

14. Lost Child Policy

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Policy Statement

Children's safety is our highest priority, both on and off the premises. Every attempt is made, through carrying out the trips and outings procedure and the door security procedure (contained within the Health & Safety Policy¹) to ensure the security of children is maintained at all times. In the unlikely event of a child going missing, our lost child procedure is followed.

A copy of this policy is kept in the Trips folder.

Procedures

When a child leaves the North Nibley Pre-school unaccompanied

This should never happen and very rarely does. The following systems are 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 case of emergency.
- An accurate and up to date register must be kept and both adults and children including visitors should be signed in and out whenever they enter and leave the premises.
- Key people of new children should take special care to ensure that both children and their parents know where they may and may not go. The child's key worker will also seek advice from parents new to North Nibley Pre-school so that they are forewarned about particularly adventurous children.
- All children in the setting should know the rules and the reasons for them.
- Prominent notices should alert visitors to the need to keep doors closed and to the reason for this. [The security (door policy) is contained within the Health & Safety Policy¹].

¹ See policy 11 Health and Safety

- A risk assessment is carried out by the committee and reviewed annually. Parents are involved to ensure that all the adults in Pre-school are aware of any potential dangers and can work together to avoid them.
- Parents and new staff should work together for the safety of all the children in setting. New parents should be helped to take an active role by being made aware of North Nibley Pre-school'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.

If a child cannot be found

In the best regulated situations, however, accidents can and do happen. This procedure is to be followed if a child cannot be found.

- 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 make someone responsible for regular counted checks . The key person system offers enormous advantages as it is easy for a key person to be aware of the few children for whom s/he is responsible – and if one seems to be missing, the key worker will know at once who it is.
- Search systematically
 - North Nibley Pre-school is responsible for the missing child and also for the other children in the setting. If a child went missing, we would ring the setting support officer for extra help and support to make sure the other children's needs were not neglected. It can be useful to gather the remaining children into one large group – having a story, perhaps with one adult while the others 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. It can also be helpful to have prepared in advance a checklist of possible hiding places in and around the setting's premises.
 - Check every room in the building and also any accessible outside areas. If the premises are being used by other people/organisations, inform them and, if appropriate seek their co-operation.
- 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 or at work, North Nibley Pre-school will call the alternative number given by the parent to call in emergencies. If the child lives in 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. As soon as parents are informed, they are given advice and support.
- The Police
 - If the above steps do not locate the child, the police must be called. They have the resources to conduct a search and speed is important.

- Informing other people

We make regular checks to ensure that if an incident of this sort does happen, we have all the necessary telephone numbers to hand – correct, up-to-date and kept together.

- If the police have to be called, Ofsted must be informed² within 14 days. If the relevant worker is not in the building, a message will be left with the duty officer. Ofsted will need to know the following:
 - what systems operate for preventing such occurrences;
 - what happened;
 - what North Nibley Pre-school did, at what time and in what order; and
 - who was informed and when.
 Ofsted will want to conduct their own investigation.
- If the Chair is not on the premises, s/he must be informed as soon as possible. The insurance company must be informed immediately too.
- The Accident and Incident book
 - A record of the event will be built up as soon as possible. This is important even if, as is likely, the child is found safe within a few minutes. The Accident and Incident book provides the ongoing record of potential hazards as well as actual accidents. Included in the record will be the last definite sighting of the child or of any other children.
- Dealing with people's reaction
 - The child's parents will be frightened, distressed and probably angry. These feelings are natural. If in the past the Pre-school has talked through the safety issues with parents, sharing concerns and establishing systems with which both groups feel comfortable, the situation will be easier for all the adults because 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 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 used to talk to people about the incident. Do not say anything that might invalidate your insurance by implying 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; and
 - that the Social Services have been informed and will also be investigating.
- 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 Chair – to be the one who speaks for North Nibley Pre-school to the media. However, you cannot be sure that reporters will approach the Pre-school direct; they may call other staff or parents for views. As early as you can, advise the adults about what they should say, as above, or ask them to refer all enquiries to the agreed spokesperson.
 - In handling this situation, you will have support from the Playgroup and Toddler Association (PATA).

² Two guidance documents: "[Childcare: significant events to notify Ofsted about](#)" and "[Report a serious childcare incident](#)"

- 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 may be possible to call a brief meeting when parents and carers come to collect children, or when they arrive the next day, or to send home a short note with each child.
 - There is no point in trying to hide what has happened. The important thing is to enlist the support of the whole Pre-school community in learning from the event in order to ensure that it does not happen again.

- When the child is found
 - During a time, a child is missing, however briefly, all the adults involved – parents and others – suffers 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 need 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 and why.

When a child goes missing on a trip or outing

Please see our Trip and Outings procedure.

Associated Policies and Procedures

- No 12 Trips and Outings