

Statement of Intent

The safety and welfare of children is of paramount importance at Playhouse Pre-School.

Although robust supervision, security and attendance procedures are in place, Playhouse recognises that a child could become unaccounted for or leave the setting unexpectedly.

A missing child is treated as a safeguarding emergency.

Playhouse Pre-School will respond immediately and systematically to any situation where a child is believed to be missing or cannot be accounted for.

The priority will be to:

- locate the child as quickly and safely as possible;
- maintain the safety and supervision of all other children;
- alert the appropriate members of staff;
- involve Longmeadow Primary School where appropriate;
- contact the police without unnecessary delay;
- inform the child's parent/carer;
- follow safeguarding procedures;
- record the incident accurately; and
- review the circumstances to reduce the likelihood of recurrence.

This policy applies to all children attending Playhouse Pre-School, including children aged 9 months to 2 years in the Caterpillar Room and children aged 2 to 4 years in the Butterfly Room.

Definition of a Missing Child

For the purposes of this policy, a missing child is a child who:

- cannot be located within the setting when they are expected to be present;
- cannot be accounted for during an outing;
- is believed to have left the setting or designated area without the knowledge or supervision of staff;
- is unaccounted for during a transition between areas;
- is not where they are expected to be when the register or headcount is completed; or
- has not been collected and their whereabouts cannot be established in accordance with the setting's procedures.

A child does not have to have been missing for a particular length of time before this procedure is started.

The response must begin immediately.

Immediate Action

1. Raise the Alarm

As soon as a member of staff becomes aware that a child cannot be located, they must immediately inform the person in charge.

The person who first notices that the child is missing must not assume that another member of staff has noticed or is dealing with the situation.

The person in charge will take control of the incident.

2. Confirm the Child Is Missing

The person in charge will immediately:

- check the register;
- confirm that the child was present that session;
- check whether the child has been collected or signed out;
- check whether the child has been moved to another area;
- establish when and where the child was last seen;
- check with the child's Key Person and other staff;
- establish whether the child may have been asleep, using the toilet or receiving personal care;
- check all appropriate areas of the setting; and
- ensure that the other children remain safely supervised.

The setting will not delay the search while attempting to establish every detail.

3. Secure and Search the Setting

An immediate search of the setting and its immediate surroundings will begin.

Staff will check, as appropriate:

- all rooms;
- toilets and changing areas;
- sleep/rest areas;
- cupboards or other spaces where a child could have entered;
- the garden;
- outdoor play areas;
- entrances and exits;
- areas behind furniture or equipment;
- the immediate area around the building; and
- any other location where the child could reasonably be.

Doors, gates and access points will be checked.

Staff will consider the child's age, developmental stage, mobility, interests and individual circumstances when deciding where to search first.

For example, a younger child may be more likely to be found in a confined or low-level space, while an older child may have moved further from the setting.

4. Protect the Other Children

The safety of the other children must be maintained throughout the incident.

Staff who are not involved in the search will remain with the children and maintain appropriate supervision.

The person in charge will organise staffing so that:

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- children remain supervised;
- required ratios are maintained wherever possible;
- children are kept calm and reassured;
- unnecessary alarm is avoided; and
- staff involved in searching do not leave other children unsupervised.

Where additional assistance is required, the person in charge will request help from appropriate staff, Longmeadow Primary School or emergency services.

5. Search the School Grounds

As Playhouse Pre-School operates within the grounds of Longmeadow Primary School, the person in charge will alert the appropriate school contact where the child may have accessed the school grounds.

Assistance may be requested to search:

- the immediate school grounds;
- playgrounds;
- school entrances and exits;
- car parks;
- paths and routes around the school;
- outdoor areas; and
- other areas identified as relevant.

Playhouse staff must continue to maintain appropriate supervision of the children remaining at the setting.

The person in charge will coordinate the search and ensure that staff know which areas have been checked.

6. Contact the Police

The police will be contacted without unnecessary delay where:

- the child cannot be located immediately within the setting and its immediate surroundings;
- there is reason to believe the child has left the setting;
- the child may be at risk of harm;
- the child is particularly vulnerable because of their age, developmental needs or individual circumstances;
- the circumstances suggest an immediate danger; or
- the person in charge considers police assistance necessary.

Staff must not wait for a prolonged period before contacting the police.

The person in charge should provide the police with as much relevant information as possible, including:

- the child's name and age;
- a recent description;
- what the child was wearing;
- a recent photograph, where available and appropriate;
- the time and place the child was last seen;
- the child's likely destination or routes;
- any relevant medical, developmental or communication information;
- the child's interests or behaviours that may help locate them;

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- information about whether the child can open gates or doors;
- the actions already taken; and
- details of the setting and its location.

The person in charge will follow police instructions.

7. Contact the Parent/Carer

The child's parent/carers will be informed as soon as reasonably practicable.

The person in charge will explain:

- that the child cannot currently be located;
- the actions already being taken;
- whether the police have been contacted; and
- what the parent/carers should do next.

The setting will provide factual information and will avoid speculation.

Parents/carers will be supported throughout the incident.

The setting will follow police advice regarding whether the parent/carers should attend the setting, search a particular route or take another action.

8. Keep Communication Lines Clear

The setting's telephone must remain available for important communications.

Where possible:

- one person will coordinate telephone communications;
- staff will not make unnecessary calls;
- staff will not use personal social media or messaging groups to discuss the incident; and
- information will only be shared with those who need it for safeguarding or operational reasons.

9. If the Child Is Found

Once the child is found, staff will:

- ensure the child's immediate safety;
- check whether the child has sustained an injury or requires medical attention;
- reassure the child;
- establish where the child has been, using age-appropriate communication;
- inform the parent/carers;
- inform the police and any other agencies involved;
- record the time and location at which the child was found; and
- preserve any information that may be relevant to the subsequent investigation.

Staff must not question the child repeatedly or suggest answers.

If there are concerns that the child may have been harmed, abused, exploited or otherwise placed at risk, the Safeguarding Children Policy must be followed.

Safeguarding Concerns

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A missing child may indicate a safeguarding concern.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead must be informed of the incident and any associated concerns.

The DSL will consider whether a referral to children's social care, the police or another safeguarding agency is required.

Staff must not investigate safeguarding concerns themselves.

Where the concern relates to a member of the management team or another person who would normally receive the report, staff must follow the safeguarding policy's procedures for managing allegations and concerns about adults.

Informing Ofsted

The Manager/registered provider will consider whether the incident meets the requirements for notification to Ofsted.

A significant event affecting the childcare provision must be notified to Ofsted as soon as reasonably possible and within the required statutory timeframe.

The current Ofsted guidance states that significant events must be reported as soon as possible and no later than 14 days after the event.

The Manager will make the notification where required and will retain a record of the notification.

RIDDOR

A missing child is not automatically reportable under RIDDOR.

RIDDOR applies to specified work-related accidents, injuries and dangerous occurrences that meet the relevant reporting criteria.

Following a missing-child incident, the Manager will consider whether any separate accident, injury or dangerous occurrence has occurred that meets the RIDDOR reporting requirements.

Where a RIDDOR report is required, the responsible person will complete the appropriate HSE report within the statutory timescale.

Recording the Incident

A full written record will be completed as soon as practicable following the incident.

The record should include:

- date and time of the incident;
- child's name;
- child's age;
- staff present;
- children present;
- other adults or visitors present;
- when the child was last seen;
- where the child was last seen;

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- what the child was wearing;
- the circumstances in which the child was discovered to be missing;
- areas searched;
- staff involved in the search;
- assistance requested from Longmeadow Primary School;
- time the police were contacted;
- time the parent/carer was contacted;
- advice received from the police or other agencies;
- time and location the child was found;
- the child's condition when found;
- any injury or medical attention required;
- any safeguarding concerns identified;
- any notifications made;
- action taken following the incident; and
- any recommendations arising from the investigation.

The record must be factual and objective.

Investigation and Review

The Manager will carry out an investigation following any missing-child incident.

The purpose of the investigation is to establish:

- what happened;
- how the child became unaccounted for;
- whether procedures were followed;
- whether supervision was appropriate;
- whether there were any weaknesses in the physical environment;
- whether staff deployment was appropriate;
- whether communication was effective;
- whether any safeguarding concerns are present; and
- whether changes are required to prevent a recurrence.

The investigation will not be used to apportion blame before the facts have been established.

Where appropriate, the Manager will review:

- risk assessments;
- staffing arrangements;
- supervision arrangements;
- entrance and exit security;
- collection procedures;
- attendance records;
- outdoor play arrangements;
- transition arrangements between rooms;
- arrangements for outings;
- staff training; and
- this policy.

Any necessary actions will be recorded and implemented.

Confidentiality and Information Sharing

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Information about a missing-child incident will be treated as confidential.

Staff must not discuss the incident with:

- other parents/carers;
- friends or family;
- unauthorised members of staff;
- members of the public; or
- the media.

Information will only be shared where there is a legitimate professional, safeguarding or legal reason to do so.

If approached by the media, staff must not provide comments or information. All media enquiries must be referred to the Manager/registered provider.

The setting will cooperate fully with any police or safeguarding investigation.

Supporting Children

A missing-child incident may be upsetting for children who remain at the setting.

Staff will:

- reassure children in an age-appropriate way;
- avoid giving children unnecessary details;
- maintain familiar routines where possible;
- provide additional emotional support where needed; and
- monitor children who appear particularly distressed.

Parents/carers may be contacted if there are concerns about a child's emotional wellbeing following the incident.

Supporting Staff

A missing-child incident can be extremely distressing for staff.

The Manager will provide appropriate support following the incident and will consider whether staff require:

- a debrief;
- additional supervision;
- time to discuss the incident;
- further training;
- adjustments to duties; or
- access to additional support.

The investigation will focus on learning and improving safeguarding arrangements.

Preventative Measures

Playhouse Pre-School will take reasonable steps to reduce the likelihood of a child going missing.

These include:

- accurate attendance registers;
- regular headcounts;

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- appropriate staff deployment;
- effective supervision;
- secure doors and gates;
- controlled access to the setting;
- clear collection procedures;
- clear arrangements for visitors;
- communication between staff during transitions;
- appropriate supervision of outdoor play;
- appropriate risk assessments;
- procedures for outings;
- staff awareness of individual children's needs and behaviours; and
- regular review of safeguarding arrangements.

Particular consideration will be given to the needs of younger children aged 9 months to 2 years, who may have different levels of mobility, communication and understanding of danger.

This policy was agreed by the staff of Playhouse Pre-School Broadwater.

Adopted on 9th February 2017 and will be reviewed annually.

Reviewed on 29th September 2026 by Z. Munford