



LOST OR MISSING CHILD POLICY

Policy statement

Children's safety is our highest priority, both on and off the premises. Every attempt is made to ensure the security of children is always maintained. In the unlikely event of a child going missing, our missing child procedure is followed.

Procedures

Staff must conduct a regular headcount onsite, especially when children are moving from one area of Pre-School to another.

Child going missing on the premises

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the manager will be alerted.
- The register is checked to make sure no other child has also gone astray.
- The remaining children will be grouped together in a secure area and supervised with sufficient staff while other staff are searching. The staff will carry on as normal as to not worry the children.
- A thorough search of the grounds will be carried out (including the Infant School grounds)
- Doors and gates are checked to see if there has been a breach of security whereby a child could wander out.
- If the child is not found, the manager calls the police immediately and reports the child as missing. If it is suspected that the child may have been abducted, the police are informed of this.
- The parents/carers are then called and informed.
- A recent photo and a note of what the child is wearing is given to the police.
- The manager talks to our staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and records this.
- The manager contacts our directors and reports the incident. A director comes to the provision immediately to carry out an investigation, with our management team where appropriate.
- To avoid false missing child situations, it is imperative that staff communicate with others as to the whereabouts of children at all times.

Child going missing on an outing

This describes what to do when our staff have taken a small group on an outing, leaving the manager and/or other staff back in the premises. If the manager has accompanied children on the outing, the procedures are adjusted accordingly.

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the staff members on the outing ask children to stand with a designated carer and carry out a headcount to ensure that no other child has gone astray.
- One staff member searches the immediate vicinity but does not search beyond that.
- The outing leader contacts the police and reports that child as missing.
- The manager is contacted immediately (if not on the outing) and the incident is recorded.
- The manager contacts the parents/carers.
- The staff take the remaining children back to the setting as soon as possible.
- According to the advice of the police, a senior member of staff, or the manager where applicable, should remain at the site where the child went missing and wait for the police to arrive.
- A recent photo and a description of what the child is wearing is given to the police.
- The manager contacts the directors and reports the incident. The directors come to our premises immediately to carry out an investigation, with our management team (where appropriate).
- The staff keep calm and do not let the other children become anxious or worried.

The investigation

- Ofsted are informed as soon as possible and kept up-to-date with the investigation as appropriate.
- The directors carry out a full investigation, taking written statements from all our staff and volunteers who were present.

- The manager, together with a representative of our management team speaks with the parents/carers and explains the process of the investigation.
- The parents/carers may also raise a complaint with us or Ofsted.
- Each member of staff present writes an incident report detailing:
 - The date and time of the incident.
 - Where the child went missing from e.g. the setting or an outing venue.
 - Which staff/children were in the premises/on the outing and the name of the staff member who was designated as responsible for the missing child.
 - When the child was last seen in the premises/or on the outing, including the time it is estimated that the child went missing.
 - What has taken place in the premises or on the outing since the child went missing.
 - The report is counter-signed by the senior member of staff and the date and time added.
- A conclusion is drawn as to how the breach of security happened.
- If the incident warrants a police investigation, all our staff will co-operate fully. In this case, the police will handle all aspects of the investigation, including interviewing staff and parents. Children's social care may be involved if it seems likely that there is a child protection issue to address.
- In the event of disciplinary action needing to be taken, Ofsted are advised.
- The insurance provider is 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.
- Our staff will feel worried about the child, especially the key person or the designated carer 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.
- They may be the understandable target of parental anger and they may be afraid. Our manager ensures that any staff under investigation are not only fairly treated but receive support while they are feeling vulnerable.
- The parents/carers will feel angry, and fraught. They may want to blame our staff and may single out one staff member over others; they may direct their anger at our manager. When dealing with a distraught and angry parent/carer, there should always be two members of staff one of whom is the manager. No matter how understandable the parent/carers' anger may be, aggression or threats against our 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. Our 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, our staff may need counselling and support. If a child is not found, or is injured, or worse, this will be a very difficult time. Our directors will use their discretion to decide what action to take.
- Our staff must not discuss any missing child incident with the press without taking advice.

Following any incident of a lost or missing child the setting will review any policies and procedures that are needed to ensure it will not happen again, this will include updating risk assessments.

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Reviewed July 2022