

Missing Child or Young Person Policy and Procedures

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Purpose and Context

Kids has the following policy and procedures in place in the event of a child or young person going missing whilst in our care. This will ensure that they are found as soon as possible, the correct actions are followed, and the appropriate people and organisations are informed.

Scope

This policy applies to children and young people (aged up to 25 years) who are in the direct care of Kids. The policy relates to Kids operational activities and other events, such as fundraising, where a child or young person has been identified as missing e.g. whereabouts unknown.

The policy does not apply to children and young people who are **absent with authority**. That means children and young people who have notified the service they will not be able to attend, or who have the authority to sign out and leave an activity of their own accord. Colleagues should refer to **Handover, Collection and Uncollected Children and Young People Policy and Procedures** for further guidance on supporting young people to have autonomy regarding travel to and from services.

Colleagues should use this policy and procedures if children and young people are identified as **absent without authority** i.e. they have not formally signed out and their presence is unknown. The policy should also be followed if a child or young person goes missing at a Kids setting after being handed over to a parent or carer.

Definitions

Colleague: The term includes employees, sessional workers, volunteers, students and trustees of Kids. This is also extended to independent contractors who are undertaking direct work with children or young people on behalf of the charity.

Missing children and young people: Child or young person's whereabouts cannot be established, or they are absent without authority i.e. have not attended as required or have left a session without the required permission or agreement from colleagues or parent/carer.

Authorised absence: Parents and or carers have informed the service of their child's/young person's absence OR young people have authority to sign themselves out of a service and make their own way home.

General Policy

Kids takes the safety and welfare of children and young people very seriously. We will take every precaution necessary to ensure that the children and young people in our care do not become lost or separated from colleagues, abscond from a setting, or are handed over or taken by someone without authority. Many of our policies and procedures and routine practices contribute to keeping children and young people safe by identifying and minimising the risk of them going missing. Our goal is to prevent children and young people from going missing when in our care.

The chances of finding a missing child or young person safe are greatest if their absence is discovered and immediately reported. Therefore, in the event a child or young person does go missing, our key objective is to locate and return them to a safe environment as soon as possible. We do this by putting into practice agreed procedures. These ensure the most effective resolution of this potentially distressing situation.

There will come a point at which a child or young person's absence will give rise to justifiable concern and will require a formal missing person's report to the police. Kids defines this point **firstly**, in terms of a child or young person's vulnerability and risk of harm and **secondly**, by time. It is our aim to collaborate with the police in carrying out a search for a missing child or young person and ensure a coherent and supportive approach is given on their return. We will maintain up-to-date records for all children and young people we care for and share relevant information with the police in order to assist a search and ensure the safe return of children and young people.

We aim to review and learn from all missing person cases and take immediate action to strengthen safety arrangements to reduce the risk of re-occurrence. We will maintain accurate records of all incidents and ensure all relevant regulatory bodies are notified within the required timeframes.

Roles and Responsibilities

Services Leadership Team (SLT) will maintain overall responsibility and accountability for the management of the Missing Children and Young People policy ensuring arrangements are in place to ensure a consistent approach to the way incidents are managed, monitored and reviewed. The SLT is also responsible for leading any communications and investigations into serious cases.

Service Managers and Co-ordinators are responsible for ensuring missing incidents are managed, reviewed and reported in line with Kids policy and learnings used to improve safety arrangements and individual care and risk plans.

All colleagues are responsible for managing the safety of children and young people in their care and alerting relevant service or senior managers and / or the police depending on the situation if children and young people have gone missing.

Training on this policy and procedure will be given during induction and updated through line manager briefings. Failure to comply with this policy may lead to disciplinary action which could include summary dismissal or as grounds to terminate your contract with Kids.

Safe Planning and Preventative Practice

To help us keep children and young people safe, colleagues must take appropriate steps to minimise the risk of them going missing. This should include (but is not limited to):

- ensuring that settings / venues and outdoor areas are secure and restrict child and young people from absconding and unauthorised people from gaining access;
- ensuring there are clear safe procedures for the handover, collection and signing in / out of children and young people by parent/carer and other authorised people;

- having up to date information regarding children and young people's health care and medical needs; protection plans; and history of missing behaviour;
- ensuring colleagues: child/young people ratios are adequate for the ages, number, needs, activity and potential risks of children and young people going missing;
- ensuring children and young people's risk assessments are up-to-date regarding any factors that are likely to increase the likelihood of them going missing and measures that are needed to prevent this e.g. higher colleague: child ratios; closer supervision;
- teaching children and young people how to stay safe when attending Kids settings and when out in the community (either on an outing or short break). This should include both importance of staying safe and leaving premises / workers and what to do if they become lost or detached from a group or worker.
- ensuring outings are well planned and risk assessed and where necessary staffed with higher than normal ratios. The risk assessment will include measures such as having a mobile phone, high visibility jackets, children and young people carrying 'Safe Cards' (or other means of identifying that they are on an outing with Kids), identifying a meeting point should children or young people become separated and other measures appropriate to the outing. Colleagues should refer to the **Community Activities and Outings Policy** for further guidance on these points;
- reviewing and learning from missing children and young people incidents to minimise the risk of re-occurrence.

Missing Children and Young People Procedures

Carrying out a search

If a child or young person goes missing from a group activity or service that is delivered from a regular setting / venue (e.g. early years, clubs, youth groups, playgrounds, residential short breaks)

- Colleagues must alert the person leading / managing the activity if they believe a child or young person is missing without authority.
- Colleagues should ensure that all other children and young people continue to be supervised appropriately while a search for the missing child or young person is carried out.
- Call the young person's mobile phone if they have one.
- All available colleagues to immediately check toilets, shared areas, rooms and outdoor areas to ensure the child or young person is not hiding or locked in anywhere. Instruct colleagues to report back as soon as they have searched their allocated areas.
- Colleagues and the relevant manager will use professional judgement and risk assess the urgency of the situation to help inform the timeframe required in establishing the child / young person's whereabouts before notifying the police. Timeliness should be on a case- by- case basis and informed by the child or young person's level of vulnerability and risk plan. If there is an immediate concern for the child / young person's welfare or a perceived threat to the public, the service manager or Head of Services must contact the police immediately and follow their instruction.
- If there is not an immediate concern for the child or young person's welfare, report the concern to the police if the initial search is unsuccessful. This should not be longer than 10 minutes after the initial missing person report if the search is ongoing.
- After calling the police, contact the child / young person's parent/carer to advise them of the concern and reassure them that everything is being done to locate the child / young person.
- Report the incident to Kids Local Safeguarding Lead and/or duty senior manager if within working hours or the National On Call Team outside of normal working hours
- Prepare a detailed description of the child / young person together with circumstances in which they went missing, as this will be required by the police.

- Follow police guidance if further action is recommended and maintain close contact with the police, relevant Kids senior managers and parent/carer.
- Inform all adults involved, including the parent/carer, searchers and police if at any stage the child or young person is located.

If a child or young person goes missing during a one to one community activity (e.g. short breaks)

It is highly unlikely for a child or young person to go missing when they are being supported on a 1:1 basis by a colleague in the community. However, in the event a child or young person does go missing, colleagues should remain calm and carry out the following steps:

- be clear when and where the child/ young person was last seen and begin a search of the immediate area, including any agreed meeting / safe point. Colleagues should attempt to contact a young person on their mobile phone if they have one;
- if there is an immediate concern for the child / young person's welfare or a perceived threat to the public, contact the police immediately and follow their instruction;
- if using a community or outdoor venue, immediately inform the venue security staff and any other venue staff/facilitators;
- if there is no immediate concern about the child or young person's welfare - report the concern to the police if the search is unsuccessful and no later than 10 minutes after the initial missing person report;
- after calling the police, contact the child / young person's parent/carer to advise them of the concern and reassure them that everything is being done to locate the child / young person;
- prepare a detailed description of the child / young person together with circumstances in which they went missing, as this will be required by the police
- report the incident to the local Short Breaks Coordinator or on-call manager if within working hours or the National On Call Team outside of normal working hours;
- continue and extend the search if safe to do so. **Note** colleagues should not put themselves at risk if working alone;
- keep in touch with either the police or relevant Kids managers by mobile phone if possible;
- inform all adults involved, including the parent/carer, searchers and police if at any stage the child or young person is located.

If a child or young person goes missing from an out of area location or activity e.g. day trip, young people's participation event

- Be clear when and where the child/ young person was last seen and begin a search of the immediate area, including any agreed meeting / safe point. Colleagues should attempt to contact a young person on their mobile phone if they have one.
- Colleagues should ensure that all other children and young people continue to be supervised appropriately while a search for the missing child or young person is carried out. If there are insufficient colleagues to carry out a search **and** supervise other children and young people safely, colleagues should contact the police and follow their instruction.
- If there is an immediate concern for the child / young person's welfare or a perceived threat to the public, contact the police immediately and follow their instruction.
- If using a community or outdoor venue, immediately inform the venue security staff and any other venue staff/facilitators
- Report the concern to the police if the initial search is unsuccessful and no later than 10 minutes after the initial missing person report.
- After calling the police, contact the child / young person's main parent/carer to advise them of the concern and reassure them that everything is being done to locate the child / young person.

- Prepare a detailed description of the child / young person together with circumstances in which they went missing, as this will be required by the police.
- Report the incident to the local on-call manager if within working hours or the National On Call Team outside of normal working hours
- Follow police guidance if further action is recommended and maintain close contact with the police, relevant Kids senior managers and parent/carer.
- Inform all adults involved, including the parent/carer, searchers and police if at any stage the child or young person is located.

Other situations

- i) Children or young people go missing at a Kids setting / venue after being handed over to a parent carer. Colleagues should follow the steps outlined above
- ii) Child or young people go missing during a home care support session. Colleagues should follow the same steps as outlined in section 6.1.2 for one to one community activities.
- iii) Children or young people go missing from a Kids event that they are attending with parent/carer. Parent/carer should contact event security and follow any instruction. Colleagues can assist if safe to do so.

Assessing level of concern

The police should be contacted immediately if the risk posed to a missing child or young person is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that:

- the child or young person is in danger through their own vulnerability;
- the public is in danger;
- past or current child in need or protection issues;
- concerns about the child or young person and family which together with the sudden disappearance is worrying.

Note: this list is not an exhaustive list and other known factors should be taken into consideration when assessing risk and timescales for contacting the police.

When a child or young person is returned by a third party

There may be instances where a member of the public finds and returns a child or young person before Kids has identified they are missing. In these situations, colleagues should check the health and well-being of the child or young person before obtaining key information regarding the incident from the person returning them.

Colleagues must report incident on SafetyNest and engage in post incident debrief with Head of Service

When a child or young person is found by Kids

We recognise that during the time a child or young person is missing, however briefly, all involved, parents/carers and others suffer great fear, guilt and distress. It is not always easy to control all these emotions when the child or young person is found. We will accept that it is important to remember:

- that the child or young person also might have been afraid and distressed and might now be in need of comfort;
- remain calm, reassure the child or young person and acknowledge it is not their fault;
- ensure the child or young person is not hurt. If they are, inform the emergency services first, and then contact the parent/carer immediately thereafter. Seek the assistance of a registered first aider who will care for the child/young person and where necessary, administer first aid while waiting for the emergency services to arrive;
- check the well-being of colleagues involved in the incident and support as necessary;

- report the incident to parent/carer, no matter how briefly the child or young person went missing and provide them with a copy of the missing person's report when complete.

Post incident discussion and review

Colleagues must report incident on SafetyNest and engage in post incident debrief with Head of Service

The incident should be discussed with children and young people where appropriate and possible to understand the reasons for them being missing. It may be necessary for parent/carer to have this discussion with the child or young person or someone independent of Kids such as a social worker. If necessary, extra support or resource will be identified to assist in this process, for example the use of social stories.

The incident should also be reviewed with all relevant colleagues caring for the child or young person at the time to illicit a clear picture of activities prior to the missing incident and the circumstances or reasons causing the child or young person to go missing. The review process should also consider how effective the response and action taken to locate the missing child or young person and how this can be improved in future.

The initial discussion and review process should be completed as soon as reasonably practicable, but no more than 24 hours after the incident has taken place. Action for maintaining the child / young person's safety should be considered and decided with parent/carer and where appropriate young people. The care and/or risk plan must be up-dated accordingly to prevent further episodes. Relevant up-dates should also be made to setting / environment risk assessments.

If the child or young person has been injured as a result of them being missing, the incident must be referred to the Head of Services for investigation in line with the **Accident and Incident Policy and Procedures**. Any safeguarding issues or concerns should be reported and followed up in line with the relevant **Safeguarding Policy and Procedures** (children or adult).

Recording missing child and young people incidents

Colleagues must report incident on SafetyNest

Notifying relevant authorities and regulators

If there are safeguarding concerns regarding the missing incident Kids Safeguarding Children and Adults Policy and Procedure must be followed.

Where required, Ofsted and / or CQC should be notified if the missing incident has resulted in serious harm including self- harm, allegations of abuse or if the incident was reported to or investigated by the police. Serious injuries must also be reported to RIDDOR. Social care services are also required to notify Ofsted if there are serious concerns over a child's missing behaviour. Managers must be aware of and follow the notification procedures and timeframes in place for the relevant regulator.

Managing people's reactions

We accept that the child's or young person's parent/carer will be frightened, distressed and angry. If the setting shares all policies with parents/carers, the situation will be easier for all because there will be an understanding of working within a framework of mutual trust and understanding.

We accept that in such circumstances powerful emotions are involved and people's behaviour can be unpredictable. Those who may seem quite calm about the incident at the time can later become angry, threaten legal action or approach the local press.

We will be clear about the circumstances surrounding the incident and will respond sympathetically to questions without implications or admission of responsibility.

Responses could include:

- how sorry you are that the incident has happened;
- that a full investigation is in hand;
- that the relevant authorities have been informed (e.g. Local Safeguarding Children's Board or Adult services, Ofsted or Care Quality Commission).

If the local press or reporters contact the local service about the incident colleagues should refer all enquiries to the Head of Services or if not available, the Director of Service Transformation. Colleagues should not attempt to respond to any enquires from the local media.

Monitoring and case management review

Missing children and young people incidents will be monitored by the Quality Team to determine a risk rating for services. The risk ratings will be used to prioritise quality monitoring visits to review and support areas where there is a high frequency of incidents.

The quality team will convene a panel to evaluate serious cases of missing child / young person incidents to establish how the situation occurred, how effective the response and resulting action and make necessary recommendations or adjustments to policy, procedures and practice to ensure future effectiveness.

References

Legislation, regulations and national guidance

- Child Abduction Act 1984
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage, April 2017 (Staff: Child Ratios – all providers; Outings)
- Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014 (Regulation 12: Safe care and treatment) (Regulation 18: Notification of other incidents)
- Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards, April 2015 (Policies for the protection of children; Children missing from the children's home)
- The Residential Holiday Schemes for Disabled Children (England) Regulations (Arrangements for the protection of children specifically (13) (3b))

Associated documents and guidance

- Kids Community Activities and Outings Policy
- Kids Mental Capacity Act Policy and Procedures
- Kids Accident and Incident Policy and Procedures
- Kids Driving for Kids' Business Policy and Procedures
- Kids Safeguarding Children and Adults Policies

- Kids Handover, Collection and Uncollected Child or Young Person Policy and Procedures

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Missing Person Process flow

Missing Person Process Flow

Colleagues, children, young people or other person notices the absence of a child or young person



Is the child / young person (CYP) in immediate danger?

If YES contact the police immediately and make a missing person report.

If no, conduct immediate search of area. If at an event or venue, alert venue security/management. Call young people if they have a mobile phone.

Ensure all other CYP continue to be supervised and supported while the search is conducted.



Contact the police if the initial search is unsuccessful and no longer than 10 minutes after CYP was first reported missing. Follow police instruction.

Inform parent/carer and relevant Kids managers of the situation as follows:

- Local Service Manager/Coordinator or on-call manager within working hours
- National On- Call Team outside of working hours



If CYP is found, call off the search and inform all relevant parties.

If CYP is injured inform the emergency services first and then contact the parent/carer immediately after. Seek the assistance of a registered first aider to care for the CYP and where necessary, administer first aid while waiting for the ambulance.



Report incident on SafetyNest

Identify reasons for missing behaviour / incident and make improvements to prevent re-occurrence. Up-date risk assessments and care records as necessary.

Respond to any further action required by the police and notify Ofsted, CQC, RIDDOR and commissioners as relevant in line with reporting procedures and timeframes.