**Child Protection and Safeguarding** 

**1.5 Missing child**

Policy statement

We take child safety very seriously and this is of paramount importance whilst they are in our care – both on and off site. Every attempt is made to ensure child security is maintained at all times and we regularly ‘head count’ and ensure all staff know how many children are on site, indoors and outdoors. In the unlikely event of a child going missing, our missing child procedure is followed.

**Procedures**

###### *Child going missing on the premises*

* As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the key person/staff alerts the setting leader.
* The setting leader calls the police and reports the child as missing and then calls the parent. The setting leader will carry out a thorough search of the building, sheds and garden.
* The register is checked to make sure no other child has also gone astray, and a full headcount of all children is carried out again.
* Doors and gates are checked to see if there has been a breach of security whereby a child could wander out.
* The setting leader talks to the staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and records this.
* The setting leader contacts the chair of committee and reports the incident. The chair comes to the setting immediately to carry out an investigation, with the management team where appropriate.

*Child going missing on an outing*

This describes what to do when staff have taken a small group on an outing, leaving the setting leader and/or other staff back in the setting. If the setting leader 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 carer 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. CODE PHRASE ‘Little Bo Peep Has Lost Her Sheep’ so all staff are aware of what is happening without unsettling the children.
* The setting manager is contacted immediately (if not on the outing) and the incident is recorded.
* 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.
* 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 chair and reports the incident. The chair comes to the setting immediately to carry out an investigation, with the management committee, (where appropriate).
* The setting manager or member of staff 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 a representative of the management team, speaks with the parent(s).
* The chair of committee carries out a full investigation taking written statements from all the staff in the room or who were on the outing.
* The key person/staff member 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 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.
* 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 to **SPOA**
* We are aware that we must notify **Ofsted** of any serious accident, illness or injury to, or death of, any child whilst in our care and of the action we have taken. Notification must be made as soon as is reasonably possible but must be within 14 days of the incident occurring. We understand that we will be committing an offence if we fail to do this. We must also inform our local child protection agencies of the same and act upon any advice from those agencies.
* In East Sussex we must inform **SPOA** (Single Point of Advice), having regard to the **PAN Sussex Child Protection and Safeguarding Manual.**
* 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. Setting leaders 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 leader. 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 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 chairperson or proprietor will use their discretion to decide what action to take.
* Staff must not discuss any missing child incident with the press without taking advice.

**Legal framework**

* Working Together to Safeguard Children (March 2015, paragraph 13)
* Statutory Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2014)
* Ofsted Early Years Compliance Handbook (May 2016)
* The Pan Sussex Child Protection and Safeguarding Procedures Manual
* Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (**RIDDOR** 1995)

**Contacts**

**Single Point of Advice (SPOA)**

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