



Missing Child Policy

Policy statement

Children's safety is maintained as highest priority, both on and off the premises. Every attempt is made, through the implementation of our outings procedure and our exit/entry 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 adult who first becomes aware alerts the Practice Manager, or in the absence of the Practice Manager, the Deputy Practice Manager.
- The Practice Manager will delegate a member of staff to gather the children in the small room and check the register to make sure no other child has also gone astray. Without alarming the children, ask them if they know where the missing child is.
- The Practice Manager will check doors and gates to see if there has been a breach of security whereby a child could wander out. If exits are not secure two members of staff go out to look for the child. If the doors and gates are secure the toilets, kitchen, office, storage area and foyer are checked before the Practice Manager carries out a thorough search of the building and garden. Premises are then to be searched systematically, starting with the main hall, then small room, office, toilets, store rooms, stage and kitchen. Look under and in any containers and cupboards and in the garden and garden shed.
- If the child is not found, the Practice 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 parent(s) are then called and informed.
- A recent photo and a note of what the child is wearing is given to the police.
- The Practice Manager talks to the staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and records this.
- The Practice Manager contacts the Chair and reports the incident. The Chair comes to the Pre-school immediately and supports the police in their investigation. A detailed report of the proceedings is recorded.

Child going missing on an outing

This describes what to do when staff have taken a small group on an outing, leaving The Practice Manager and/or other staff back at the Pre-school. If the Practice Manager has accompanied children on the outing, the procedures are adjusted accordingly.

What to do when a child goes missing from a whole group outing may be a little different, as parents usually attend and are responsible for their own child.

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the staff members on the outing ask children to stand with their 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.
- In an indoor venue, a staff member contacts the venue's security who will handle the search and contact the police if the child is not found.
- If there is no security, the most senior staff member on the outing contacts the police and reports that child as missing.
- The Practice Manager is contacted immediately (if not on the outing) and the incident is recorded.
- The Practice Manager contacts the parent(s).
- Staff take the remaining children back to the Pre-school, or the closest safe place, as soon as possible.
- Staff keep calm and do not let the other children become anxious or worried.
- According to the advice of the police, a senior member of staff, or The Practice 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 Practice Manager contacts the Chair and reports the incident. The Chair comes to the Pre-school/venue immediately and supports the police in their investigation. A detailed report of the proceedings is recorded.

The investigation

- Ofsted are informed as soon as possible and kept up-to-date with the investigation.
- The Practice Manager, together with the Chair, speaks with the parent(s) and explains the process of the investigation.
- The parent(s) may also raise a complaint with the Pre-school 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/volunteers/children were in the group/outing and the name of the staff member who was designated 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 staff 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.
- 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. The Practice Manager ensures that any 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 manager. When dealing with a distraught and angry parent, there should always be two members of staff one of whom is the Practice Manager and the other should be the Chair. 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 Chair will use their discretion to decide what action to take.
- Staff must not discuss any missing child incident with anyone outside of the Pre-school's staff or Committee, unless part of a formal investigation process, including the press.