

Cold Ash Pre-school: Missing Child Policy

Safeguarding and Welfare Requirement: Child Protection

Providers must have and implement a policy, and procedures, to safeguard children.

Policy statement:

Children's safety is our highest priority, both on and off the premises. Every attempt is made, through following 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 :

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the staff alert the Pre-school Leader or Deputy Manager in the Leader's absence.
- The Pre-school Leader or Deputy Manager does a thorough check of the preschool building and garden area.
- If the child is not found, the Pre-school Leader or Deputy Manager calls the police and reports the child as missing and then calls the parent/guardian.
- 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 Pre-school Leader or Deputy Manager talks to the staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and records this.
- The Pre-school Leader or Deputy Manager contacts the Chair of the Management Committee and reports the incident. The Chair or another member of the Management Committee comes to the preschool immediately to carry out an investigation, with the Pre-school Leader or Deputy Manager where appropriate.

Child going missing on an outing:

This describes what to do when staff have taken a small group on an outing, leaving the Pre-school Leader and/or other staff back in the Pre-school. If the Pre-school Leader 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 come together 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 Pre-school Leader or Deputy Manager contacts the police and reports the child as missing.
- In an indoor venue, the staff contacts the venue's security who will handle the search and contact the police if the child is not found.
- The Pre-school Leader or Deputy Manager is contacted immediately (if not on the outing) and the incident is recorded.
- The Pre-school Leader or Deputy Manager contacts the parent/guardian, who makes their way to the Pre-school.
- The Pre-school Leader or Deputy Manager contacts the Chair of the management committee and reports the incident. The Chair or another member of the Management Committee comes to the preschool immediately to carry out an investigation, with the management team (where appropriate).
- Staff take the remaining children back to the preschool.
- The Pre-school Leader or Deputy Manager may be advised by the police to stay at the venue until they arrive.

When a child goes missing on a preschool outing with their parents/guardians present, the procedure may be a little different as parents attending are usually responsible for their own child.

The investigation:

- Staff keep calm and do not let the other children become anxious or worried.
- The Pre-school Leader or Deputy Manager together with a representative of the Management Committee, speaks with the parent(s)/guardian(s).

- The Chair carries out a full investigation taking written statements from all the staff in the room or who were on the outing.
- The Pre-school Leader or Deputy Manager writes an incident report detailing:
 - The date and time of the report.
 - What staff/children were in the group/outing.
 - When the child was last seen in the group/outing.
 - What took 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; 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 Pre-school Leader or Deputy Manager need to ensure that staff under investigation are not only fairly treated but receive support while feeling vulnerable.

- The parents/guardians 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 Pre-school Leader. When dealing with a distraught and angry parent/guardian, there should always be two members of the Pre-school team, one of whom is the Pre-school Leader and the other should be the Chair or another representative of the management committee. No matter how understandable the parent's/guardian'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 externally without taking advice.