

Safeguarding children

1.7 Missing child

Policy statement

Children's safety is maintained as the highest priority at all times both on and off premises. Every attempt is made through carrying out 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

- Children are counted during circle and story times and checked against numbers of children in session.
- If this number doesn't agree a re-count takes place.
- If numbers still don't agree, check with the office to confirm numbers.
- Office staff support further count and check register for any anomalies.
- As soon as it is suspected that a child is missing the staff member alerts the session leader.
- Staff keep calm and do not let the other children become anxious or worried.
- The session leader or nominated person will carry out a thorough search of the building and garden.
- The register is checked to ascertain who has gone astray.
- 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 parent is contacted and the missing child is reported to the police.
- The session leader talks to the staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and records this.
- The session leader contacts the Administration Manager, who in turn contacts the Chairperson, to report the incident. The chairperson, with the management committee, carries out an investigation and may come to the pre-school immediately.

Child going missing on an outing

This describes what to do when an outing leader has taken a small group on an outing, leaving other staff in the pre-school.

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, staff 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.
- Staff keep calm and do not let the other children become anxious or worried.
- The Administration Manager is contacted immediately and the incident is reported to her.
- The Administration Manager contacts the police and reports the child as missing.
- The Administration Manager contacts the parent and asks them to come to pre-school or the outing venue. *The pre-school is advised as the best place to meet, as by the time the parent arrives, the child may have been returned to the pre-school already.*
- The outing leader or designated staff member may be advised by the police to stay at the venue until they arrive. Staff take remaining children back to the pre-school, with additional support if required.
- 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 Administration Manager contacts the chairperson and reports the incident. The chairperson, with the management committee, carries out an investigation and may come to the pre-school immediately.
- The Administration Manager together with the chairperson or representative from the management committee speaks with the parent(s).

The Investigation Procedure

- The Administration Manager and chairperson carry out a full investigation taking written statements from all the staff in the room or who were on the outing.
- The outing/session leader writes 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 member or adult 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 and Ofsted is informed by telephone and also in writing.
- 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 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.
- Staff may be the understandable target of parental anger and they may be afraid. The pre-school leader needs 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 leader. When dealing with a distraught and angry parent, there should always be two members of staff, one of whom is the pre-school leader and the other should be the chairperson of the management committee or representative. 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 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.

This policy was adopted at a meeting of	Cullompton Pre-School	name of setting
Held on	15 th September 2010	(date)
Date to be reviewed	September 2011	(date)
Signed on behalf of the management committee	Michelle Ratcliff	
Name of signatory	Michelle Ratcliff	
Role of signatory (e.g. chair/owner)	Chairperson	

This policy has an annual review period and, as such, will be reviewed and signed off at a management committee meeting of Cullompton Pre-School each year, as shown below.

- Amended to three yearly review

Previously reviewed on:-	8 th February 2012	by	Jo Fellows Chairperson
Previously reviewed on:-	28 th March 2013	By	Michael Hall Chairperson
Previously reviewed on:-	16 th May 2016	by	Sarah Lush Chairperson
Previously reviewed on:-	24 th February 2020	by	Alex Fox Chairperson

Reviewed by Staff on:	February 2023 (AJ/MW)
Reviewed by Committee on:	22.03.23
Date of next review:	February 2026
Signed on behalf of the Management Committee:	H Tilley
Name of Signatory (printed):	Hannah Tilley
Role of Signatory (e.g. Chairperson)	Chairperson