

Procedure for When a Child Leaves the Premises Unaccompanied.

To prevent a child leaving the pre-school unaccompanied we have the following systems in place:

- All exits from the premises should be locked/guarded in a way that makes it impossible for a child to leave unobserved/unattended, while allowing rapid exit for the whole group in case of an emergency.
- An accurate and up-to-date register is kept and both adults and children, including visitors, who should sign in and out whenever they enter and leave the building.
- The key person for a new child should take special care to ensure that both children and their parents know where they may and may not go. The key person should seek advice from parents of those new to the group, so that they are forewarned about particularly adventurous children.
- All children should be taught the rules of leaving the premises unaccompanied and the reasons for them.
- Prominent notices should alert any visitors for the need to keep doors closed and, if necessary locked and the reasons for this.
- Parents and staff should work together for the safety of all the children in the group. New parents should be helped to take an active role by being made aware of the group's safety procedures and being 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.

However, if an accident should happen, and a child is missing, these are the procedures to follow:

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 and someone is responsible for regular counted checks. The key person system offers enormous advantages, as it is very easy for a key person to be aware of the few children for whom they are responsible - and if one seems missing the key person will know at once who it is.

2. Search systematically

We are responsible for the missing child and also for the other children in the group. One advantage of the high adult: child ratio in the pre-school is that 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 one or two 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 we can, who last saw the child, when and doing what.

Check every room in the building, including any possible hiding place in and around the pre-school premises and also any accessible outside areas.

3. Parents

Alarming them as little as possible, call the child's parents/guardians to warn them that the child may be attempting to get home. If they are out at work, we should have an alternative number to call in an emergency. If the child lives within walking distance of the pre-school, 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

Make regular checks to ensure that if an incident of this sort did happen, we have all the necessary phone numbers to hand.- correct, up to date and all kept together.

If we have to call the police, tell the social services department that we have done so. If the relevant social worker is not in the building leave a message with the duty officer.

The social services department will need to know:

- What systems we operate for preventing such occurrences?
- What happened?
- What we did, at what time, and in what order?
- Whom we informed and when.

They will want to conduct their own investigation.

If the chairperson or vice-chairperson is not on the premises then they must be informed as soon as possible.

Call the insurance manager at National Centre (0171 833 0991) and she will advise us and will contact the insurers on our behalf.

Contact Ofsted and inform them.

6. The accident and Incident book

Start to build up a record of the event as soon as an adult has time to do so. This is important even as if likely, the child is found safe in a few minutes. Our accident and incident book provides an invaluable ongoing record of potential hazards as



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well as actual accidents. Include in the record the last definite sighting of the child. Also note anything unusual about the day/behaviour of the children.

7. Dealing with people's reactions

The child's parents will be frightened, distressed and probably angry. These feelings are natural. We should talk through with parents, sharing concerns and establishing systems with which both pre-school and parents feel comfortable. If this has already been done, the situation will be easier for all the adults as they will be working within a framework of mutual trust and understanding.

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 very careful from the beginning about the words you use to talk to people about the incident. Do not say anything that might invalidate your insurance by implying that we 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 we are that the incident has happened.

That a full investigation is in hand.

That the social services has also been informed and that they will also be carrying out an investigation.

8. Dealing with the media

Distressed parents may contact the local press, or reporters may hear about the incident if the police are involved. It is sensible for one person, normally the chairperson, to be the one who speaks to the media. However, we cannot be sure that reporters will approach us direct; they may call other staff or parents for views. As early as we can we will advise all adults about what they should say, as above or ask them to refer all enquiries to the chairperson.

In handling this situation, we will have support from the pre-school learning alliance. If we speak to the insurance manager at the national centre, s/he will alert our regional centre, who will in turn inform local staff and volunteers as appropriate.

9. Informing other parents

Other parents need to be given, brief and accurate information as rapidly as possible. This is the best way to prevent the spreading of gossip. It might be possible to call a short meeting when parents/carers come to collect children, or when they arrive the next day, or to send home a note with each child.

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 also might have been afraid and distressed and might now be in need of comfort.



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- 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 unaccompanied and why.

Signed: 
Charlie Wardle - Chair Person