



Missing child

Policy statement

Children's safety is always maintained as the highest priority both on and off premises. 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 Key Person/staff alerts the setting Manager.
- The setting Manager (or in their absence the Deputy Manager) will carry out a thorough search of the building.
- The register is 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.
- If the child is not found, the parent is contacted, and the missing child is reported to the police.
- The setting Manager (or in their absence the leader) talks to the staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and records this.
- The Manager will consider the need for an investigation and will arrange for the investigation to take place as considered appropriate and in a timely fashion. The Manager may appoint an appropriate person to carry out the investigation or may lead it themselves. Other relevant partnership agencies may also be consulted and involved if considered that this will add value to the investigation.
- The outcome of any such investigation will be considered by the committee as soon as practicable with a view to progressing any actions as recommended by the investigator to ensure prevention of a similar occurrence in the future.

Child going missing on an outing.

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

- 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 ensure that no other child has gone astray. One staff member searches the immediate vicinity but does not search beyond that.
- The setting Manager is contacted immediately, and the incident is reported.
- The setting Manager (or in their absence the leader) contacts the police and reports the child as missing.
- The setting manager (or in their absence the leader) contacts the parent, who makes their way to the setting or outing venue as agreed with the setting Manager. The setting is advised as the best place, as by the time the parent arrives, the child may have been returned to the setting.

- Staff take the remaining children back to the setting.
- In an indoor venue, the staff contact the venue's security who will handle the search and contact the police if the child is not found.
- The Manager will consider the need for an investigation and will arrange for the investigation to take place as considered appropriate and in a timely fashion. The Manager may appoint an appropriate person to carry out the investigation or may lead it themselves. Other relevant partnership agencies may also be consulted and involved if considered that this will add value to the investigation.
- The outcome of any such investigation will be considered by the Manager/Deputy as soon as practicable with a view to progressing any actions as recommended by the investigator to ensure prevention of a similar occurrence in the future.

The investigation:

- Staff keep calm and do not let the other children become anxious or worried.
- The setting Manager (or in their absence the Deputy Manager), speaks with the parent(s).
- The setting Manager (or in their absence the Deputy Manager), carries out a full investigation taking written statements from all the staff in the room or who were on the outing.
- The key person/staff member 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 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 setting leader. When dealing with a distraught and angry parent, there should always be two members of staff. Ideally one of whom is the setting Manager. 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 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 Manager will use their discretion to decide what action to take.
- Staff must not discuss any missing child incident with the press, rather direct any press enquiries to either the setting Manager (or in their absence the leader).

All our Policies & Procedures are crafted to ensure the highest possible standards at our setting and will be reviewed every 3 years or sooner, if necessary, in light of specific events or relevant statutory changes.

