

1. Safeguarding children

1.5 Missing child

Children's safety is maintained as the highest priority at all times both on and off premises. Every attempt is made through carrying out the outings procedure 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

- Staff keep calm to avoid other children becoming anxious or worried.
- As soon as it is suspected that a child is missing all staff are alerted and a preliminary headcount takes place.
- The setting leader will carry out a thorough search of the building, garden and forest school area.
- The remaining children will be led to a secure area so that a secondary head count can be made and the register checked to make sure no other child has also gone astray.
- Doors and gates are checked to see if there has been a breach of security whereby a child could wander out.
- The setting leader talks to the staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and records this.
- If the child is not found, the parent is contacted and the missing child is reported to the police.
- The setting leader contacts the chairperson and reports the incident. The chairperson, with the management committee carries out an investigation and may come to the setting immediately.

Child going missing on an outing

- Staff keep calm to avoid other children becoming anxious or worried.

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, staff on the outing ask children to stand with their designated person and carry out a headcount to check that no other child has gone astray.
- Ensuring sufficient staff/child ratios, remaining available staff will search the immediate vicinity.
- If at an organised venue, the staff contact the venue's security who will handle the search and contact the police if the child is not found.
- The setting leader or manager (if not present) is contacted immediately and the incident is reported.
- The setting leader contacts the police and reports the child as missing, unless venue security have already done so.
- The setting leader contacts the parent, who makes their way to the setting or outing venue as agreed with the setting leader.
- Staff take the remaining children back to the setting.
- The setting leader contacts the chairperson and reports the incident. The chairperson, with the management committee, (or venue proprietor) carries out an investigation and may come to the setting immediately.

When parents accompany the nursery on a whole setting outing procedures may vary slightly.

The investigation

- The setting leader together with the chairperson or representative from the management committee or venue proprietor, speaks with the parent(s).
- The chairperson and management committee, carry out a full investigation taking written statements from all staff present during the incident.
- The outing lead writes an incident report detailing:
 - The date and time of the report.
 - 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 is drawn as to how the breach of security happened.
- If the incident warrants a police investigation, all staff co-operate fully. In this case, the police will handle all aspects of the investigation, including interviewing staff. Children's Social Care may be involved if it seems likely that there is a child protection issue to address.
- The incident is reported under RIDDOR arrangements (see the Reporting of 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 is informed.
- 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.
- The 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.
- Staff may be the understandable target of parental anger and they may be afraid. Setting leaders need to ensure that staff under investigation are not only fairly treated but receive support while feeling vulnerable.
- The parents may 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 setting leader. When dealing with a distraught and angry parent, there should always be two representatives of the nursery, one of whom is the setting 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 committee will use their discretion to decide what action to take.
- Staff must not discuss any missing child incident with any persons not authorised to investigate the incident unless permission has been given by the Management Committee.

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