

MISSING CHILD POLICY (September 2022)

Policy statement

All children attending Riding Mill Outdoor Preschool are of equal importance and are cared for equally. Staff are deployed, and the site is used, in such a way as to minimise the chance of children removing themselves from the main group without being noticed, whilst allowing them a free choice of activities. In this way, staff can be made aware immediately of a child needing help or support, and react accordingly. Our aim is to minimise the likelihood of children going missing while in the care of RMOP and to provide the correct procedure to follow should that happen. Children's safety is our highest priority, both on and off the premises. Every attempt is made, through the implementation of our outings procedure and our exit/entrance procedure, to ensure the security of children is maintained at all times. In the unlikely event of a child going missing, our missing child procedure is followed.

Procedures

Child going missing on the premises

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the key person alerts the RMOP Leader (or RMOP Deputy Leader if RMOP Leader not on site).
- The register is checked to make sure no other child has also gone astray.
- The RMOP Leader/Deputy will carry out a thorough search of the site buildings and outdoor space including school field/gardens.
- Doors and gates are checked to see if there has been a breach of security whereby a child could wander out.
- If the child is not found, the Leader/Deputy calls the police immediately and reports the child as missing. If it is suspected that the child may have been abducted, the police are informed of this.
- The parent(s) are then called and informed.
- A recent photo and a note of what the child is wearing is given to the police.
- The Leader/Deputy talks to our staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and records this.
- The Leader/Deputy contacts our Chair and reports the incident. Our chair comes to the provision immediately to carry out an investigation, with our management committee where appropriate.
- All other children to be kept away from any heightened feelings and stress either in yurt or school field.

Child going missing on an outing

Before leaving on a trip take a photo on the preschool phone of each child attending in order to have a record of clothing and description in the event of a search.

This describes what to do when our staff have taken a small group on an outing. Regular head counts are carried out on children throughout the outing. In the extremely unlikely event of a child going missing whilst on an outing the following procedure will be implemented immediately.

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, all staff present will be informed and a headcount will be carried out to ensure that no other child has gone astray.
- One staff member searches the immediate vicinity, but does not search beyond that, with other staff present ensuring that all other children remain supervised and in one place throughout.
- In the event of a child not being found, the designated person in charge will immediately inform the emergency services on 999 or 112, and give detailed directions to the location (to be found in register in emergency bag)
- The designated person in charge (RMOP Leader/Deputy) will then inform the child's parents/carers and the secretary of Broomhaugh C of E First School who will continue to try to contact the child's parents/carers if the designated person in charge has not been able to, giving details of what has happened.
- At least one member of staff will remain at the scene whilst others return to RMOP with the children as soon as possible. This member of staff will continue searching for the child/children, and be a point of contact for the emergency services and parents/carers. Once returned to preschool, if any adults are not needed to maintain the ratio, they will return to the outings location to help
- A recent photo and a description of what the child is wearing is given to the police.
- The Leader/Deputy contacts our Chair and reports the incident. The Chair comes to our premises immediately to carry out an investigation, with our management committee (where appropriate).
- Our staff keep calm and do not let the other children become anxious or worried.

The investigation

- Ofsted are informed as soon as possible and kept up-to-date with the investigation.
- Our Chair, carries out a full investigation, taking written statements from all our staff and volunteers who were present.
- The RMOP Leader, together with our Chair speaks with the parent(s) and explains the process of the investigation.
- The parent(s) may also raise a complaint with us or Ofsted.
- Each member of staff present writes an incident report detailing:
 - The date and time of the incident.

- Where the child went missing from e.g. the setting or an outing venue.
- Which staff/children were in the premises/on the outing and the name of the staff member who was designated as responsible for the missing child.
- When the child was last seen in the premises/or on the outing, including the time it is estimated that the child went missing.
- What has taken place in the premises or on the outing since the child went missing.
- The report is counter-signed by the senior member of staff and the date and time added.
- A conclusion is drawn as to how the breach of security happened.
- If the incident warrants a police investigation, all our staff co-operate fully. In this case, the police will handle all aspects of the investigation, including interviewing staff and parents. Children's social care may be involved if it seems likely that there is a child protection issue to address.
- In the event of disciplinary action needing to be taken, Ofsted are advised.
- The insurance provider is informed.

Managing people

- Missing child incidents are very worrying for all concerned. Part of managing the incident is to try to keep everyone as calm as possible.
- Our staff will feel worried about the child, especially the key person or the designated carer responsible for the safety of that child for the outing. They may blame themselves and their feelings of anxiety and distress will rise as the length of time the child is missing increases.
- They may be the understandable target of parental anger and they may be afraid. The RMOP Leader ensures that any staff under investigation are not only fairly treated, but receive support while feeling vulnerable.
- The parents will feel angry, and fraught. They may want to blame our staff and may single out one staff member over others; they may direct their anger at the RMOP Leader. When dealing with a distraught and angry parent, there should always be two members of staff one of whom is the Leader and the other should be our Chair. No matter how understandable the parent's anger may be, aggression or threats against our staff are not tolerated, and the police should be called.
- The other children are also sensitive to what is going on around them. They too may be worried. Our remaining staff caring for them need to be focused on their needs and must not discuss the incident in front of them. They should answer children's questions honestly, but also reassure them.
- In accordance with the severity of the final outcome, our staff may need counselling and support. If a child is not found, or is injured, or worse, this will be a very difficult time. Our Chair will use their discretion to decide what action to take.
- Our staff must not discuss any missing child incident with anyone other than those already involved.