

06 Safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults procedures

06.05 Missing child

In the building

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the member of staff informs the manager/deputy/senior room leader/designated person who initiates a search within the pre-school. The manager/deputy/senior room leader/designated person asks the staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and records this.
- Meanwhile, the register is checked to make sure no other child has also gone astray.
- If the child is found on-site, the manager/deputy/senior room leader/designated person check on the welfare of the child and investigates the circumstances of the incident.
- If the child is not found on site, one member of staff searches the immediate vicinity, if there is no sign of the child, the police are called immediately.
- The parents/carers are then called and informed.
- The manager/deputy/senior room leader/designated person contacts the trustees of Little Doves Christian Pre-School and reports the incident. This person/s or a trustee representative carries out an investigation and may come to the pre-school immediately.

Off-site (outing or walk)

This describes what to do when staff have taken a small group on an outing, leaving the manager/deputy/designated persons and/or other staff back in the pre-school. If the manager/deputy/senior room leader/designated persons have accompanied the children on the outing, the procedures are adjusted accordingly. What to do when a child goes missing from a whole pre-school outing may be a little different, as parents/carers 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 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 manager/deputy/senior room leader/designated persons are contacted immediately and the incident is reported.
- The manager/deputy/senior room leader/designated person contacts the police and reports the child as missing. 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/deputy/senior room leader/designated person contacts the parents/carers, who make their way to the pre-school or outing venue as agreed with the pre-school leader.
- Staff take the remaining children back to the pre-school as soon as possible if safe to do so.

- According to the advice of the police, one senior member of staff should remain at the site where the child went missing and wait for the police to arrive.
- The manager/deputy/senior room leader/designated person contacts the trustees of Little Doves Christian Pre-school and reports the incident. This person/s or a trustee representative carries out an investigation and may come to the pre-school immediately.
- Staff keep calm and do not let the other children become anxious or worried.

Recording and reporting

- A record is made on 06.1a Child welfare and protection summary and 06.1b Safeguarding incident reporting form. The manager/deputy/senior room leader/designated person completes and circulates 06.1c Confidential safeguarding incident report form to the designated officer (Jenny Walker) on the same day that the incident occurred.

The investigation

- Ofsted are informed as soon as possible (and at least within 14 days).
- The designated officer carries out a full investigation.
- The manager/deputy/senior room leader/designated person and the designated officer speak with the parents/carers together and explain the process of the investigation.
- Each member of staff present during the incident writes a full report using 06.1b Safeguarding incident reporting form, which is filed in the child's file. Staff do not discuss any missing child incident with the press.

Additional Procedure

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 pre-school or an outing venue
- which staff/children were in the premises/on the outing and the name of the staff member who was designated as 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/carers, if needed. 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.
- The pre-school 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 manager/deputy/senior room leader ensures that any staff under investigation are not only fairly treated but receive support while feeling vulnerable.
- The parents/carers 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/deputy/senior room leader. When dealing with a distraught and angry parents/carer, there should always be two members of staff, one of whom is the manager/deputy/senior room leader and the other a senior member of staff. No matter how understandable the parents/carers 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, the 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/deputy and trustees will use their discretion to decide what action to take.

The staff must not discuss any missing child incident with the press without taking advice.

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