06 Children’s Onsite Safety

# **06.17 Missing Child**

* 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 managers are contacted immediately (if not on the outing) and the incident is recorded.
* The Manager contacts the police and reports the child as missing.
* The Deputy Manager contacts the parent, who makes their way to the setting.
* Staff take the remaining children back to the setting.
* In an indoor venue, the staff will contact the venue’s security who will handle the search and contact the police if the child is not found.
* The Manager contacts the chair and reports the incident. The chairperson will come to the setting immediately (or as soon as possible) to carry out an investigation, with the management team where appropriate.
* A member of staff may be advised by the police to stay at the venue until they arrive.

***The Investigation***

* Staff keep calm and do not let the other children become anxious or worried.
* The Joint Managers, or a representative of the management team, speaks with the parent(s).
* The chairperson will carry out a full investigation taking written statements from all the staff in the room or who were on the outing.
* The Joint Managers write 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.
* 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, especially the person responsible for the safety of that child if on an 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 management (Pre-school managers and Chairperson) need 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 pre-school management. When dealing with a distraught and angry parent, there should always be two members of staff, at least one of whom is the pre-school manager. The other should be the deputy manager or chairperson of the management committee. 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 managers and/or chairperson will use their discretion to decide what action to take.
* Staff must not discuss any missing child incident with the press without taking advice.