

25. Missing Child

Statement of Intent

Children's safety is paramount at all times both on and off premises. We have a strict entrance/exit system along with an outings 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.

Aim

Polesden Lacey Playschool is committed to the safety of the children throughout the time they attend the Playschool or on Playschool outings. In the event that a child is lost, we will ensure that a search is made for the child as soon as possible. The parent/guardians and authorities will be notified as soon as practicably possible. A high level of care for the other children at Playschool will be maintained while procedures are followed.

Procedures

Child going missing on the premises

As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing the key person/staff alerts the Manager and the following procedure is implemented:

- Staff will remain calm and deployed to assist the other children from becoming anxious or worried;
- The member of staff in charge of the group will ask where the child was last seen;
- The searching members of staff will be given a full description of the child and what they were wearing and told where the child was last seen. The premises will be searched outwards from that point;
- The register is checked to make sure no other child has also gone astray;
- Gates/doors are checked to see if there has been a breach of security whereby a child could wander out;
- If the child cannot be found after a thorough search the management team will notify and liaise with the parent/guardians accordingly. We aim to do this no later than 15 minutes from the initial alert;
- Simultaneously a wider search will be undertaken by a second search party; beyond the premises;
- If the child is not found after 30 minutes, the Police will be contacted;
- The Manager will report the incident to Ofsted and C-SPA in due course; and
- The Manager will carry out an investigation into the situation and action any gaps in security or procedures.

Child going missing on an outing

If a child goes missing from a setting outing the following will happen:

- Staff will remain calm and assist the other children from becoming anxious or worried.
- The searching member of staff /parent helpers will be given a full description of the child and what they were wearing and told where the child was last seen. The venue will be searched outwards from that point.
- Simultaneously the venue organisers will be alerted for advice and additional manpower.
- The children will remain in one group with the appropriate ratio allowing the other adults to search the area.
- The Outing Leader will contact the parent/guardians after 15 minutes, if the child is not found.
- If the child is not found within 30 minutes the Outing Leader contacts the Police.
- If the child continues to be missing the remaining group makes their way back to the setting, and
- The Manager will report the incident to Ofsted and C-SPA in due course.

- The Manager will carry out an investigation into the situation and action any gaps in security or procedures.

Actions to be followed once the child has been found

- Talk to, take care of and, if necessary, comfort the child;
- Speak to the other children to ensure they understand why they should not leave the premises/separate from the group on an outing;
- The Manager will speak to the parent/guardians to discuss the events and give an account of the incident (having already spoken with C-SPA);
- The Manager will undertake a thorough investigation;
- The investigation should involve all concerned providing written statements;
- The Manager will prepare a briefing document for other parents/guardians;
- The detailed report should cover: time, place, numbers of staff and children, when the child was last seen, what appeared to have happened, the length of time the child was missing, how the child appeared to have gone missing and lessons for the future;
- All media queries should be referred to the Manager; and
- Protective measures identified to prevent future occurrences.

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 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. The Manager needs to ensure that staff under investigation are not only fairly treated but receive support while feeling vulnerable.

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 Manager will use their discretion to decide what action to take.

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

Policy Review

As part of Polesden Lacey Playschool monitoring of missing children this policy will be subject to periodic review.

Policy adopted by: Ellie Pragnell (Chair), Caroline O'Leary (Manager)

Date: September 24

Policy Review Date: September 25