

Wildlings



Missing Child Policy

Policy statement

Wildlings has the highest regard for the safety of the children in its care. Staff will always be extremely aware of the potential for children to go missing during sessions or outings. Children's safety is maintained as the highest priority at all times both on and off the 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. Even when all precautions are properly observed, emergencies can still arise. Therefore, members of staff will undertake periodic head counts, in addition to the registration procedures set out. If, for any reason, a member of staff cannot account for a child's whereabouts during a session, the following procedure will be activated.

Procedures

Child going missing from the premises:

- The member of staff in question will inform both the supervisor and the rest of the staff that the child is missing and a thorough search of the entire premises will commence. If out on a walk, the immediate area would be searched thoroughly and a member of staff would go back to the classroom and grounds to check there
- The staff will be careful not to create an atmosphere of panic and ensure that the other children remain safe and adequately supervised
- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing the key person/staff alerts the setting Manager.
- The Manager/Deputy Manager will nominate members of staff to search the area surrounding the premises. All staff will be extra vigilant to any potentially suspicious behaviour or persons in and around the Wildlings
- The setting Manager will carry out a thorough search of the building and garden
- The register is checked to make sure no other child has also gone astray
- Doors and gates are checked to see if there has been a breach of security whereby a child could wander out
- If, after 5 minutes of thorough searching, the child is still missing, the Manager will inform the police (using 999) and then the child's parent/carer
- While waiting for the police and the parent/carer to arrive, searches for the child will continue. During this period, other members of staff will maintain as normal a routine as is possible for the rest of the children at Wildlings
- The setting Manager talks to the staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and records this
- The setting Manager contacts the chairperson and reports the incident. The Manager/ chairperson, with the management committee, carries out an investigation and may come to the setting immediately

Child going missing on an outing:

This describes what to do when staff have taken a small group on an outing, leaving the setting Manager and/or other staff back in the setting. If the setting Manager has accompanied children on the outing, the procedures are adjusted accordingly.

What to do when a child goes missing from a whole setting outing may be a little different, as parents usually attend and are responsible for their own child.

- 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
- The setting Manager is contacted immediately and the 'lost child area' would be informed and given the relevant information
- The setting Manager contacts the police and reports the child as missing
- The setting Manager contacts the parent, who makes their way to the setting or outing venue as agreed with the setting Manager. The setting is advised as the best place, as by the time the parent arrives, the child may have been returned to the setting
- Staff take the remaining children back to the setting
- 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 setting Manager contacts the chairperson and reports the incident. The Manager/chairperson, with the management committee, carries out an investigation and may come to the setting immediately
- The setting Manager, or designated staff member 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 setting Manager together with the chairperson or representative from the management committee speaks with the parent(s)
- The Manager/chairperson and management committee, carry out a full investigation taking written statements from all the staff in the room or who were on the outing
- All incidents of children going missing will be recorded in the incident record book

- The key person writes an incident report detailing:
 - The date and time of the incident
 - 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
- In cases where either the police or social services have been informed, Ofsted will also be notified, as soon as is practical
- 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; 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
- Once the incident is resolved, the Manager/Chairperson and staff will review relevant policies and procedures and implement any necessary changes (paying particular note to the provisions of the Wildlings risk assessments)

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. Setting Managers 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 setting Manager. When dealing with a distraught and angry parent, there should always be two members of staff, one of whom is the Manager and the other should be the 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 Manager/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 is underpinned by:
Children Act (CA) 1989 and 2004
Data protection Act (DPA) 1998
Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage Health & Safety Guidelines
www.hse.gov.uk

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