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**1.4 – Missing Child**

**Policy Statement:**

Winterbourne Early Years Centre ensure that childrens safety is maintained as the highest priority at all times, both on and off the premises. As a Centre we do everything within in our power to ensure that safety measures are in place that prevent children from going missing. We take on this responsibility from the moment a parent leaves the child at the beginning of the childs session, until we release them to a parent at the end of the session. This also relates to those who are assigned set sessions and miss the session with no reason for the absence. As a Centre we want to ensure that all children are safe at all times, this including when they miss a session. Although we are consistently ensuring that safety measures are in place and that staff follow these effectively, we do also have procedures in place, if in an unlikely event, a child does go missing.

**Definitions:**

Missing Child – A child who has been left in our care and is unable to be found, they are missing from view and staff are unable to find them.

Missing Child – Can also be defined as a child who has not attended the setting with no reason given for their absence.

**Centre Specifics:**

Risk assessments are completed by the manager and checked within the rooms to ensure they maintain up to date and are relevant to each room. Risk assessments ensure that safety measures are a high priority and that all risks have been considered, where possible we ensure that areas can be amended or provide resources to ensure risks can be minimised.

The centre has in place an attendance policy which explains our procedures for unexplained absences in full. If a Child misses a session, we follow the procedures in place with hope that the end result will be an explanation as to where the child is, and why they’ve missed the session. This also includes non-starters, children who are due to start with us but miss their settling in sessions prior to the given start date.

**Winterbourne Early Years Centre Procedures:**

**Missing Child on premises –**

If staff have counted the children present and realised a child(ren) are missing, they then begin checking all areas – Toilets, outside areas, coat areas, under furniture, cupboard spaces and inside any tents within the room. Staff must consider spaces such as role play kitchens, garden areas with bushes and behind trees as children may be playing. Once staff have exhausted all areas, it’s important to re-count the children against the register and alert the Centre Manager or Deputy Manager.

The Manager will then carry out their own search and again count the children against the register. It’s important to check with all staff due to children who may have been collected early and this wasn’t marked down, or witnessed by all staff. All security doors and gates are to be checked, Children will have to get out of range of doors to be able to exit the building and site, ensuring all doors are secure will enable to staff to understand whether the child is still on or off the premises.

If the child is unable to be found, the parent is then contacted. The missing child is then reported to the police and a report must be made. The Chair Person of the committee will then be informed and will need to come in and investigate matters alongside the Centre Manager.

If a child is unable to be found, or is found offsite, the situation will be referred to as a serious incident and will need to be reported to Osfted.

**Missing Child off premises -**

Staff count children and staff when leaving the premises. Children are encouraged to walk with an employee at the front (leading) and an employee and the back (ensuring children don’t wonder off. Staff work on a smaller ration and if a trip off site isn’t suitable with the staffing then parents and carers are encouraged to participate as helpers.

If staff have counted the children present and realised a child(ren) are missing, they then begin checking all areas surrounding them. This will depend on whether the children are at a library, visiting the primary school, care home, forest outing or at the park. Once staff have exhausted all areas, it’s important to re-count the children against the register and alert the Centre Manager or Deputy Manager.

The Manager will then carry out their own search and again count the children against the register.

If the child is unable to be found, the parent is then contacted. The missing child is then reported to the police and a report must be made. The Chair Person of the committee will then be informed and will need to come in and investigate matters alongside the Centre Manager.

If a child is unable to be found, or is found offsite, the situation will be referred to as a serious incident and will have to be reported to Osfted.

**Missing child under the care of a guardian –**

As a Centre we do have fun days and events that encourage parents and carers to attend alongside their child. This can include children who don’t usually attend on that day such as stay and plays or fayres. As a setting we continue to hold a level of professionalism and will follow the same policy for if a child was to go missing. We will carry out the same procedures of searching and ensuring areas are secure, before notifying the Police and the Chair Person of the committee. If a child is unable to be found, or is found offsite, the situation will be referred to as a serious incident and will have to be reported to Osfted.

**The investigation –**

All staff who were present at the time of the child going missing must complete a written statement detailing all relevant information,

-Date and Time of statement

-What were staff/children doing at the time

-Designated staff responsible for certain children

-When was the child last seen

It is essential that all information is factual and correct, giving a rough idea of when and how the child went missing. The manager and Chair Person will work together to decipher how the breach in security had occurred in the first place.

The purpose of any investigation is to have an end result of the child being found safe and unharmed. In any instance where harm has come to the child, the manager will need to report the incident under RIDDOR arrangements. (More information on RIDDOR can be found within the policy: Health and Safety general standards.

It is not in the managers interest to point blame; however, the investigation may result in highlighting mistakes made and safety procedures being missed which may lead to staff warnings and disciplinary actions.

**Confidentiality and sharing of information –** In the rare case that the Centre has a missing child, it’s imperative that staff continue to keep a professional outlook on the matter. Discussions should only take place with the Manager or Chair Person responding with the incident, or the police if they have taken charge of the matter.

Under no circumstances are employees to speak to anyone external to the Centre, this includes reporters, and local press. Disciplinary proceedings may be a result if this is discovered.

More information can be found in our Confidentiality policy regarding what information we have and how we store/record information.

**Further guidance –**

*South Gloucestershire Safeguarding Childrens Board: Children missing from home, care, and multi agency school protocol (Feb 2019)*

*Ofsted publication: Missing Children Report (Feb 2013)*

This Policy was adopted by: Winterbourne Early Years Centre

On: 14/02/2020

Date to be Reviewed: 14/02/2021

Signed on behalf of the provider:

Name of signatory: Lisa O’Sullivan

Role of signatory: Centre Manager