

Missing Child Policy

Policy statement

Children's safety is our highest priority, both on and off the premises. Every attempt is made, through carrying out the Outings Policy and the exit/entrance procedure, to ensure the security of children is maintained at all times. In the unlikely event of a child going missing, our missing child procedure is followed.

Procedures

Child going missing on the premises

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the Pre-School Leader should be alerted.
- The Pre-School Leader and any available staff should carry out a thorough search of the building and garden.
- Doors, gates and fences should be checked to see if there has been a breach of security whereby a child could wander out.
- The Pre-School Leader should then call the police and report the child as missing and then call the parents.
- Any available staff could undertake a search of the immediate vicinity. If there are no available staff then the pre-school could request help from the school.
- The remaining children should be gathered on the carpet and the register checked to make sure no other child has also gone astray.
- The Pre-School Leader should talk to the staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and record their answers.
- The Pre-School Leader should contact the Chair and report the incident. The Chair should come to the setting immediately to carry out an investigation, with the management team where appropriate.

Child going missing on an outing

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, staff on the outing should ask children to stand with their designated carer and carry out a headcount to ensure that no other child has gone astray. Available staff should search the immediate vicinity, but not beyond that.
- The staff inform the venue who will handle the search and contact the police if the child is not found.
- The remaining outing group should go to the designated meeting point and take the register.
- The outing leader should contact the police and report the child as missing.

- The Pre-School Leader should be contacted immediately (if not on the outing).
- The outing leader should contact the parents, who should make their way to the venue.
- Staff should take the remaining children back to the setting.
- The Pre-School Leader should contact the Chair and report the incident. The Chair should come to the setting immediately to carry out an investigation, with the Management Committee, (where appropriate).
- The Outing Leader or member of staff may be advised by the police to stay at the venue until they arrive.

The investigation

- The Pre-School Leader together with a representative of the management team, should speak with the parent(s).
- The Chair should carry out a full investigation taking written statements from all the staff on duty.
- The Pre-School Leader/Deputy Leader or Outing Leader should write an incident report detailing:
 - The date and time of the incident.
 - What staff/children were in the group/outing and the name of the staff designated responsible for the missing child.
 - When the child was last seen in the group/outing.
 - What has taken place in the group or outing since the child went missing.
 - The time it is estimated that the child went missing.
- A conclusion should be drawn as to how the breach of security happened.
- If the incident warrants a police investigation, all staff must cooperate fully. In this case, the police will handle all aspects of the investigation, including interviewing staff. Children's social care may need to be involved if it seems likely that there is a child protection issue to address.
- The incident must be reported under RIDDOR arrangements (see the Managing Accidents and Incidents Policy); the local authority Health and Safety Officer may want to investigate and will decide if there is a case for prosecution.
- In the event of disciplinary action needing to be taken, OFSTED must be informed.
- The insurance provider should be informed.

Managing people

- Missing child incidents are very worrying for all concerned. Part of managing the incident is to try to keep everyone as calm as possible.
- The staff will feel worried about the child, especially the key person or the designated carer, and responsible for the safety of that child for the outing. They may blame themselves and their feelings of anxiety and distress will rise as the length of time the child is missing increases.
- Staff may be the understandable target of parental anger and they may be afraid. The Pre-School Leader need to ensure that staff under investigation are not only fairly treated, but receive support while feeling vulnerable.
- The parents will feel angry, and fraught. They may want to blame staff and may single out one staff member over others; they may direct their anger at the Pre-School Leader. When dealing with a distraught and angry parent, there should always be two members of staff, one of whom is the Pre-School Leader and the other should be the Chairperson of the Management Committee or representative. No matter how understandable the parent's anger may be, aggression or threats against staff are not tolerated, and the police should be called.
- The other children are also sensitive to what is going on around them. They too may be worried. The remaining staff caring for them need to be focused on their needs and must not discuss the incident in front of them. They should answer children's questions honestly, but also reassure them.
- In accordance with the severity of the final outcome, staff may need counselling and support. If a child is not found, or is injured, or worse, this will be a very difficult time. The Chairperson will use their discretion to decide what action to take.
- In the event of a missing child the pre-school's Critical Incident management team should be called and we would request support from the **Critical Incident Support Line 07623 912974**, Mon-Fri 8am - 6pm only.

See also *Accident and Critical Incident* policy.