

## Missing Child

### Policy Statement

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

Even when all precautions are properly observed, emergencies can still arise. If for any reason a member of staff cannot account for a child's whereabouts during a session at playgroup, the following procedures will be followed.

#### Child Going Missing On The Premises

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing the Key Person or other member of staff alerts the Preschool Leader.
- The staff team will then be advised and a thorough search of the entire premises will commence. Staff will be careful not to create an atmosphere of panic and to ensure that the other children remain safe and adequately supervised.
  - If the child is not found during this initial search, then the Preschool Leader calls the police and reports the child as missing and then calls the parent/carer.
- The Preschool Leader contacts the Chair of the committee and reports the incident. The Chair comes to the playgroup as soon as possible to carry out an investigation, with members of the committee where applicable.
- While waiting for the police and the parent/carer to arrive, searches for the child will continue. During this period, staff will maintain as normal a routine as is possible for the rest of the children.
  - 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.
  - The Preschool Leader talks to the staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and records this.
- The Preschool Leader, with a member of the committee if possible, will be responsible for meeting the police and the missing child's parent/carer. The Preschool Leader will co-ordinate any actions instructed by the police, and take appropriate action to comfort and reassure the parents/carers.

#### Child Going Missing On An Outing

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

What to do when a child goes missing from a whole playgroup outing may be a little different, as parents/carers may attend and will be responsible for their own child.

A copy of this policy is to be taken on all outings.

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, staff 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.
- The Preschool Leader is contacted immediately (if not on the outing) and the incident recorded.
- The Preschool Leader, DSL or senior staff member contacts the police and reports the child as missing.
- The Preschool Leader or DSL contacts the parent/carer, who makes their way to the playgroup.
- Staff take the remaining children back to the playgroup as soon as possible if it is safe to do so. According to police advice, one senior staff member should remain at the site where the child went missing and wait for the police to arrive.
- In an indoor venue, staff contact the venue's security who will handle the search and contact the police if the child is not found.
- The Preschool Leader, DSL or senior staff contacts the Chair of the committee and reports the incident. The Chair comes to the playgroup as soon as possible to carry out an investigation, with members of the committee where applicable.
- The Preschool Leader or a member of staff may be advised by the police to stay at the venue until they arrive.

#### 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. Preschool Leaders need to ensure that staff under investigation are not only fairly treated but receive support while feeling vulnerable.
- The parents/carers will likely 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 Preschool Leader. When dealing with a distraught and angry parent/carer, there should always be two representatives of the playgroup, one of whom is the Preschool Leader and the other should

be the Chair of the committee or another committee member. No matter how understandable the parent/carer'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 the press without taking advice from a committee member.

Whether the incident occurs at the playgroup or on an outing an investigation will always be carried out. The following steps are taken.

- Staff keep calm and do not let the other children become anxious or worried.
- The Preschool Leader together with the Chair speaks with the parent/carer(s) together and explains the process of the investigation.
- The Chair will carry out a full investigation.
- The Preschool Leader or DSL reports the incident to Cambridgeshire Safeguarding Designated Officer and the designated Early Years Advisor.
- The Key Person, DSL or a senior 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.
- Each member of staff present during the incident writes a full report, which is filed in the child's file. Staff do not discuss any missing child incident with the press.
- 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.
- Ofsted are informed as soon as possible (and at least within 14 days) via their online reporting system.
- LADO are informed: LADO@cambridgeshire.gov.uk, 01223 727967 or the Emergency on duty team 01733 234724.
- RIDDOR is to be informed via their online reporting system.
- The insurance provider is informed.
- A meeting will be held between the committee and staff to understand and discuss how a child went missing; the missing child policy will be reviewed and amended if necessary.

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Policy adopted: September 2011

Last reviewed: October 2025

Signed: .....

Name: Caroline Wilson

Position: Chair