

Safeguarding and Welfare Requirement: Child Protection

Missing child

Policy statement

The safety and security of children in our care is our absolute priority. We take all reasonable steps to prevent children from leaving the premises unnoticed and ensure children are supervised effectively at all times.

This policy applies both on the premises and off-site during outings.

Our procedures sit alongside:

- Our Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Our Arrival and Departure Procedures
- Our Outings Policy
- London Child Protection Procedures
- Bromley Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP) and current London Child Safeguarding Procedures
- This policy also reflects the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework for group and school-based providers, effective from 1 September 2026, and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026.

Although incidents of missing children are extremely rare, we have robust systems to respond promptly, effectively, and calmly in the event of a child going missing.

Key Principles

- Immediate action is taken as soon as a child is suspected missing.
- Staff ratios and supervision must never be compromised.
- We comply with the EYFS requirement to notify Ofsted (or the relevant childminder agency, where applicable) of any serious childcare incident, including where a child is missing from the setting, as soon as reasonably practicable and always within 14 days.
- We comply with Ofsted's expectation that providers must notify them of any incident where a child has gone missing.
- We work in partnership with the police, parents, and relevant agencies.

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- We ensure the incident is fully investigated, and appropriate learning, improvements, and risk reduction measures are implemented.

Procedures

- **Child going missing on the premises**

If a child is discovered missing:

1. Raise the alarm - the staff member alerts the manager/DSL immediately.
2. Stop and check - staff ensure all other children are safe and supervised in ratio.
3. Check the register to confirm the child's presence on site and verify no other child is missing.
4. Immediate search (2-3 minutes maximum):
 - Manager and designated staff conduct a coordinated search of all rooms, toilets, cupboards, garden areas, outdoor play spaces, and access points.
 - If the child is not located immediately following the initial coordinated check:
5. Police (999) are contacted without delay. Staff must not postpone contacting the police in order to complete a prolonged search.
 - Police (999) are contacted immediately.
 - Inform them of any suspicion of abduction or unauthorised collection.
6. Parents/carers are contacted immediately after calling the police.
7. Provide the police with:
 - recent photo (if available),
 - description of the child,
 - clothing worn, and
 - last known location/time.
8. Staff continue to supervise all remaining children safely and calmly.

- **Child going missing on an outing**

If a child is identified as missing during an outing:

1. Alert the group immediately and gather all other children together.
2. A brief, immediate search of the immediate area may be undertaken only where this does not compromise supervision of the remaining children.
3. One staff member searches the immediate area for a maximum of 2 minutes.
4. Senior staff member contacts police (999) straight away.
5. Notify the setting manager immediately (if not present).
6. Manager informs the parents/carers without delay.
7. Staff return the rest of the group to the setting as soon as possible, maintaining safe ratios.
8. A senior staff member remains at the site where the child went missing until the police arrive.

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9. Provide police with:
 - description,
 - photo (if available),
 - clothing worn,
 - time and place the child was last seen.
10. Staff remain calm and reassuring with the other children, avoiding alarming language.

Investigation Procedures

An internal investigation starts immediately once the child is found or once police have taken over.

The Manager/DSL will:

- Secure and preserve all relevant information.
- Take written statements from staff, visitors, and witnesses as soon as possible.
- Review CCTV (if available on premises).
- Speak with the parent(s)/carer(s) and explain the investigation process.
- Provide support and regular updates.
- Bromley Children and Families Hub (C&F Hub) / Children's Social Care
 - Bromley MASH
 - BSCP
 - Police

Reports from staff must include:

- Date, time, and location of the incident
- Staffing arrangements at the time
- When and where the child was last seen
- Accurate timing of events, actions taken, and persons involved
- How the incident was handled and by whom
- The report will be signed, dated, and countersigned by the manager.

External Notifications

Ofsted is notified as soon as reasonably practicable and always within 14 days of a serious childcare incident, including where a child goes missing from the setting. The Manager/Provider will use the current Ofsted serious incident notification process and retain a record of the notification.

- Ofsted is notified within 14 days of any incident where a child has gone missing, attempted to leave, or been unaccounted for.
- Insurers are informed promptly.
- For Bromley safeguarding referrals or consultation, the setting will use the Bromley Children and Families Hub: 020 8461 7373 / 7379 (Monday-Friday 8.30am-5pm), out of hours 0300 303 8671, email CandFhub@bromley.gov.uk. Where a child is in immediate danger, call 999.

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- If a criminal offence or child protection concern is suspected, police and Children's Social Care are involved.

Conclusion & Risk Reduction

A written report will conclude:

- how the incident occurred,
- contributing factors,
- whether there was any breach of supervision, procedure, or security,
- what immediate corrective and preventative actions will be taken.

Actions may include:

- environmental changes,
- staff training,
- revised procedures,
- Following any incident, the Manager/DSL will consider whether the circumstances indicate wider safeguarding concerns, including possible exploitation, trafficking, unauthorised collection or other harm outside the home, and will make a referral to the Bromley Children and Families Hub where appropriate.
- disciplinary action (where required),
- review of risk assessments.

Managing people and Emotional Impact

Missing child incidents can be highly distressing. We prioritise the emotional well-being of all involved.

Supporting Staff

- Staff involved are supported and treated fairly.
- Staff are not blamed without investigation.
- Staff may be removed from duties temporarily if required.
- Confidential counselling or supervision may be offered.
- Manager ensures no staff member faces hostility or threats from parents.

Supporting Parents

- Meetings with distressed parents must include two staff members (e.g., Manager + Deputy).
- Parents concerns are listened to respectfully.
- Any threatening or aggressive behaviour results in contacting the police.

Supporting Children

- Other children must be shielded from the distress of adults.
- Staff answer questions calmly and honestly, offering reassurance.
- No details of the incident are discussed in front of children.

Media

- Staff must not discuss the incident with the press at any time.
- Only the Manager/Provider will give statements if required, following legal guidance.

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Preventative Measures

We maintain robust systems to minimise risk, including:

- secure perimeter fencing and locked gates
- controlled entry/exit points
- visual checks of all gates/doors daily
- strict collection procedures
- supervision risk assessments for all outings
- named staff responsibility for specific children
- high staff-to-child ratios
- regular headcounts
- Registers, arrival/departure records and emergency contact information are kept accurate and readily accessible so that staff can quickly establish who is present and provide essential information to emergency services.
- immediate reporting of any faulty locks, latches, or fencing
- thorough handover procedures
- visitor supervision
- Outing and premises risk assessments will specifically consider the risk of a child becoming separated from the group, access/exit security, individual children who may be at increased risk of leaving, communication arrangements and emergency response. Risk assessments are reviewed:
 - annually,
 - after any incident,
 - or when environmental changes occur.

Policy Review

The Manager/DSL will check current BSCP and London Child Safeguarding Procedures as part of each review so that local contact details and referral arrangements remain current.

This policy is reviewed annually, or sooner if:

- statutory guidance changes,
- an incident occurs,
- the BSCP releases new recommendations,
- Ofsted expectations change.