve the lives of socially excluded, homeless young people. It provides a range of accommodation based services including emergency nightshelters and short stay hostels, foyers and supported flats. It also runs specialist projects for care leavers, ex-offenders and young single parents as well as floating support services.

www.centrepoint.org.uk

Childline is a free, 24 hour counselling service for all children and young people who need help or are in trouble or danger.

Tel: 0800 1111 (Free Phone), www.childline.org.uk

Community Service Volunteers offers volunteering and learning opportunities that tackle real need and enrich lives.

Tel: 0800 374 991 (Free Phone), www.csv.org.uk

The Foyer Federation can help you with accommodation combined with education and/or training.

Tel: 020 7430 2212, www.foyer.net

Shelter provides free telephone housing advice between 8am and midnight 7 days a week.

Tel: 0808 800 4444 (Free Phone), www.shelter.org.uk

Women's Aid are a national charity working towards ending domestic violence towards women and children.

Tel: 0808 2000 247 (Free Phone), www.womensaid.org.uk

The council housing department can help you if you are homeless or at risk of losing your home or even if you are just planning to move.

They can provide advice and may be able to assist you with:

- ⊙ Supported Accommodation
- ⊙ Emergency/Temporary Accommodation
- ⊙ Assessment of your legal rights under homelessness law
- ⊙ Getting support to move or stay in your home
- ⊙ Referrals to specialist services for further advice and help

If you have emergency housing needs please contact them as soon as possible. Don't leave it until the last minute to get in touch.

For more information contact your local authority:

www.Southwark.gov.uk

Tel: 020 7525 5000

www.Greenwich.gov.uk

Tel: 020 8854 8888

www.Lewisham.gov.uk

Tel: 020 8314 6000

www.Bromley.gov.uk

Tel: 020 8464 3333

www.Bexley.gov.uk

Tel: 020 8303 7777

Your local **Citizens Advice Bureau** provides independent, practical, reliable, up-to-date information on a wide range of topics, including benefits, housing, employment and debt, consumer and legal issues.

Check out www.citizensadvice.org.uk for your local office and more information.

Your local **Job Centre Plus** provides help and advice on jobs and training for people who can work and financial help (benefits) for those who cannot.

Check out www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk for your local office and more information.

Your local **Social Services** office has a responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of young people who:

- ⊙ may be at risk of harm or neglect
- ⊙ may be in trouble with the police
- ⊙ have a disability
- ⊙ are in local authority care
- ⊙ have serious family problems

For more information look at your local authority website.



Your local Connexions office provides support to all young people aged 13 to 19 in England.

It also provides support for people up to the age of 25 who have a disability or learning difficulty (or both.) It provides information, advice, guidance and access to personal development opportunities for young

people. It aims to remove barriers to learning and progression, and ensure young people make a smooth transition to adulthood and working life.

Tel: 080800 13219 (Free Phone)

Check out www.connexions-direct.com for more information.



This leaflet has been produced by the South East London Housing Partnership (Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, Lewisham and Southwark). With special thanks to the Lewisham Young Advisors Group for their comments and input.

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South East London

housing partnership

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