

1.8 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 outing's procedure and the exit/entrance procedure 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

Child going missing on the premises

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing the key person/staff member alerts the Manager who must establish who last saw the missing child, where and when and records this.
- The remaining children will be gathered into one large group with two adults or more (for ratio), leaving the remaining adults to search the preschool systematically.
- Ensure all adults are aware of the situation.
- The Manager will carry out a thorough search of the building, Lady Boswell's school grounds and the Environmental Park.
- The register is checked to make sure no other child is unaccounted for.
- Doors and gates are checked to see if there has been a breach of security whereby a child could wander out.
- If the child cannot be found, the Manager will contact the child's parents. If the parents are unavailable, the setting will use the emergency contact people.
- Need to ensure that as soon as parents are informed, they will need ongoing advice and support throughout.
- If the above steps do not locate the child, the police will be contacted to report the child missing.
- The Manager contacts the Chair and reports the incident. The Chair will come to the setting to carry out an investigation where possible, alternatively will appoint a member of the committee to attend.

Child going missing on an outing

- As soon as it is identified that a child is missing, staff on the outing ask children to stand with their designated carers and carry out a headcount to ensure that no other child is unaccounted for.
- One staff member searches the immediate vicinity but does not search beyond that.
- The senior staff member/Manager contacts the police and reports the child as missing.
- The Manager is contacted immediately (if not on the outing) and the incident recorded.
- The senior staff member/Manager contacts the parents.
- 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 or a member of staff may be advised by the police to stay at the venue until they arrive.
- A recent photo and a description of what the child is wearing is given to the police.
- The Manager contacts the Chair and reports the incident. The Chair will come to carry out an investigation, where possible, alternatively will appoint a member of the committee to attend.
- If police are called then Front Door Service notified and Ofsted informed.

The investigation

- Staff keep calm and do not let the other children become anxious or worried.
- The Chair and Committee of Trustees carry out a full investigation taking written statements from all the staff who were on the outing.
- The Manager together with the Chair or representative from the Committee of Trustees, speaks with the parent(s) and explains the process of the investigation.
- The parent(s) may also raise a complaint with the setting or Ofsted and should be given the opportunity and meetings to do this.
- Each staff member involved writes an incident report statement 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 setting/on the outing and the name of the staff designated responsible for the missing child.
 - When the child was last seen in the setting or on the outing including time estimated child went missing.
 - What has taken place in the setting or on the outing since 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.
- 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. The Manager needs 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 Manager. When dealing with a distraught and angry parent, there should always be two members of staff, one of whom is the Manager and the other should be the Chair of the Committee of Trustees 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 Chair together with the Committee of Trustees will use their discretion to decide what action to take.
- Staff must not discuss any missing child incident with the press without taking advice.