Missing Child Policy

Policy Aim

Children's safety is our highest priority, both on and off the premises. Every attempt is made to ensure the security of children is maintained at all times. In the unlikely event of a child going missing, the procedures below are followed.

Procedures

Child going missing on the premises

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the relevant member of staff alerts the setting manager.
- All children present are gathered together in an allocated space where a headcount is completed and a register is called to ensure no other child is missing.
- The setting manager carries out a thorough search of the building and garden, repeatedly calling the child's name and saying they must come out if they are hiding.
- Doors and gates are checked to see if there has been a breach of security whereby a child could wander out.
- If the child is not found, the manager calls the police immediately and reports the child as missing. If it is suspected that the child may have been abducted, the police are informed of this.
- A member of staff carries out a second search.
- The setting manager contacts the child's parents to explain the situation and advise them of action being taken.
- The setting manager talks to all staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and records this.
- The setting manager meets the police and parents when they arrive at the setting.
- A recent photo and a note of what the child is wearing is given to the police.
- The police lead any investigation, and the setting manager and staff follow their directions.
- The setting manager contacts the Committee and reports the incident. The Committee or suitable representative comes to the setting immediately, if possible, or within 48 hours to carry out an investigation.

Child going missing on an outing

- On noticing a child is missing, the setting manager/staff members on the outing ask children to stand with their designated carer and carry out a headcount and register to ensure that no other child is missing.
- One staff member searches the immediate vicinity, repeatedly calling the child's name, but does not search beyond that.

If after a maximum of five minutes the child is not found, the procedure below is followed:

- The venue's reception/security are informed and asked for support.
- The most senior staff member on the outing contacts the police and reports the child as missing.
- The setting manager is contacted immediately (if not on the outing) and the incident is recorded

    - The setting manager contacts the child's parents to explain the situation and advises them of action being taken.
    - Staff take the remaining children back to the setting as soon as possible. During any delay the children are kept in a safe and secure place.
    - According to the advice of the police, the setting manager / senior member of staff, should remain at the site where the child went missing and wait for the police to arrive.

- Setting manager contacts the Committee and reports the incident. The Committee or suitable representative comes to the appropriate location immediately, or as and when as directed by the police/LADO. The Committee should not carry out an investigation without liaising with the police and/or LADO.
- Ofsted are informed of the incident and actions taken

The investigation

- LADO must be informed, before any internal investigation takes place. The setting follow LADO's instructions, including any investigation which would involve taking written statements from all staff and volunteers who were present and any other witnesses as appropriate.
- Setting manager, together with the Committee, speak with the parents and explain the process of the investigation.
- The parents may also separately notify Ofsted if they wish to.
- 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 setting 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 most senior member of staff present 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. Gloucestershire's Children's Social Care Team (Via MASH) and LADO 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 accordingly.
- 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 key person or the designated carer responsible for the safety of the child on 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. Appropriate support should be provided.
- Staff may be the understandable target of parental anger and they may be afraid. The setting manager ensures that any staff under investigation are treated fairly and receive support while feeling vulnerable.
- The parents will feel angry and fraught. When dealing with a distraught and angry parent, there should always be two members of staff, one of whom is the setting manager and the other should be the Committee/next most senior member of staff present. Aggression or threats against staff are not tolerated, and the police should be called and Ofsted informed.
- The other children are also sensitive to what is going on around them. They too may be worried. 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 has died, this will be a very difficult time. The setting manager/ Committee will use their discretion to decide what action to take.
- Staff must not discuss any missing child incident with the press, public, parent, or other professionals but direct them to the Committee.

Preventative Procedures

- Risk assessments are completed and regularly updated.
- Gates, fences and boundary are checked daily to ensure they are secure.
- Visitors are supervised.
- Staff will carry out regular head counts in the setting and during offsite visits – see Outings Policy.
- Legal ratio requirements will always be met and exceeded if possible. Staff on offsite visits will have appropriate training and experience.