

Missing Children

MISSING CHILD
POLICY
INFORMATIONAL
PROGRAM

(EMERGENCY PROCEDURES)

Emergency Procedures When a Child is Discovered to be Missing **(Policy Statement) Introduction**

This policy is written and should be read in conjunction with the whole school health and safety policy. It also is linked to the whole school security policy.

Purpose and Aims of this Policy Statement

The purpose of this policy statement is to give all staff, both teaching and non teaching, a clear understanding of how to respond and who to inform should they discover a child is missing. The aims of this policy statement are to:

- provide a clear procedure which is understood and effectively implemented by all staff,
- enable the missing child to be located as quickly as possible and given the appropriate level of safety and security commensurate with the pupil's age and emotional/behavioural maturity.

Occasions when a child may go missing

Staff need to be mindful that a child can go missing at any time of the day. These times and examples of the occasions providing opportunities for a child to go missing are:-

a) From an indoor lesson

This could occur when a child is allowed to leave the classroom unaccompanied by an adult and fails to return;

- e.g. - to go to the toilet,
- to collect something from his/her bag in the cloakroom, - being sent to another class or teacher as a punishment,
- undertaking errands for the teacher such as taking the register to the office.

b) From an outdoor lesson

This could occur when the class are outside the building with the children spread out and/or engaged in a variety of activities that make it is easy for a child to wonder away unnoticed. e.g.

- during games lessons on the playground or field
 - during other outdoor lessons, (e.g. measuring parts of the building)
- at the beginning or end of outdoor lessons when children are getting changed or using the toilet, drinking fountains etc.

c) Travelling about the school

This could occur when the children are spread out and beyond the teacher's direct total supervision.

- e.g.
- going to and from the hall or outdoors before and after a PE lesson,
 - going to and from the hall before and after assembly,
 - going to and from the classroom at the beginning/end of lunch/break times.

d) Other Times These include:

- at the start of the school day when children are freely moving about the grounds and building to get to their cloakroom and classroom.
- At break and lunch times.
- At the end of the school day when children and parents are freely moving about.

Upon Discovering a child is Missing

It is important that the person discovering a child is missing knows what to do. What action is taken depends on who discovers the child is missing. Therefore, the following action should be taken by the following personnel.

..Voluntary helpers will:

Notify immediately the class teacher. If the teacher is not available for whatever reason they must inform the classroom support staff if there is one, or, if there is not, the nearest available teacher. They should state the name of the child (if known) or a description of the child (if the child's name is not known to them), what the child was last seen doing and where, and how long since they last saw the child. Thereafter they should assist with any organised search for the child as directed by the class teacher or the Head teacher.

..Classroom Support Staff will:

Notify immediately the class teacher. If the teacher is not available for whatever reason they must inform the nearest available teacher. They should state the name of the child and what he/she was last seen doing and where, and how long since they last saw the child. Thereafter they should assist with any organised search for the child or supervision of the rest of the class as directed by the class teacher or the Head teacher.

...Lunchtime supervisors will:

Notify immediately a teacher, or Administrator(whoever is found first). They should state the name of the child (if known) or a description of the child (if the child's name is not known to them), what the child was last seen doing and where, and how long since they last saw the child. Thereafter they should assist with any organized search for the child or supervision of the rest of the children as directed by the Administrator

...The Class Teacher will:

Conduct a search of the immediate surroundings, i.e.:

Indoors - in the classroom (looking under tables, work surfaces and other possible hiding places such as cupboards), adjacent work areas and classrooms, nearby cloakrooms and toilets.

Outdoors - in the immediate area where the child was last seen including looking under bushes and up trees etc.

The teacher should quickly arrange for another adult (e.g. support staff or neighboring teacher) to supervise their class while they conduct any search away from the class for which they are responsible].

If this initial search does not find the child the teacher shall begin a wider search of the school buildings and grounds including searching public areas in other parts of the school e.g. library areas, toilet and cloakroom areas, corridors, hall etc. (it is not necessary at this stage to search classrooms unless they are empty). The task of undertaking this search can be done either by

the teacher personally or they can delegate this to a member of the support staff depending on the teacher's knowledge of the child including their emotional and behavioral characteristics. At all times the rest of the class must be supervised by either the class teacher or a member of the support staff. If appropriate a neighboring teacher can be asked to supervise the class (as well as their own) to enable both the teacher and the support staff to conduct the search.

If this search does not discover the missing child within a reasonable time the teacher must inform the Principal (directly or via the school office) of the missing child and the facts surrounding the child's disappearance.

..The Principal will:

Take charge of the situation. If satisfied that the class is adequately supervised the Principal will join the teacher (and support staff if applicable) in searching the school premises for the missing child directing the teacher (and others) where to search (e.g. while he searches externally, the teacher searches internally) Alternatively, the Principal may direct the teacher (or support staff) to return to their class in order to continue supervising the class and to be a familiar adult should the missing child return to their classroom. In this situation the Principal will continue the search alone or with other available adults.

When the Principal is satisfied that the child is not on the premises he will instruct the office staff to contact the child's parents and inform them of the situation and to inquire if the child has returned home. If the child is at home the parents will be informed by telephone of the known facts surrounding the child going missing. If the child is not at home the Principal will, in consultation with the parents, begin a search outside of the school premises. If the parents cannot be contacted at home the Principal (or other adults as directed by the Principal) will begin a search outside of the school's immediate premises. This may include a visit to the child's home if this is near the school. If the child is not found within 25 minutes the Principal (or other staff if so directed by the Principal) will inform the police and, as appropriate, the social services and the Chairman of Governors of the child's disappearance. Thereafter the Principal will follow the instructions of the police regarding the continuation of the search for the child.

..The Office staff will:

Inform the Principal of the missing child and then await further instructions. They will not take part in the search but will instead contact the child's parents when instructed by the

Principal to do so and inform them of the situation and inquire if the child has returned home. They will then hand communication with the parents over to the Principal unless directed otherwise by the Principal. If the parents cannot be contacted the office staff will, if directed to do so by the Principal, telephone the police, social services and Chairman of the school governors to inform them of the missing child and giving them such information as they may request. The school staff, including the Principal, will then continue the search as directed by the police and the office staff will continue to try to contact the child's parents.

Missing Children Seen Running Off the Premises

If, during the search, the missing child is seen leaving the premises, the member of staff witnessing this must inform the most senior member of staff immediately available or, if none is available, send a message to the office via a reliable messenger without losing sight of the child if possible.

As a general rule staff should not pursue a child beyond the school boundary. Instead they should report to the Principal where they last saw the child and the direction the child was heading so that this information can be communicated to the parents or police as appropriate. The member of staff should then return to their normal duties unless directed otherwise by the Principal.

In certain circumstances it may be appropriate for the member of staff to go beyond the school boundary, e.g. to retrieve a child who has accidentally wandered out of an open gate, or to follow/retrieve a child with special needs who has deliberately left the premises but in doing so does not understand the gravity of their action. Staff are expected to use their professional discretion in deciding whether or not it is appropriate to go beyond the school boundary in pursuance of such children. If a child is followed beyond the school boundary the member of staff must behave in a manner that is not threatening to the child. They must not run after the child as this may cause the child to run into a dangerous situation, e.g. the child might run into a road without looking out for traffic in an attempt to evade the pursuing, running adult.

In exceptional circumstances where a child is known to be liable to run off the premises, the school may prepare and enact contingency search plans involving named staff. When enacting these plans staff should be mindful not to put themselves or the child at risk.

Investigations

When a missing child has been located and safely returned to school, the child's family or the police, the Superintendent will conduct an investigation into the circumstances of the child going missing. This is in order to identify any factors that need to be addressed by the school or communicated to the parents to prevent a recurrence of the child going missing.
