

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 strict procedures for outings, arrival and departure of children and entrance and exit of staff and visitors, to ensure the security of children is maintained at all times. All children are required to wear high-vis jackets or vests over their waterproofs when part of our woods groups. Rules about safety in the woods with regard to staying within the boundary are strictly observed and reinforced with all children. Higher than required staffing ratios are engaged within the woodland for the safety of the children present.

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:

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the member of staff who has noticed will inform both the session lead/Manager and the rest of the staff that the child is missing.
- The staff will be careful not to create an atmosphere of panic and ensure that the other children remain safe and adequately supervised.
- 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 premises.
- The setting Manager/Deputy 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 will talk to the staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and record this.

- The setting Manager will contact the chairperson and report the incident. The Manager/ chairperson, with the management committee, will carry out an investigation and may come to the setting immediately.

Child going missing in the woodland setting:

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the member of staff who has noticed will inform both the session lead/manager and the rest of the staff that the child is missing.
- The Manager/session lead will gather the rest of the group together and take a register to ensure no other child is also unaccounted for. They will nominate as many members of staff as possible to search the area surrounding the site boundary.
- The staff will be careful not to create an atmosphere of panic and ensure that the other children remain safe and adequately supervised.
- All staff will be extra vigilant to any potentially suspicious behaviour or persons in and around the site.
- If the manager is not present, they will be alerted that a child is unaccounted for as soon as it is noticed that a child is missing. They will make their way to the site to aid searches and be a point of contact for parents and police if required.
- If, after 5 minutes of thorough searching, the child is still missing, the Manager/session lead 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.
- The setting Manager will talk to the staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and record this.
- The setting Manager will contact the chairperson and report the incident. The Manager/ chairperson, with the management committee, will carry out an investigation and may come to the setting immediately.

Child going missing on an outing:

- 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. The Manager/Deputy Manager designates staff to search the immediate vicinity and surrounding areas.
- The rest of the staff will be careful not to create an atmosphere of panic and to ensure that the other children remain safe and adequately supervised.
- The setting Manager, if not already present, is contacted immediately and security staff at the visit site (if applicable) would be informed and given the relevant information to facilitate searches.
- 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 site as agreed with the setting Manager.
- The setting Manager will contact the chairperson and report the incident. The Manager/chairperson, with the management committee, will carry out an investigation and may come to the setting or visit site immediately.

- The setting Manager, or a designated staff member may be advised by the police to stay at the venue until they arrive.
- The rest of the staff may take other children back to Wildlings premises, ensuring adequate supervision for safety as well as maintaining legal staff to child ratios, or facilitate the collection of children from the visit site according to arrangements made prior to the visit.

The investigation (for incidents on or off premises)

- Staff keep calm and endeavour to ensure the other children don't become anxious or worried by any investigation taking place
- 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 present at the time of the incident.
- All incidents of children going missing will be recorded as an incident on the Family App.
- The room leader/forest school lead/manager writes an incident report detailing:
 - The date and time of the incident
 - What staff/children were present at the time of the incident and the name of the staff designated responsible for the missing child (if applicable)
 - When and where the child was last seen
 - What has taken place since the child went missing
 - The time it is estimated that the child went missing
- 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).
- Ofsted will be notified, as soon as is practical and within 14 days of any missing child incident. The notification to Ofsted will include details of the incident gathered as part of the investigation, conclusions drawn as to how the breach of security occurred, any disciplinary action taken and steps put in place to improve security.
- 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 will be reported under RIDDOR as required; in these cases the local authority Health and Safety Officer may want to investigate and will decide if there is a case for prosecution.
- The insurance provider will be 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. 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 wherever possible. 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

Date Created: January 2021

Reviewed date: January 2023

Reviewed and amended date: January 2025