

Policy & Procedures in respect of a 'Lost /Missing' child

This document is produced for staff working with the children at Pixies, and is a point of reference for families and others visiting the setting. Within this document 'staff' refers to all persons directly involved in the care of children at this setting, irrespective of their employment status, and includes students, trainees and volunteers. 'Person-in-Charge' refers to the most Senior member of staff on duty at the time in question. It relates to the safety and security of all children attending Pixies and outlines the procedures to follow in the event of a child or children being lost or missing from the setting. These procedures are also a safeguard for staff and the parents/carers of children attending Pixies.

Procedures for when a child is lost/missing.

This should never happen. The setting has the following systems in place for the protection of children.

- All exits from the premises should be locked/guarded in a way which makes it impossible for a child to leave unobserved/unattended, while allowing rapid exit for the whole group in the case of an emergency.
- Accurate and up-to-date registers must be kept. Children and adults, including visitors, should be signed in and out whenever they enter and leave the premises. This does not include parents/carers dropping off or collecting their child.
- Key persons for new children should take especial care to ensure that both children and their parents know where they may or may not go. Staff should also seek advice from parents new to the setting so that they are forewarned about particularly adventurous children.
- All children in the setting should know the rules, and the reasons for them.
- Parents and staff should work together for the safety of all the children in the group. New parents should be advised of the setting's rules pertaining to safety procedures. Parents should be encouraged to alert a member of staff if they notice a child whose behaviour suggests that s/he might be thinking of trying to leave.

In the best regulated situations, however, accidents can and do happen. These are the procedures to follow if a child cannot be found.

1. Find out quickly.

The chances of finding a missing child safe are greatest if the child's absence is soon discovered. Know how many children should be present, all staff are responsible for regular counted checks. If one seems to be missing staff should know at once who it is.

2. Search systematically.

The setting is responsible for the missing child and also for the other children in the group. In an emergency some adults can be freed to respond to the new situation without neglecting the needs of the other children. It can be useful to gather the remaining children into one large group – having a story, perhaps with 1 or 2 adults while the rest search.

Without alarming them, ask the children themselves whether they have seen the child who is missing. They can sometimes be a useful source of information.

Check that all the adults are present and that all know the problem. It is useful to establish, if you can, who last saw the child, when and doing what.

Check every room in the building and also any accessible outside area.

3. Parents.

Alarming them as little as possible, call the child's parents to warn them that the child may be attempting to get home. If they are out at work, staff will have an alternative number to call in emergencies. If the child lives within walking distance of the setting, one adult should make the journey on foot in order to catch up with or intercept the child if possible.

Remember that as soon as parents are informed, they will need advice and support.

4. The Police.

If the above steps do not locate the child, the Police must be called. They have resources to conduct a search and speed is important.

5. Informing other people.

If you have to call the Police, inform ACAS that you have done so. Contact the Office by telephone and speak with the Duty Officer. They will need to know:-

- what systems are in operation for preventing such occurrences
- what happened
- what you did, at what time and in what order
- whom you informed, and when

They will want to conduct their own investigation.

If the Proprietor/Registered Provider is not on the premises, she must be informed as soon as possible.

Ofsted must also be informed, both that the child is lost and the outcome.

6. The Accident & Incident records.

Start to build up a record of the event as soon as an adult has the time to do so. This is important, even, if, as is likely, the child is found safe within a few minutes. Include in the record the last definite sighting of the child and anything unusual that day about the behaviour of that child or of any other children.

7. Dealing with people's reactions.

The child's parents will be frightened, distressed and probably angry. These feelings are natural. Because powerful emotions are involved, people's behaviour can be unpredictable. People who seem quite calm about the incident at the time can later on become very angry, threatening legal action or recourse to the local press.

It is therefore important to be careful from the beginning about the words you use to talk to people about the incident. Do not say anything that could be misconstrued or imply that you accept liability. However, that does not mean that you have to appear uncaring. Do not say, 'no comment', which can make you appear indifferent and unhelpful.

Say:

- how sorry you are that the incident has happened
- that a full investigation is in hand
- that the Social Services have been informed and will also be investigating

8. Dealing with the media.

Distressed parents may contact the local press, or reporters might hear about the incident if the Police are involved. It is sensible for one person – usually the Registered Provider or the Manager – to be the one who speaks for the setting to the media. However, you cannot be sure that reporters will approach the setting direct, they may call other staff or parents for views. As early as you can, advise all adults about what they should say, or ask them to refer all enquiries to the agreed spokesperson.

9. Informing other parents.

Other parents need to be given brief, accurate information as rapidly as possible. This is the best way to prevent the spreading of gossip. It might be possible to speak to parents when they come to collect their child, to send home a letter or email all current parents.

There is no point trying to hide what has happened. The important thing is to enlist the support of the whole community in learning from the event in order to ensure it does not happen again.

10. When the child is found.

During the time a child is missing, however briefly, all the adults involved – parents and others – suffer great fear, guilt and distress. It is not always easy to control all these emotions when the child is found. It is important to remember:

- That the child might have been afraid and distressed and might now be in need of comfort
- That the child may be completely unaware of having done anything wrong
- That the incident provides a good opportunity to talk to all the children to ensure that they understand that they must not leave the premises, or their carers and why.

Implementation

The Registered Provider has overall responsibility for ensuring that this policy is implemented. All Managers and other members of staff are to co-operate with their employer and senior staff in carrying out this policy.

ACAS – tel: 01273 295920 (out of hours – 01273 335906)

Advice Contact and Assessment Service
Whitehawk Community Hub and Library
179a Whitehawk Road,
Brighton BN2 5FL
email: ACAS@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk

Ofsted

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Piccadilly Gate, Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD
0300 123 1231

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